

Date:

November 13, 2009

Name of Section/Roundtable:

Manuscript Repositories Section

Officers:

Sammie Morris, Chair

Fernanda Perrone, Vice-Chair/Chair Elect/Newsletter Editor

Mat Darby, Past Chair

Laura Carroll and Catherine Stollar Peters, Co-Web Liaisons

Steering Committee:

Chris Burns, 2009-2011

Deborah Dandridge, 2009-2011

Barbara DeWolfe, 2008-2010

Donna McCrea, 2009-2011

L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin, 2008-2010

Elizabeth Russey, 2008-2010

Report from annual meeting:

Number of attendees: Approximately 85 people attended the section meeting

Election results: The membership elected Fernanda Perrone as Vice Chair/Chair Elect and Chris Burns, Deborah Dandridge and Donna McCrea to the steering committee.

Summary of meeting activities:

**Society of American Archivists
Manuscript Repositories Section Meeting
Hilton Austin
Thursday, August 13, 2009
1:30-3:00 pm**

Minutes**1. Welcome and introductions**

With approximately 85 Section members and other SAA members in attendance, Mat Darby, Chair, called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. He introduced the Section officers and Steering Committee members, and recognized those departing the Section leadership: Past Chair and Chair of Nominations Karen Spicher, Web Liaison Catherine Stollar Peters, and Steering Committee members Rebecca Bizonet, Helice Koffler, and Katherine Salzmann.

2. Election Results

Karen Spicher thanked all the candidates for agreeing to run and announced the winners of the Section's first electronic election. Fernanda Perrone was elected Vice-Chair/Chair Elect and

Chris Burns, Deborah Dandridge, and Donna McCrea were elected to the Steering Committee. The revised Section bylaws were also approved.

3. Updates and Announcements

Tom Hyry, Council Liaison, informed the Section of some recent Council actions: the revisions to the Standards Committee were approved; the investments policy has changed and a Finance Committee has been recharged to oversee finances; the Cultural Properties Working Group has been charged to begin a dialogue over cultural property issues; and Council is working on strategic planning priorities for 2010-2013 and is soliciting feedback on the priorities, which are available on the SAA website.

Diane Kaplan, 2010 Program Committee representative, discussed next year's meeting, which will be in Washington, D.C. on August 10-15, and will not have a theme. The emphasis of the meeting will be on commonalities among archives and across settings. The meeting will be held jointly with the Council of State Archivists and NAGARA. The deadline for session and pre-conference workshop proposals is September 24. More information is available on the SAA web site. Each section may endorse up to two proposals but there is no guarantee that they will be approved.

Sammie Morris, Vice Chair/Chair Elect, provided a brief update on the status of the Section history initiated by past chair Amy Cooper Cary. Progress has been made on the history of the Section and it is anticipated that a draft will be ready by December. The history may initially take the form of a timeline on the Section's web page until the fuller article is completed and/or accepted for publication.

Lucy Barber, Deputy Executive Director of the NHPRC, provided an update on NHPRC funding and encouraged applications, which are due October 6 for the Basic Projects and Detailed Processing Projects grants. NHPRC also offers digitization and electronic records grants, and submissions for these are due in June. Conference calls are available and additional information is on the NHPRC web site.

4. Forum on Archives and the Economic Downturn: Challenges and Solutions

Mat Darby introduced the speakers for the panel, archivist Mike Miller, Manager of the Austin History Center and Joel Wurl, Senior Program Officer for the National Endowment for the Humanities' Division of Preservation and Access.

Mike Miller discussed how the economy has affected the Austin History Center and offered tips to others who may be in similar situations. The Austin History Center has grown rapidly since its beginnings, but due to recent financial cuts the staff has been reduced and their budget has been cut by 7%. Staff is struggling with how to continue to provide services to customers when they have fewer resources. Mike suggested approaching the problem internally and externally. Some of the tips Mike offered to others in an economic downturn are to think internally by: not just accepting a budget cut (instead make people aware of your needs and fight for what you deserve); be clear about how the cuts will affect users and give concrete examples such as statistics and user feedback; view a budget cut as an opportunity to see what you can change or

stop doing; keep staff involved in the process; encourage staff to be entrepreneurial by letting them generate ideas, take risks, and learn from what doesn't work. Thinking externally, you should know your friends, make your institution prominent in the community, give lots of presentations, get the message out and find allies; a formal friends group really helps by contacting individuals and city council on your behalf and seeking funds; don't sugarcoat your message, tell it like it is; show the value you bring to the community and make them care; make your archives "the untouchable," the one department that it would be political suicide to cut its budget because the community cares about it; be "on" 24/7, have your elevator speech ready; work to build up private endowments or reserves for bad times; write grants and be creative with them; form partnerships.

Joel Wurl discussed "Grant Seeking Strategies in an Economic Recession: No Cash for Clunkers." The NEH is seeing a significant increase in grant proposals. More applications are focusing on infrastructure because of staff shortfalls, with more emphasis on regular processing and cataloging instead of the "bells and whistles" type projects. Joel advised archivists not to panic but rather to take stock and see what opportunities are out there. The NEH is doing well, as is the IMLS and the NHPRC is also gaining momentum. Applicants should think outside of the digital preservation and access box and look creatively at the other NEH divisions and types of grants available. There is no magic formula for a successful grant application. Funding agencies need to receive enough information in the proposal to know if it is a good investment. Joel suggested that archivists be proactive and not wait for grant callouts; to look at lists of recently funded grants; talk with colleagues and investigate collaboration, which funders are attuned to; know the funder, be familiar with the guidelines for eligibility, and ask to see successful proposals. With the NEH, the "H" word is paramount—the project must relate to the humanities. It's a good idea to call and ask if the agency is interested in a particular project. Stay true to your project and don't make the proposal too contrived. Clarity of proposal writing is essential—state up front what you are seeking support for and be succinct when you can. Demonstrate awareness of best practices and show how your project adheres to them. Don't overcomplicate the work plan; it needs to be achievable. Include a timeline, but keep it concise. The project needs to have a lasting impact. Sustainability and interoperability are important and correlate to institutional commitment. Don't wait until the 11th hour for the deadline. Establish contact with a proposal officer, the success rate is much higher and they will review proposals in advance if they are submitted early enough. Projects that come through without some prior conversation with a grants officer are likely doomed. Being overly needy is not good—play to your strengths and how you can build on what you've already accomplished. Persistence is important—some proposals have been rejected five times and grants on the sixth. Take advantage of the reviewers' comments and use them to help you on the revised proposal.

There was a call out for questions or comments from the audience. There was a comment from the audience that their institution had lost two staff lines and as a result had cut their open hours. Mike Miller agreed that it is a good idea to tie the number of personnel to the number of open hours to show that when staff is cut the hours will also be cut, because this affects users.

5. Update on PAHR

Sue Hodson from the PAHR Task Force ("Preserving America's Historical Record Act," HR 2256) discussed the status of this bill to provide federal funds to each state for preserving the

historical record. There are 40 sponsors and they need more. The vote will probably be in September or October. Members of congress are on their summer break so now is a good time to contact them about supporting PAHR. Kathleen Roe, chair of the PAHR Task Force, can provide advice on contacting your legislator.

6. Wrap-up

Mat thanked Mike and Joel for their presentations, and called for any additional comments or questions from the audience. With no additional comments or questions offered, Mat adjourned the meeting at 3:00 pm.

Submitted by Sammie Morris

August 22, 2009

Completed projects/activities

Newsletters

Published three issues on the section website, and publicized them on the archives and section listservs.

Annual meeting

Presented panel on archivists and the economic downturn with Mike Miller, Manager, Austin History Center, and Joel Wurl, Senior Program Officer for the National Endowment for the Humanities' Division of Preservation and Access

Ongoing projects/activities

Former chair Amy Cooper Cary and current chair Sammie Morris continue to work on section history and additions to the section archives.

New projects/activities

Session endorsements

We reviewed five session proposals, and endorsed the following:

- "Think First!: Planning for Processing"
- "That Was Easy!: Making Digital Archives a Pleasure to Use"

Other projects

- Conducted survey of section membership to determine better ways to serve them throughout the year and to guide the steering committee's section meeting planning
- Implemented online voting for the first time.
- Developed guidelines for the transfer of section records to the SAA Archives.

Diversity initiatives

None at this time

Questions/concerns for Council attention

None at this time