

# Museum Archivist

January/February 2024

WINTER 2023, Number 33, Volume 02

## Letter from the MAS Chair, Tara Laver

Family and friends who visit the museum where I work always comment on how lucky I am to work somewhere that is full of beautiful and meaningful objects, in a graceful and inspiring space (the museum, not necessarily the archives on the latter, if you know what I mean). I don't know about you, but in the gray of January, I find some relief in such surroundings, and I hope you do, too, whether it's your own home museum or another favorite cultural institution.

Thankfully, the new year also brings new opportunities and initiatives for the Museum Archives Section. I'm pleased to share that, at the invitation of the Yale Center for British Art, the section is co-hosting the Museum Archives Symposium on Friday, May 10, 2024. This free event will be held in person at the Yale University Art Gallery and livestreamed online. There is no registration fee. The section's involvement entails me, as section chair, serving on the program committee, chairing a session, and helping to promote the event.

The symposium is prompted by the 2022 SAA publication [Museum Archives: Practice, Issues, Advocacy](#) (ed. Rachel Chatalbash, Susan Hernandez, and Megan Schwenke) and will examine the current position and future directions of the museum archives field. Proposals that examine any aspect of the museum archives profession are welcome from new and established museum archivists, and their professional allies. YCBA is also offering travel and accommodations for successful applicants. Please see [additional information and the call for proposals](#), due February 14.



Tara Laver, MAS Chair and Senior Archivist, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

Members who attended the section’s annual meeting in 2023 will recall a wide-ranging discussion about what projects and benefits the section should focus on in the near to mid-term. Many voiced interest in continuing to have some version of a symposium (akin to those organized by the [former Standards and Best Practices Working Group](#)), so this opportunity is especially timely and welcome. The section leadership was pleased to be able to accept the invitation and hope many of you are able to participate.

At the annual meeting we also discussed plans to send out a survey of members to collect a broader range of ideas and priorities for the section’s future. After some delay, I’m happy to share that the survey is now live at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TRMPRYX>. Please make every effort to complete it by March 1, 2024. We look forward to hearing your thoughts! As you respond, please also keep in mind that many of the programming options we might undertake are dependent on members volunteering to participate and share their experiences and expertise.

Along those lines, with the symposia at YCBA on the calendar, we will not pursue a separate symposium this year. However, section leadership would still like to offer a slate of pop-up webinars. Last fall the section hosted three: “The GLAM Life: Working in Museum Archives” with Joseph Schill (Senior Archivist, The Corning Museum of Glass); Brenda Gunn (ALI Director and Associate University Librarian for Special Collections and Preservation, University of Virginia) presented “Archives Leadership Institute: Transforming Archivists, Transforming Archives”; and “Out of the File Cabinet and onto the Wall: Using Archives Materials in Museum Exhibits” with Amanda Staley Harrison (Assistant Curator, University of Missouri Museum of Anthropology). If you have an idea for a pop-up, please be in touch ([tlaver@nelson-atkins.org](mailto:tlaver@nelson-atkins.org)).

## In This Issue:

- **News from the Museum Archives Section.....3**
- **90th Anniversary Celebrations at Nelson-Atkins Feature Archives, Tara Laver.....4**
- **Preserving *The American Vision* (1965), Kelly Burton.....6**
- **Meet Your Fellow Archivist, Kelly Schulz.....8**

**Dear MAS newsletter reader:**

**If you would like to include an article, news, or highlight piece to the upcoming Summer 2024 newsletter, please email [saamasnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:saamasnewsletter@gmail.com) for more information or pitch us an idea. We rely on this community to keep the newsletter engaging and informative. We look forward to learning more about our museum archives community. Please enjoy this issue of the Winter 2023 MAS newsletter!**

# News from the Museum Archives Section

## Upcoming Steering Committee Election, Spring 2024

Are you interested in becoming more involved in the Museum Archives Section? Consider joining the Section Steering Committee. This spring, we will be holding elections for the positions of Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect, Recording Secretary, and Web Liaison. You are welcome to nominate yourself or a colleague.

During their first year, the **Vice-Chair/Chair Elect** assists the Section Chair and takes on any projects the Chair may assign them. During their second year, they succeed as the Section Chair, who presides over the Section meetings and directs the Section's activities. The position of Chair is also responsible for all communications and submissions to the SAA Council and SAA Executive Office.

The **Recording Secretary** records the proceedings of the section's annual meeting and participates in other steering committee meetings.

The **Web Liaison** is responsible for maintaining the Section microsite, which includes posting the meeting minutes and newsletter, updating announcements, and making sure all other information is accurate.

All positions are two-year terms.

See the Standing Rules on the [section microsite](#) for more information. Additional information will also be provided closer to election time. As always, feel free to reach out to any of the steering committee members if you have specific questions.

## Museum Archives Section Steering Committee

2023-2024

<b>Tara Laver</b>	<b>Chair</b>	<b>Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art</b>
<b>Laura Uglean Jackson</b>	<b>Vice-Chair</b>	<b>Denver Museum of Nature &amp; Science</b>
<b>Franklin (Kelly) Burton</b>	<b>Secretary</b>	<b>National Gallery of Art</b>
<b>Kelli Yakabu</b>	<b>Web Liaison</b>	<b>John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum</b>
<b>Kelly Schulz</b>	<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	<b>National Gallery of Art</b>

# 90th Anniversary Celebrations at Nelson-Atkins Feature Archives

By: Tara Laver, Senior Archivist, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art celebrated its 90th anniversary on December 11. Spread over two and a half months, the celebration included a progressive party through the galleries, a lecture, issuance of an NFT based on the first accessioned object, social media, an exhibition, and a response station where visitors could share their memories. Not surprisingly, the focus on the museum's 90 years brought opportunities for the Archives to support other departments as well as to make our own unique contribution.

The centerpiece of the Archives 90th anniversary contributions was an exhibition in the library reading room, highlighting key events, acquisitions, exhibits, figures, and developments decade by decade. The display featured documents, photographs, ephemera,

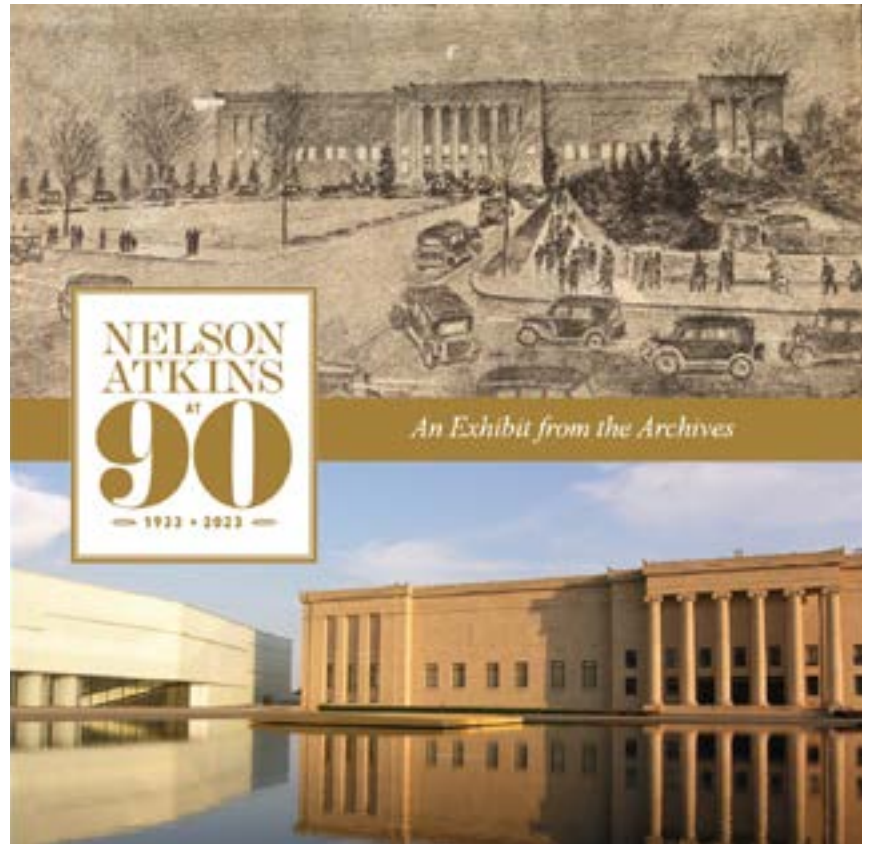


Exhibit title board.



One of the two sections of the exhibition.



and artifacts, including a compilation of museum maps from across the years so visitors could trace how the museum had changed and grown physically. They also had the opportunity to explore further past exhibitions or major donated collections referenced in the 90th anniversary exhibit by browsing a shelf of related catalogs and publications. Similar to curator-led tours of feature exhibitions for volunteers and staff, we held an open house in early December for those groups to have a dedicated time to view the exhibit. About sixty people attended, and we received many comments about the desirability of a dedicated space for exhibits about the museum's history. Stay tuned!

The other primary way the Archives supported the 90th was to provide an extensive timeline of museum history and to select photographs that would represent those events. From this compilation, Media Services developed a [video for a day of giving](#) on December 11 and a more general [celebratory video](#) that played in the lobby and on the website. Marketing and Communication developed a social media campaign based on the content, taking an “how it started vs. how it’s going” or “then and now” approach. These posts on Instagram, and Facebook were well-received ([example](#)). Posts featured museum spaces, community favorite works of art, and exhibitions and programs. In addition, we proposed a set of notecards for the Museum Store featuring images from the Archives. The store displayed the images and captions with the cards themselves to attract interest.

While obviously a lot of work, all of these projects provided excellent ways to highlight the archival collection, to make colleagues more aware of the Archives and how we can be collaborative partners in their work, and to share the museum's history with our guests. In addition, having this bank of selected historical images and stories will be a useful resource as we look to the 100th anniversary just a decade away.

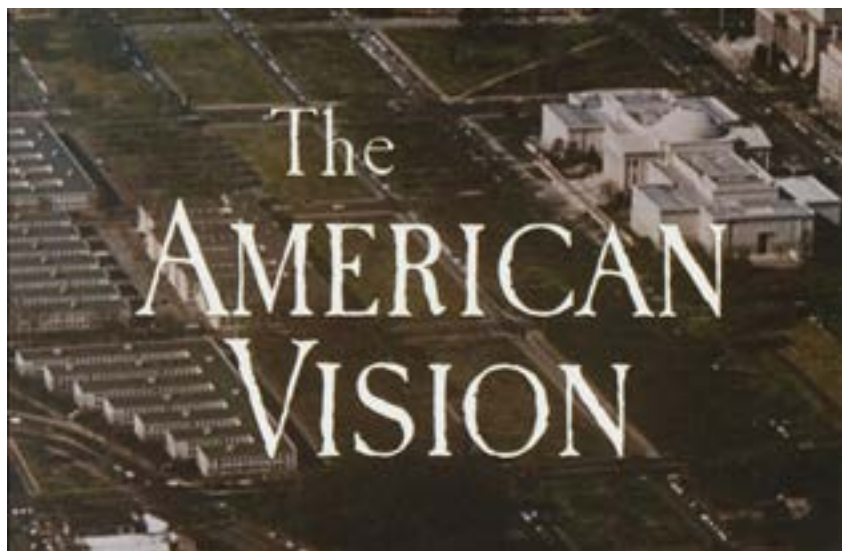


90th anniversary notecards featuring archival photographs.

# Preserving *The American Vision* (1965)

By: Kelly Burton, Media Archivist, National Gallery of Art

In August 2023, the National Gallery of Art in Washington was awarded a grant by the National Film Preservation Foundation to preserve and provide improved access to *The American Vision*, a 1965 educational film written and directed by J. Carter Brown. The 37-minute film uses works from the museum's permanent collection to trace the development of American painting from pre-revolutionary days to the beginning of the twentieth century.



## Background and Significance

*The American Vision* is a vital piece of the National Gallery of Art's institutional history, one which represents an early effort by the museum to connect with both onsite and remote audiences using audiovisual materials. *The American Vision* was created as an educational film for the museum's Extension Services Department, an office that circulates no-cost audiovisual aids to schools and groups throughout the country. Inspired by the

permanent collection at the museum, the film highlights paintings by American artists such as Gilbert Stuart, John Singleton Copley, John James Audubon, James McNeill Whistler, Mary Cassatt, William Merritt Chase, John Singer Sargent, Winslow Homer, and George Bellows. In the film, images of the National Gallery's American collection are complemented by narration from actor Burgess Meredith and an original score by composer Frank Ledlie Moore. The film premiered at the White House on November 16, 1965, enjoyed great success in the National Gallery's auditoriums for several years, and screened at dozens of international venues and film festivals throughout the mid-1960s.

*The American Vision* has additional significance to the National Gallery because it was written and directed by J. Carter Brown, the director of the institution from 1969 to 1992. The National Gallery developed into one of the leading art museums in the world under Brown's leadership, and as the third director, he was celebrated as a champion of public access to art. While serving as the Assistant Director to John Walker, Brown envisioned a motion picture film that would share the museum's American paintings with the world. He described the approach of the film as "that of an imaginary visit, in which the images are presented as visualized in the mind's eye, set free from the conventional format of the on-camera host, and from the intercutting of shots of the everyday world." As to its intended effect upon the audience, Brown described the film as an effort to "dream together the same dream."

In addition to providing an expressive survey of the first two centuries of painting in the United States, *The American Vision* serves as an example of the National Gallery's efforts to reach a broader audience using its own

audiovisual productions. In his speech from the dedication of the National Gallery of Art in 1941, Paul Mellon states: “It was my father’s hope, and it is ours, that the National Gallery would become not a static but a living institution, growing in usefulness and importance to artists, scholars, and the general public.” J. Carter Brown’s film can be seen as a nascent attempt to fulfill the Mellon promise with audiovisual materials, and as an effort to extend the National Gallery’s cultural and educational mandate beyond the walls of its Washington locale.



### **An Opportunity for Collaboration**

*The American Vision* was originally created by the National Gallery of Art for the purposes of entertainment, education, and outreach. From the original 35mm elements, 16mm prints were made for distribution among educational facilities such as schools and libraries. The original elements were managed by the museum’s Education staff until the early 1980s, at which point twenty-eight elements were selected for transfer to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) in the absence of an established film repository at the National Gallery. In 2023, the National Gallery’s Archives performed a detailed survey of its own media holdings, as well as a review of its textual records pertaining to *The American Vision*. It was determined that the elements deposited at NARA represented the best surviving materials, and this was validated by a physical inspection of the elements by NARA staff. In collaboration with NARA’s Moving Image and Sound Branch, the visual component of *The American Vision* will be taken from a set of four 35mm silent interpositives, while the audio will be retrieved from a set of four 35mm master projection prints containing optical sound.

### **Increased Access**

The Basic Preservation Grant awarded by the National Film Preservation Foundation provides funding for a digital transfer of *The American Vision*, as well as the creation of new 35mm negative and positive prints. In addition to providing high-quality digital access copies to researchers at no cost, the Archives plans to incorporate *The American Vision* into larger outreach programs involving archival audiovisual holdings. To this end, the archives will be exploring various avenues for increasing public awareness of institutional history, such as a free screening of the new 35mm print and online access to the film. An access version of *The American Vision* will also be uploaded to the National Gallery’s internal digital asset management system to facilitate staff access.

Both images, from *The American Vision*, courtesy of the National Gallery of Art Archives.

# Meet Your Fellow Archivist

**Kelly Schulz, Archivist, National Gallery of Art**

Hi MAS Community! As your newest section newsletter editor, I thought I would take this opportunity to introduce myself! My name is Kelly Schulz, and I am an archivist at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC.



I graduated with my MS/LIS from the iSchool at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in December 2018. During my program and shortly after graduation, I had internships at the Newberry Library, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries at the Art Institute of Chicago, and Pritzker Military Museum & Library. I also volunteered and then worked part-time with the all-digital archive, Chicago Dance History Project. I relocated to Santa Rosa, California in January 2020 for my first full-time permanent position, where I was the Assistant Archivist at the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center. Schulz was the cartoonist for the comic strip *Peanuts*, and no – we aren't related!

In December 2022, I relocated to the Washington, DC area to start my dream job at the National Gallery. Here, my primary focus is handling internal and external reference requests and processing our ever-going collection of National Gallery of Art publications, which includes everything from exhibition catalogues to visitor guides and educational event ephemera and annual reports.

I look forward to serving as your newsletter editor and learning more about you all through your submissions.

## Reach out to Us!

[saamasnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:saamasnewsletter@gmail.com)

Visit our page to stay informed on all MAS news and programming:

<https://www2.archivists.org/groups/museum-archives-section>

## Official SAA Museum Archives Email List

To connect via the official MAS email listserv, login or create a login for SAA Connect: <https://connect.archivists.org/home>. Once logged in, you can select to join the email list.



*Disclaimer:* Use of the SAA logo by an SAA component group does not necessarily imply SAA endorsement of the groups' statements, positions, or opinions.