

Society of American Archivists
American Archivist Editorial Board Meeting
October 27–29, 2019 | Chicago, IL

MINUTES

In attendance: Cal Lee (Chair), Bethany Anderson (Reviews Editor), Sumayya Ahmed, Adriana Cuervo, Caroline Daniels, Benjamin Goldman, Katharina Hering, Josh Schneider, Heather Soyka, Karen Trivette, Alison Trulock, Christopher Prom (*ex officio* Publications Director), Mario Ramirez (Council Liaison), Meredith Evans (SAA President), and SAA staff Nancy Beaumont, Teresa Brinati, and Abigail Christian.

Unable to attend: Shadrack Katuu

I. Welcome

Lee welcomed the Editorial Board to Chicago. There are two new members, per Council's recent approval to expand the Board to include two additional members: Sumayya Ahmed of University College London Qatar and Shadrack Katuu of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. SAA President Meredith Evans joined the meeting Sunday evening and Monday morning to provide additional Council support.

II. Approval of the Minutes and Review of To Do Lists

Trivette motioned to approve the minutes from the August 2, 2019, meeting and Schneider seconded. Minutes approved unanimously.

Trivette motioned to approve the minutes from the August 26, 2019, conference call and Daniels seconded. Minutes approved unanimously.

The To Dos from both sets of minutes were reviewed and all except two were accomplished. The two that are still in progress are included here:

TO DO #1 (Brinati and Christian): Establish a subgroup to supervise the Hidden Content project. *Project tabled to early 2020 and will engage the Editorial Board Early-Career Members as well as reach out to the Archival History Section for help.*

TO DO #2 (Hering): Prepare a list of English-language archival journals (and other languages) based on ICA information. *Work in progress.*

III. Discussing Feedback

- A. The Editorial Board reviewed and discussed the feedback** received on the preprint of the article "To Everything There is a Season" by Frank Boles. Feedback came from Twitter, blog posts, several professional listservs, and emails sent to Lee. Since much of the feedback came via Twitter, it's important to consider where people have discussions about the journal and professional issues and what SAA can offer in those mediums.
- B. Feedback seems to fall around two topics:** the content of the article and the journal's processes.

1. Notes on Content:
 - a. One concern is the nature of the article's argument against the role of activism or social justice as a core part of appraisal—that this conversation is one that keeps coming up again and again, though many see these issues as no longer debatable. Who does this conversation serve? Who are the readers who need to keep having this conversation again? The Boles article shows where we are and where we still need to go as a profession.
 - b. Although Boles is entitled to his opinions, intellectual freedom has always been selective—not everyone has the same freedom to speak. All of us are responsible for the language and logic we employ. Feedback highlights frustration with the platform Boles' article received and notes what some perceive as a dismissive and condescending tone, which does not invite healthy debate.
 - c. The Boles article is a perspective piece, but feedback shows that some people may have seen it as a research article—and with a poor level of scholarship. How do we emphasize this is an individual's opinions vs. research? The Board should revisit the different kinds of pieces in the journal and clarify their definitions or how they're included in the journal. We encourage a variety of kinds of submissions—do we need new or renamed categories for them?
 - d. In the feedback, many people sense a privilege being given to Boles that they don't have, which is at the root of their frustration. We can implement new procedures to address the imbalance, but that doesn't affect the feeling right now that some voices aren't heard the way other voices are heard.
 - e. Many people have felt the article diminished them and their work in the profession. The Editorial Board recognizes this and needs to express this recognition and lament for the pain caused. Apologies go a long way in the work of reconciliation, especially for people of color, who so often don't receive them. It's important to move forward humbly and with transparency.
 - f. This split goes beyond the journal to the wider profession and culture. The Editorial Board cannot fix everything, but it can take the responses received to inform how it moves forward and share how the Board is listening and grappling with these issues.
2. Notes on Process:
 - a. Are Letters to the Editor an equal platform to an article? With only two issues of the journal a year, such conversations via Letters to the Editor can be dragged out because of the publication schedule. How can we make such content seem valid and valued? The entirety of the content for an issue has typically moved through production at the same time—articles, editor's intro, book reviews, cover image, etc. There is an option with our current vendor (Allen Press) to do "Advance Article Publication" where journal content can be published online in pieces as its received and approved, which would help make those conversations timelier.
 - b. There is hesitancy about allowing Boles to revise his piece without any documentation of that process. The Board discussed if the original should be

published alongside the revised version. However, several revisions pertain to a misrepresentation of another author's article, these fixable errors should not be perpetuated.

- c. Some Editorial Board members feel a lack of clarity about their role, which is not unique to this body but is a challenge in general among volunteer work in SAA's many groups. There is an assumed intuitiveness about volunteer service—that members will know what to do because it's their professional association. But leadership and processes in groups change. What are Board members' roles, which have evolved across editorships? How can we establish more accountability in support of each other?
- d. Feedback questioned the peer review process as well. Lee explained the process in his September 11, 2019, blog post on *Off the Record*, "Editor's Comments about Brown Bag Lunch Article Controversy at SAA Annual Meeting: Listening and Learning." The Board discussed its use of peer reviewers, how they're trained, what it means to be an "expert" in a subject, how peer reviewers are assigned to articles, and how we can be transparent about the process. The Editorial Board's Peer Review Subcommittee (Soyka, Daniels, and Trulock), which was established at the August meeting, will share recommendations.

IV. Discussion Items

A. Peer Review Subcommittee

1. Soyka, Daniels, and Trulock revisited the peer review guidelines for *American Archivist* as well as looked at guidelines for other journals in the field. From a mix of approaches, they selected best practices from different journals and provided preliminary recommendations:
 - a. Provide peer review resources for peer reviewers and explanations for authors
 - b. Be explicit about what double blind peer review is
 - c. Provide a statement of purpose for peer review for the journal
 - d. Clarify expectations of the editor for the peer reviewer
 - e. Clarify timeframe for review
 - f. Provide resources for peer reviewers (e.g., "how to," and/or an example of a completed peer review)
 - g. Report on outcomes for articles reviewed
 - h. Publish statistics on how many articles are accepted, accepted with revision, or rejected
 - i. Create a peer review coordinator position within the Board or distribute work of peer review coordination among the board.

B. The Editorial Board brainstormed questions to continue pursuing and then broke into three smaller groups to pursue 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?

V. Action Items

Small group discussion ideas were shared with the whole Editorial Board and yielded the following action items.

A. Forthcoming Communications

TO DO #3 (Brinati and Christian): Draft short, general message to the SAA membership in Nov. 6 issue of *In the Loop* to share that the Editorial Board has met and continues to discuss the issues at hand.

TO DO #4 (VOLUNTEERS NEEDED): An open letter from the Editorial Board to membership that highlights themes from public feedback to engage further. Respond that the Board heard and discussed feedback. 1 to 3 people will draft a response to share with Editorial Board for review by November 18 so that it can be publicly disseminated by November 25. This will be a news release on the SAA website and distributed through usual communications channels (*In the Loop*, social media, Announcement listserv).

TO DO #5 (Lee): Finish drafting introduction to the 82:2 (Fall/Winter 2019) and share with the Editorial Board.

TO DO #6 (Brinati and Christian): Make sure the Editorial Board roster is accessible online (fix the two links at *americanarchivist.org*) and create a general email address (*editorialboard@archivists.org*).

TO DO #7 (Hering): Follow up with Issues and Advocacy Section.

TO DO #8 (VOLUNTEERS NEEDED): Possibly create a digital supplement sharing communications sent to SAA that pulls out themes from shared feedback and establishes a mechanism for gathering additional feedback.

TO DO #9 (VOLUNTEERS NEEDED): Create a post-publication plan of action, especially on social media.

B. Improvements to Roles of Editorial Board and Editor

1. Editor will keep the Board informed of accepted articles and what's in the pipeline (titles, authors, and abstracts) by sending a monthly update. This way the Board can advise, see what's trending, what types of submissions should be solicited.

TO DO #10 (Brinati and Christian): Investigate the possibility of expanding Editorial Board access in Peer Track to see submissions.

2. Possible assignment of a shepherd for articles. When an article needs major revisions, offer a Board member to serve as a shepherd to the author. This would also help train future editors.

TO DO #11 (Prom and Lee): Discuss how shepherding works for Publications Board and explore the feasibility of implementation by the Editorial Board.

3. Consider creating a Peer Reviews Coordinator position or Associate Editor position (e.g., <https://journals.flvc.org/sfaj/about#h23sk1jd0dyk1ww8p6fnq3f01tokozy>).
4. Be proactive on social media.
5. Call for a special section or full issue on archives and "social justice" (although a better term or clear definition of the term is needed). A special section is one way to increase visibility for these issues.

TO DO #12 (VOLUNTEERS NEEDED): Special section/issue on "social justice and archives": Flesh out the goal and topic of the call; draft the proposal; suggest possible guest editors; determine timeline.

TO DO #13 (Brinati and Christian): Create a form on journal website where special issue topics can be suggested.

6. Create a stronger presence at the Annual Meeting. The Editorial Board could host an information table near the registration areas (similar to the Committee on Public Awareness). Editorial Board members could serve in shifts at the table to interact with interested conference attendees. Such interaction would increase visibility of the journal and proactively engage members.
7. Editorial Board can assist in expanding the author and peer review pool through their own attendance at professional conferences. For example, if you hear an outstanding presentation, approach the presenter afterward and invite submission to *American Archivist*. Update existing journal flyer for Editorial Board.

TO DO #14 (Brinati and Christian): Update *American Archivist* flyer and post to website so Editorial Board members can download as needed and handout at conferences to generate interest in peer reviewing and writing for the journal.

C. Improvements to Selection Process for Brown Bag Lunch Discussions at the Annual Meeting

1. Editorial Board members nominate 3 to 4 articles for possible discussion and then as Board make the selection.
2. Reach out to sections in advance of the Annual Meeting and invite them to consider leading discussions of the selected article as part of their meetings.
3. Because time is an issue in promoting the Brown Bag event ahead of the Annual Meeting, the selection could be from the pool of articles published since the *preceding* Annual Meeting instead of a forthcoming article. The embargo could be lifted for online access to that article.

D. Editorial Policy

1. Review and revise editorial policy, not just functional areas of the language around procedures but also new language reflecting SAA Core Values and strategic goals, particularly adding language in support of inclusiveness and diversity. Share broadly.

TO DO #15 (VOLUNTEERS NEEDED): Review and revise Editorial Policy.

2. Clarify that SAA Code of Conduct applies to submissions to the journal and the submission process.
3. Continue to experiment in the next issue with Advance Article Publication to make content available more swiftly online to increase visibility, particularly for Letters to the Editor.
4. Revisit the article categories: research articles, case studies, perspectives, commentary. How can they be more inclusive? What opportunities for expanding the categories? Clarify if these pieces are subjected to same rigor as other articles. In short term, identify perspective pieces.

TO DO #16 (Brinati and Christian): Share style guide with Editorial Board and add inclusive language around pronouns, etc.

E. Peer Review Process

1. Review and revise peer review rubric—including evaluation of alignment with SAA mission and Core Values. Shape rubric to address different submission categories.

TO DO #17 (VOLUNTEERS NEEDED): Review and propose changes to rubric to Board.

2. Develop guidance/best practices for peer reviewers.
 - a. Gather resources for peer reviewers

- b. Offer sample peer reviews / articles (before and after examples)
- c. Explore different approaches for different types of articles
- d. Provide guidance to author about peer review
- e. Create a visual workflow of the process so that reviewers see themselves in the process and author expectations are managed. A workflow would also help create transparency around the process of how articles get into the journal.
- f. Possibly pair with cultural competency; see if other journals have done this.
- g. Create onboarding messaging and resources for new peer reviewers.

TO DO #18 (Lee): Select several articles which can be used as “before” and “after” examples of good peer review.

- 3. Set new or revise list of keywords

TO DO #19 (Lee): Have Editorial Board Early-Career Members compile a list of keywords used with articles in recent years. Contact reviewers to update areas of expertise. Suggest new keywords. Board will then review the revised list.

- 4. Expand pool of reviewers by reaching out to individual sections.

VI. Reports Since August 2019 Meeting

A. SAA Council – Mario Ramirez

- Council held its quarterly conference call earlier this month. Approved a new Operating Reserve, among other items.

B. Publications Editor – Chris Prom

- Completing second three-year term in March 2020 and wrapping up duties before transitioning to the new Publications Editor. The search is currently underway and should be completed in January. Since five new books debuted at the 2019 Annual Meeting, there are plenty more on the way.

C. Reviews Editor + Podcast – Bethany Anderson

- Anderson is expanding reviews of publications in other languages other than English—two are in the works now.
- Season 2 of *Archives in Context* podcast released in September. Several interviews already confirmed for Season 3.

D. Publishing Program – Teresa Brinati

- The website *americanarchivist.org* is undergoing a makeover courtesy of the vendor, Allen Press. Now is a good time to revisit navigation, policies, etc. The new website will debut in early 2020.
- Book publishing is a robust and ever-busy program. Next on the list of books coming out is *Creating Family Archives: A Step-by-Step Guide to Saving Your*

Memories for Future Generations, released in November. In addition, there are 17 projects in the pipeline.

E. Hidden Content Project – Abigail Christian

- Project has been shelved as the digital content of *American Archivist* is migrating to a new website. Need help in evaluating the content, identifying what should be pulled out, re-titling content, and deconstructing/reconstructing the PDFs.

F. Special Section on Design Records – Karen Trivette

- Scheduled for the Fall/Winter 2021 issue. Several people have responded with interest to the call for papers. Should send out the call again.

TO DO #20 (Trivette and Christian): Send out call again for special section on Design Records.

TO DO #21 (Nancy Beaumont): Revisit info provided to Annual Meeting speakers.