

# **A Survey of Archival Revolutions: Transitional Moments and Paradigmatic Shifts in Archival Enterprise, 1980-2020**

**STEVEN D. BOOTH and BRENDA GUNN**

At the Society of American Archivists (SAA) 1983 Annual Meeting in Minneapolis, incoming president David B. Gracy II announced a new initiative that would become his signature work as president of the Society: the Archives and Society Initiative. Gracy proposed to tackle the perennial problem of image and public perception of archivists. He envisioned a transformation for archivists from a passive role and belief that archives justify themselves to an active one of caretaking, advocacy, and responsibility for our own image. This call to action presented such a fundamental shift in thinking, approach, and practice, that Gracy referred to this in his presidential address and the resulting *American Archivist* article, as “the first archival revolution.”

Using Dr. Gracy’s concept of an archival revolution, the authors conducted nine focus group sessions with archive workers from across the field to identify and explore the impact of paradigmatic shifts in archival theory, ideas, practices, and perceptions. Based on the participants' differing life and professional experiences, this qualitative study informs the definition of “archival revolution” and the creation of a preliminary list of shifts and transitional moments that have occurred over the last forty years in the profession.

## **About the authors:**

**Steven D. Booth** (he/him) is an archivist, independent researcher, and co-founder of [The Blackivists](#). He is currently the archivist of the Johnson Publishing Company (JPC) Archive at the Getty Research Institute. He has been an active member of SAA since 2008 and was named an SAA Fellow in 2022.

**Brenda Gunn** (she/her) is a certified archivist and has been an active member of SAA since 1993. Currently, Brenda is the Associate University Librarian for Special Collections and Preservation at the University of Virginia. She is a former member of the SAA Council (2017-20) and was named an SAA Fellow in 2017.