

**Society of American Archivists  
Council Meeting  
December 3-5, 2019  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Report of the *American Archivist* Editor, August-November 2019  
(Prepared by Christopher [Cal] Lee)**

The *American Archivist* Editorial Board has done a great deal of intensive listening, discussing, and reflecting on the controversy caused by the forthcoming article, “To Everything There Is a Season” by Frank Boles in volume 82, number 2, of the journal, and its selection for a Brown Bag Lunch discussion during *ARCHIVES\*RECORDS 2019* in Austin. A summary of activities is below (with more detailed minutes of meetings and conference calls on the [journal’s microsite](#)).

**Composition of the Board**

With the recent approval of the Council, we were able to grow the size of the Editorial Board to twelve by adding two additional members in September: Sumayya Ahmed of University College London Qatar and Shadrack Katuu of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. In addition to adding talented reviewers, I am also excited about the valuable perspectives and international reach of our new Board members.

**Editorial Board Meeting in Austin – August 2, 2019**

Much of the meeting was devoted to the Boles article, as reaction to the preprint was unfolding at that time. We had a detailed conversation about the journal’s editorial policy and submission guidelines. I committed to investigating the best method to let members of the Board know when I made a decision to accept an article, so everyone can see what is slated for publication.

Heather Soyka, Allison Trulock, and Carrie Daniels volunteered to serve on a subcommittee to revisit peer review guidelines and explore ways to provide more guidance to peer reviewers. We also considered how to recruit more peer reviewers and diversify the reviewer pool.

The Board discussed the process for selecting articles for Brown Bag Lunch discussions. There was consensus that this should become a joint process and not just the purview of the editor.

We discussed other journal business: reviews section and portal; podcasts; online quality control and “hidden content”; engagement with SAA component groups; the proposed special section focusing on design records (Spring/Summer 2021); and encouraging international submissions.

After the meeting, I touched base with SAA President Meredith Evans regarding proposed next steps, including suggestions for who might prepare the additional content to include with the Boles article and the feasibility of holding an Editorial Board meeting in Chicago in September or October. I also contacted Frank Boles (who was not at the conference) regarding the

controversy and potential plan to move publication of the article to the following issue to facilitate including additional voices.

### **Conference Call – August 26, 2019**

The Board discussed the option of pushing back publication to the Spring/Summer 2020 issue (vol 83, no. 1) to give sufficient time for those writing responses, for the Editor to sufficiently address the discussion in his introductory article, for Boles to make revisions in response that the Editor has conveyed to him, and so as not to hold up the current production schedule. Members of the Board conveyed that, regardless of when the Boles article is published, a top priority should be engaging with SAA membership soon in the interest of openness and transparency, and to ensure that those who would like to make specific contributions to the discussion have an opportunity to do so. SAA staff agreed to explore with Allen Press implementing an “advanced publication” option that involves publishing the other articles and book reviews earlier online, so that publication of the full issue could be delayed to include the Boles article and associated responses without penalizing the other authors.

Board members conveyed that, regardless of when it is published, an essential element is the Board’s communication and transparency about how the article and responses are being handled. The Board needs to share what is forthcoming, how it happened, and what the Board is doing about it. We agreed that I as the editor would author a guest post on the *Off the Record* leadership blog. Although there were no objections to inviting people whom the Council recommended to write Letters to the Editor, the Board was concerned that this was somewhat limiting and suggested opening up the call more broadly. We agreed that the *Off the Record* blog post should indicate that we are interested in people’s responses, give a deadline for when people can be included in the next issue, and share different forms in which they could respond (letter to the editor, an article, or a perspective piece, which is shorter than an article). We also discussed other potential engagement activities. There was concern about how the Board is setting up to handle future problematic content, improving its process, or content with this kind of feedback. We agreed that this would be part of the agenda at the October meeting in Chicago.

[“Editor’s Comments about Brown Bag Lunch Article Controversy at SAA Annual Meeting: Listening and Learning”](#) was posted to *Off the Record* on September 11. Since the blog post, 104 additional individuals have registered as peer reviewers in PeerTrack.

### **Editorial Board Meeting in Chicago - October 27–29, 2019**

Thank you to the Council for funding this meeting, which was attended by all members of the Editorial Board, except Shadrack Katuu, who was not able to secure approval for travel from South Sudan on short notice. Also participating were SAA President Meredith Evans, Council liaison Mario Ramirez, and SAA staff Nancy Beaumont, Teresa Brinati, and Abigail Christian.

In preparation for the meeting, we compiled a document containing feedback—from Twitter, blog posts, professional mailing lists, and email sent to the Editor account—about the Boles article and Brown Bag event. Feedback relates to both the content of the article and the journal’s processes. Participants in the meeting reviewed and discussed the feedback at length. We devoted considerable discussion to the work of the peer review subcommittee. We considered concerns, existing models, and strategies for the future. And we generated a set of issues to consider, then broke up into groups to discuss them:

- How are we reflective of what happened and what feedback we received?
- How do we as an Editorial Board engage with issues of structural power? What is the role of SAA in engaging with other groups? How do we identify points of failure and articulate change?
- What is the nature of the Editorial Board's response and what are the forums for response?
- What should be part of our communication plan (consider audience, medium, and message)?
- What preventive measures can we implement?
- What is the timeline for these various responses and action items?
- Are there procedures in place for accountability for the Editorial Board, Council, etc.?
- What are our roles as Editorial Board members? How do we contribute to production of journal?

We reported out from the group discussions and generated a set of 21 action items.

### **Conference Call – November 8, 2019**

The Editorial Board will proceed with a statement. Karen Trivette, Adriana Cuervo, and Heather Soyka volunteered to lead the drafting. The content could include multiple perspectives. A draft was sent to the Board for feedback on November 18, with hopes of finalizing it and publishing it before Thanksgiving.

The Board should also review and suggest additions/changes/enhancements to SAA's Code of Conduct. The code addresses harassment on the website and in online spaces, but should spell out how it applies to publications. The Publications Board recently added language to its guidelines for book proposal submissions, indicating that it will take into account the strategic goals and core organizational values of SAA. The Editorial Board will make sure similar language is reflected in its guidelines.

### **Production of Volume 82.2 (Fall/Winter 2019)**

The issue will include 12 articles, 12 book reviews, and three letters to the editor (from Christine George, Dani Stuchel, and Lae'l Hughes-Watkins). We have completed second page proofs for most of these items, and the contents should be appearing online soon. Print publication will take a few more months. (This is the issue that includes the volume index, which requires an additional step.).

### **Production of Volume 83.1 (Spring/Summer 2020)**

I have already accepted one article for publication in 83.1 ("Maintaining Records in Context: An Historical Exploration of the Theory and Practice of Archival Classification and Arrangement" by Ciaran Trace). The 2019 Theodore Calvin Pease Award-winning article ("Big Brother, Big Data: Digital Preservation of Big Data in Government" by Emily Larsen, University of British Columbia) is also in this issue.