

## Outreach and Advocacy Spotlight

The Issues & Advocacy Roundtable (I&A) of the Society of American Archivists is pleased to present an interview with Rachel Chatalbash. This interview is the first in an ongoing feature designed to encourage advocacy by and for archivists by spotlighting successful outreach and advocacy campaigns around the country. This and any future interviews are available on the I&A webpage at <http://www2.archivists.org/groups/issues-and-advocacy-roundtable>

**Name:** Rachel Chatalbash, President

**Organization:** Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

**Summary of Organization:** Founded in 1979, the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (ART) is a not-for-profit organization representing a diverse group of more than 400 archivists, librarians, and records managers in the New York metropolitan area. It is one of the largest local organizations of its kind in the United States, with members representing more than 160 repositories.

### **Does your organization have formal outreach or advocacy programs?**

Outreach and advocacy have always been important to ART. Formally, this begins with ART's mission, which states that: we will educate the public about the importance of archives; we will provide a forum for members of the archives community to discuss issues; and we will advocate the preservation and use of historical materials. These three guidelines set the stage for our outreach and advocacy activities, allowing us the opportunity to reach out to New York City communities and to provide leadership and opportunities for discussion within our organization regarding pertinent archival issues.

ART has both an Outreach Committee and an Advocacy Committee. The committees operate independently of each other, with their own set of priorities, programs, and volunteers. Interestingly, neither committee was included in ART's original by-laws; instead each was added after the fact, as the need for prioritizing outreach and advocacy arose. ART's Advocacy Committee is our newest, formed just this year in response to a need within our community: we had no designated body to respond to or champion current local and national issues, or to provide our members with the tools to better advocate for themselves or their repositories, especially in times of economic difficulty.

One might ask how our Outreach and Advocacy Committees actually differ, as both advocate for archives and the promotion of archivists, historical materials, and our repositories. As the committees currently stand, the difference is largely in their target audiences. Our Outreach Committee's audience is the public at large; we want to communicate to the public what archives are and how archivists can serve as a resource. The Advocacy Committee's audience is members of the profession; we want to communicate to our membership how they can influence policy by taking various actions, why they would want to do this, and how they can work on behalf of their repositories to secure funding and to help administrators fully understand the value of archives within their institutions.

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**If so, what kind of outreach programs does your group focus on?**

Historically, New York Archives Week has been one of ART's key outreach programs. Since 1988, ART has celebrated New York Archives Week every October; this type of program has since spread to many other parts of the country. Archives Week is intended to be a coordinated effort to celebrate New York's rich history, to raise public awareness of the area's archival resources, and to recognize and honor individuals and institutions through awards. This year, over twenty New York City archives opened their doors to the public for the city-wide event.

Most recently, the Outreach Committee implemented its first annual K-12 Archives Education Institute as part of an effort to develop new outreach programming directed toward communities not yet adequately served by ART. The institute paired professional archivists with local New York City educators to demonstrate how archival documents can be incorporated into class curricula to achieve state mandated learning standards. The program provided educators with local archival materials and the tools to integrate these materials into their classrooms. The institute's subject focus this year was developing lesson plans related to civil and human rights curricula.

The Outreach Committee is currently working to identify additional local communities for whom they may be able to develop outreach programming.

**If so, what kinds of advocacy issues is your group involved in?**

As mentioned previously, ART's Advocacy Committee was recently formed to help recognize the importance of archives and archivists in the New York City area. This committee has just begun to establish advocacy priorities and an advocacy plan. Although these are likely to evolve over time, it is possible to offer an overview of the Committee's current functions and agendas.

Our Advocacy Committee first came together to define advocacy, to define the role of the Committee, and to establish priorities for the coming year. The result of this meeting was the following Committee description and mission:

The Advocacy Committee addresses significant issues facing archivists at the national and regional levels. The Committee is dedicated to actively promoting and supporting the archives profession and the work of archivists. The Committee serves as a voice for the archives community: it reports on pending state and federal legislation in a timely manner; promotes archives and archival issues to government, decision-makers, funders, other organizations, the media and the general public; and provides resources to archivists so they can better advocate for the profession, their repositories, and themselves.

The Advocacy Committee mission is to provide leadership to archivists and to provide direction on policy issues important to the community as a whole.

We have identified two focus areas for action. The first focus is on internal issues, such as helping archivists advocate for themselves and their repositories. This can include programming

on how to effectively raise the profile of an archivist, how to self-advocate, and how to demonstrate one's value, with a focus on raising salary levels to reflect the material contributions we make to our respective institutions and repositories. Our second focus is external, concerning the archivists' interactions with communities at large, and will include political advocacy and programming related to funding and grants. The Advocacy Committee is looking forward to establishing programming within these two focus areas.

**What has been the most rewarding result of your group's outreach/advocacy programs?**

ART has an unusual advantage in terms of our outreach and advocacy goals compared to many regional or local professional organizations in that the majority of our members live and work in very close geographical proximity to one another. This makes it much easier for our members to come together to discuss their ideas and plan committee activities. While ART has had many successes in its outreach programming, perhaps the greatest reward has been seeing New York City archivists at all levels of experience come together around issues of importance. The level of commitment, the time and energy devoted, and the incredible effort these archivists make to effect change in the field of archives is rewarding for members of the profession and the community at large.

**What do you see as the most important issue(s) facing archivists today?**

For 2011, our organization has chosen to focus on outreach and advocacy as the tools to help archivists deal with the challenges that continually present themselves. There are myriad issues facing archivists today, ranging from how to preserve email, to how to prevent budget cuts, all of which are of great importance and require urgent response. ART has always provided and continues to provide educational opportunities for our members through our workshops and monthly meetings. However, by establishing a focus on outreach and advocacy, we hope to provide archivists with the tools to better meet these pressing challenges. If we can gain better support from our communities, workplaces, and colleagues, we can establish archives as a higher priority and make all of the other challenges a little less daunting.

**Want to get involved? Have questions?**

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