

# Museum Archivist

Winter 2020

Volume 30, Issue 1

---

## Letter From the Chair, Katrina O'Brien

---

Dear Museum Archivists:

In the past few months, I've had the opportunity to dive deeper into MAS, its members, its resources and found more answers were needed for the growing mountain of questions. And so, we decided to put together a membership survey to get some answers.

MAS has done two surveys in the last decade. The 2010 survey focused on members' interest in MAS resources and group demographics while the 2014 survey looked more into professional experience along with MAS resources. You can find both surveys at <https://www2.archivists.org/groups/museum-archives-section/surveys>.

This time around, we are hoping to get a clearer picture of our members' priorities, employment trends in the field, and the landscape of today's museum archives programs. Please take a few minutes to fill out the online survey at <http://bit.ly/MAS2020Survey>.

If you haven't checked it out in a while, our section page (<http://bit.ly/MASHome>) has some great material including videos, funding links, and best practices resources. If you have something to add, please let us know. It's also where you can find information about our Working Group who are busy updating the Guidelines. Like me, you may use SAA Connect as your portal into the many sections. The MAS Connect page (<http://bit.ly/MASconnect>) has some great resources including the listserv discussions and a library of attachments, including our newsletters.



Katrina O'Brien

There are a great many things happening in MAS and resources being shared. Thank you in advance for taking a few minutes to complete our [2020 members survey](#). I look forward to sharing the results at the annual meeting this summer in Chicago.

Katrina O'Brien

Head of Archives & Collections, World of Speed Motorsports Museum

# Welcome to Incoming Museum Archives Section Officers

## Chair-Elect/ Chair: Sharad Shah

Sharad Shah is currently employed with the Smithsonian Libraries as Collections Management Librarian, Sharad serves as the Branch Head of the Museum Support Center (MSC) Library, and works in various locations where library branches may have ongoing collections projects.

Prior to joining the Smithsonian, Sharad (rhymes with "Jared") spent four years working in the Library of Congress's Rare Books and Special Collections Division (RBSCD) and the U.S. Copyright Office. Before moving to the DC-Metro area, he lived in Wilmington, North Carolina, where he worked as an archivist, historical consultant, and in special collections at UNC-Wilmington's William Randall Library, the New Hanover County Public Library, and the Wrightsville Beach Museum of History. In addition to receiving his MSLIS from the Catholic University of American (2013), Sharad has also received a master's in history from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (2008) and is an ACA-certified archivist.



Sharad says: "While in pursuit of my master's degree in history, I saw the connections between libraries, archives, and museums not merely as repositories of knowledge and information, but as institutions engaged in proactively sharing that information with the public and specialized researchers for the benefit of improving society.

Over the years, I have seen how these institutions have benefited by working together in collaborative efforts and how best practices (e.g. digitization, cataloging methods, preservation practices, collections storage, etc.) in one field could be applied to improve the operating policies in another field. Likewise, I have seen where units sharing resources (software, hardware, budget, staffing) have worked to achieve compromises which best addressed the needs of all involved parties.

Because of the broad overlap within LAMs, I have been a member of organizations such as the Society of American Archivists (SAA), American Library Association (ALA), American Historical Association (AHA), American Alliance of Museums (AAM), National Council on Public History (NCPH), and regional groups such as the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC), North Carolina Association of Historians (NCAH), and the District of Columbia Library Association (DCLA). Additionally, I am involved in several internal groups within the Smithsonian such as the Smithsonian Institution Archives and Special Collections Council (SIASC), Audio-visual Archives Interest Group (AVAIL), and I am the chair of the Smithsonian Libraries' Archival Material Working Group (AMWG).

Ultimately, what I bring to the position of Chair-Elect/Chair is the combination of broad experience, education, passion, professionalism, and a desire to promote added awareness and perspective."

## Standards Committee Liaison: Emily Toder

Hello Museum Archives Section! I'm a Section member and a newly appointed member of the SAA Standards Committee. For those not familiar with this group, the Standards Committee initiates and facilitates the development of standards; reviews and comments on standards relevant to archival theory and practice; educates the archives community on the value of standards; partners with relevant professional organizations on standards of mutual interest; and maintains the [Standards Portal](#). To fulfill these duties duly and collaboratively, Committee members regularly liaise with working groups, task forces, and other bodies both within and outside of SAA in order to stay abreast of developments regarding standards, best practices, and guidelines newly issued or revised to suit the needs of those groups. To that effect, in late 2019, I had the pleasure of volunteering to liaise with the Museum Archives Section, a slice of the Society that I've enjoyed being a part of for the past several years.



Emily Toder

At the time my post on the Standards Committee became official in August of 2019, I held the position of Processing Archivist at the New York Transit Museum, where for a little over three years, I arranged and described all manner of artifacts, ephemera, manuscripts, and visual materials related to public transit in the Greater New York City Area; assisted with exhibitions, public programs, and education initiatives; and helped advise on aspects of collections management. (I also developed a few standards while I was at it!) In December of 2019, I left this post to take on a new role at the Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice, where my archival eye and information background has been more trained on digital repositories, information management, and taxonomy/ontology design. Leaving the world of museum archives was bittersweet, and having the opportunity to stay in touch with the Section through my duties on the Standards Committee seemed to me as good a solution as ever to stay in the loop. To supplement my genuine and ongoing interest in museum collections, I now have an official reason to be in-the-know on MAS goings-on, and that makes me very happy.

As the Section reviews and revises the Museum Archives Guidelines over the course of the next few months, I'll be a ready point-person and willing collaborator, keeping you apprised of the formal requirements governing the revision process, and making the Standards Committee steadily aware of your progress. I've been in touch with Rachel and Megan about some basic steps, and I'm looking forward to also working with members of the MAS Standards and Best Practices Working Group as the project unfolds. I'm confident that the changes made to the Guidelines will enhance the work of museum archivists and the experience of their visitors, so I'm really honored to support this project in absolutely any way I can. Please feel free to reach out to me at [emilytoder@gmail.com](mailto:emilytoder@gmail.com) if you think of other ways I can assist. Thanks and I look forward to hearing from you!

### Museum Archives Section Officers

Katrina O'Brien, Chair  
[katrina@worldofspeed.org](mailto:katrina@worldofspeed.org)

Cate Peebles, Newsletter Editor,  
[catherine.peebles@gmail.com](mailto:catherine.peebles@gmail.com)

Melissa Gonzales, Council Liaison  
[Melissa\\_gonzales@icloud.com](mailto:Melissa_gonzales@icloud.com)

Sharad Shah, Chair-Elect/ Chair  
[ShahS@si.edu](mailto:ShahS@si.edu)

Felicia Owens, Staff Liaison  
[fowens@archivists.org](mailto:fowens@archivists.org)

Tara Laver, Recording Secretary  
[tlaver@nelson-atkins.org](mailto:tlaver@nelson-atkins.org)

Emily Toder, Standards Committee  
Liaison, [emilytoder@gmail.com](mailto:emilytoder@gmail.com)

Shannon Morelli, Web Liaison  
[s-morelli@nga.gov](mailto:s-morelli@nga.gov)

## Report from the Standards and Best Practices Working

BY RACHEL CHATALBASH AND MEGAN SCHWENKE

S&BP Working Group Co-Chairs

This year the Museum Archives Section's Standards and Best Practices Working Group is updating the [Museum Archives Guidelines](#), first drafted in 1998 and endorsed by the SAA Council in 2003. This project builds on the previous year's work of evaluating the content and structure of the Guidelines; Working Group members reviewed and discussed them in small groups, and the Working Group co-chairs surveyed Section members to solicit their ideas as well. All feedback from both review stages was compiled and is currently being used to draft a new version of the Guidelines, to be shared with the Section for workshop and review at the 2020 Annual Meeting.

We've welcomed three new members to the Group this year--Tara Hart from the Whitney Museum of Art, Hannah Mandel from the CCS Bard Hessel Museum, and Becca Morgan from the American Museum of Natural History. We are grateful for their participation in this year's project, as well as for the work of our returning members!

We'd like to increase our numbers and are excited to begin accepting new members in **August 2020**. It's a great way to meet colleagues and grow your museum archivist network, work on interesting museum-archives focused projects, and to build new skills. If you don't have a lot of time to give, that's OK: work is conducted over email and generally averages out to an hour or two a month.

Museum archivists are known for being busy and juggling many priorities at once. We asked a few current Working Group members why they find participation valuable despite the many competing demands on their time:

"As a member since 2012, perennially working towards the goals established by the group, as well as the resulting symposia at the SAA annual meeting, has been extremely rewarding. The dialogue generated amongst the group, and through outreach to the greater membership, has given me an invaluable point of contact with my peers across the country. In addition to those relationships, by distilling our common missions and services in a collaborative effort to establish best practices, I have also deepened my perspective on the work that I do." - Ryan Evans, Archivist, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution



Ryan Evans, Archives of American Art

"I enjoy participating in the Working Group because it provides a way to connect with other museum archivists in a meaningful, productive way. As we work on projects together that address "big picture" museum archives issues, it's a great way to gain perspective: What do museum archivists have in common? What do we do differently, and why? What can we learn from each other? It's always fun and surprising to ponder answers to these questions. It is exciting to get to share our work with the wider museum archives community, in the form of the final products we produce each year, such as online case studies and resources. I'm always happy when I hear an archivist ask a question, and can point them to an

online resource we worked on that addresses it!" - *Katherine Meyers Satriano, Associate Archivist, Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology*

"I rely on my Bay Area archivist colleagues for advice but there are very few of us who are museum archivists. The Working Group is a great opportunity to interact with other museum archivists. Also, the topics that the Working Group tackles are ones that are relevant and pressing to me."

- *Peggy Tran-Le, Archivist/Records Manager, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art*



Peggy Tran-Le, SFMoMA



Katherine Meyers Satriano,  
Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology

We'd love to have you join us! If you're interested in becoming part of the Working Group, please email the Group's co-chairs: Rachel Chatalbash ([rachel.chatalbash@yale.edu](mailto:rachel.chatalbash@yale.edu)) and Megan Schwenke ([megan\\_schwenke@harvard.edu](mailto:megan_schwenke@harvard.edu)). Students and new professionals are welcome.

**About the Museum Archives Section Standards and Best Practices Working Group:**

Launched in 2011, the Working Group compiled a Standards and Best Practices Resource Guide and completed several projects pertaining to museum archives and archivists. For more information, please view our page on the [Museum Archives Section website](#).

2019-2020 MAS Standards and Best Practices Working Group members:

Rose Chiango, Ryan Evans, Tara Hart, Hannah Mandel, Rebecca Morgan, Katrina O'Brien, Cate Peebles, Katherine Meyers Satriano, and Peggy Tran-Le

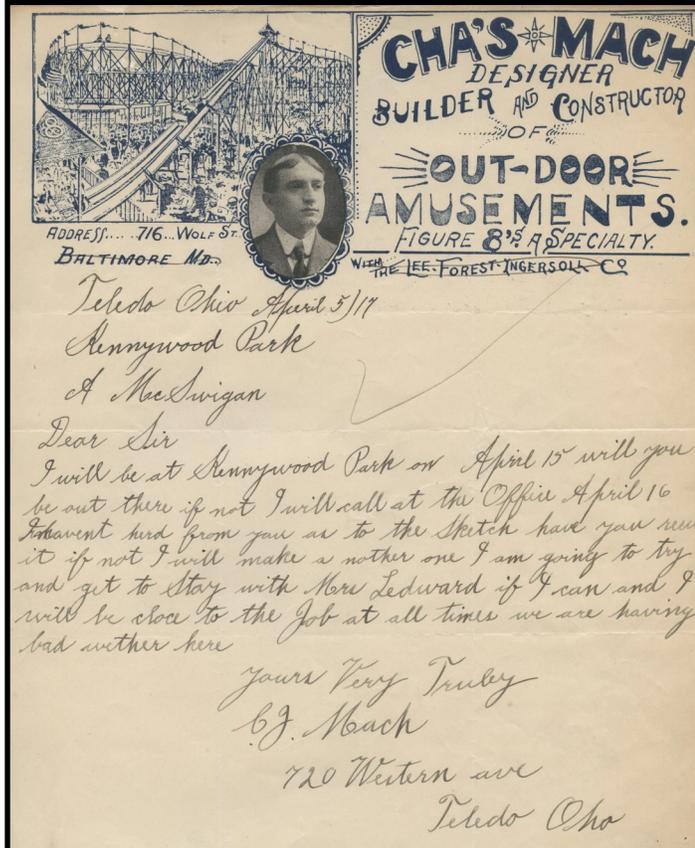
# Collection Profiles

## Senator John Heinz History Center Launches NEH-Funded Kennywood Grant

By Claire Moclock, Project Archivist  
and Matt Strauss, Chief Archivist, of the Detre Library & Archives, Heinz History Center

The Heinz History Center's Detre Library & Archives is excited to be working on a grant from the National Endowment of Humanities for the processing and partial digitization of the archives of Pittsburgh's iconic Kennywood Park. One of only two amusement parks to be designated as a National Historic Landmark, Kennywood Park donated more than 140 boxes of their corporate archives to the Heinz History Center in 2016. The materials include the correspondence of park management, photographs, videos, press coverage, blueprints, daily event schedules, and promotional material and cover

most of the park's existence. The materials shed light on how park management navigated changing cultural, economic, and social conditions brought upon by two world wars, downturns in the nation's economy, technological upheavals, changing customer taste, and competition from modern theme parks. Internal records of an amusement park, like the Kennywood Park Records, have the potential to reveal the strategies, planning, decision-making of the individuals behind one of the most powerful and under-researched cultural influencers of the 20th century. We believe that the Kennywood Park Records are the largest collection of internal archives from an amusement park in the country.



Letter from Charles Mach to Andrew McSwigan, Kennywood Park Manager. 5 April, 1917. From Kennywood Park Records, MSS 141, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center.



Musicians in the pool. 1930s. From Kennywood Park Records, MSS 141, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center.

The initial work of the grant has involved processing administrative correspondence from the 1920s and 1930s. Even this small portion of the collection is dense with details about the early years of Kennywood and broader amusement industry. For



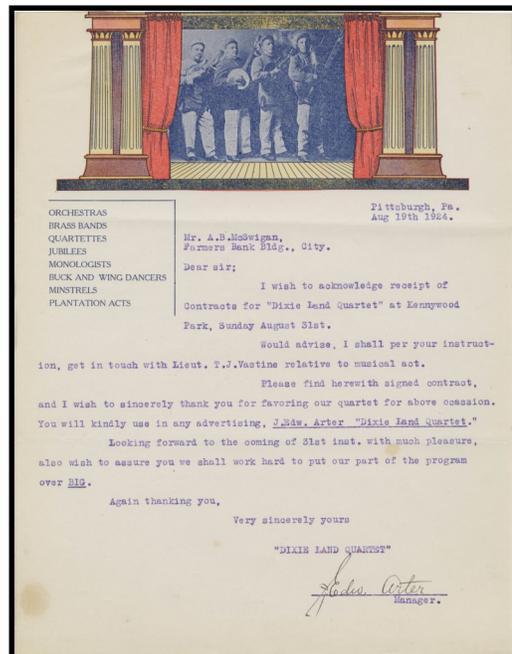
more performance opportunities and broader audiences. The collection contains incoming correspondence and promotional material from a wide variety of acts looking to perform at the park. The quality of the paper, the printing process, and number of colors used varies from act to act and can clue us in to who had more financial resources, public support and notoriety. In the coming year, we will continue to rehouse and describe the materials, begin the digitization process, and start developing educational resources. When complete, we'll post a finding aid to [Historic Pittsburgh](#), which will link to the digitized content.

Letter from Penn Diamond Orchestra to Andrew McSwigan, Kennywood Park President. 29 August, 1924. From Kennywood Park Records, MSS 141, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center.

instance, we have also seen stylistic reflections of the era in stationery and promotional material from correspondents. A perfect example is 1917 correspondence between Charles Mach and Andrew McSwigan, Kennywood Park President. Mach specialized in constructing rides, but his accomplishments have not been as widely recognized as those of the engineers who designed the attractions. He started his career under Frederick Ingersoll, creator of the Luna Park chain, and eventually made his way to Kennywood and many other parks in the Mid-Atlantic region. His letter head (pictured below), which combines photographic and hand-drawn images, embodies the do-it-yourself vigor of the amusement industry at that time. This era also presented musicians and artists with



Entertainers with an elephant. 1930s. From Kennywood Park Records, MSS 141, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center.



Above: View of the entrance to the Racer. 1919. Below: Letter from Dixie Land Quartet to Andrew McSwigan, Kennywood Park President. 19 August, 1924. From Kennywood Park Records, MSS 141, Detre Library and Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center.



2,038 negative strips and contact sheets  
 1,822 slides  
 1,506 prints  
 1,164 manuscripts and publications  
 72 pieces of camera equipment  
 1 set of keys to a 1969 Chevy



The detailed cataloging work allowed the team to make deep connections with the Draper photographs that were already in the museum's collection, by adding critical details to the knowledge about them. For example, the names of the young men Draper photographed when he was a mentor for the Youth in Action program were uncovered through his [handwritten notes on negative sleeves](#) and contact sheets.

Extensive data normalization ensured that users would find all of the relevant materials about a [particular person](#) or event, while maintaining Draper's own language and terminology.

Data was also used to build relationships with the museum's art collection. Metadata was added to records to [automatically link related archival materials to photographs](#), so that users will be presented with the option to explore directly related negatives, contact sheets, correspondence, or other ephemera.

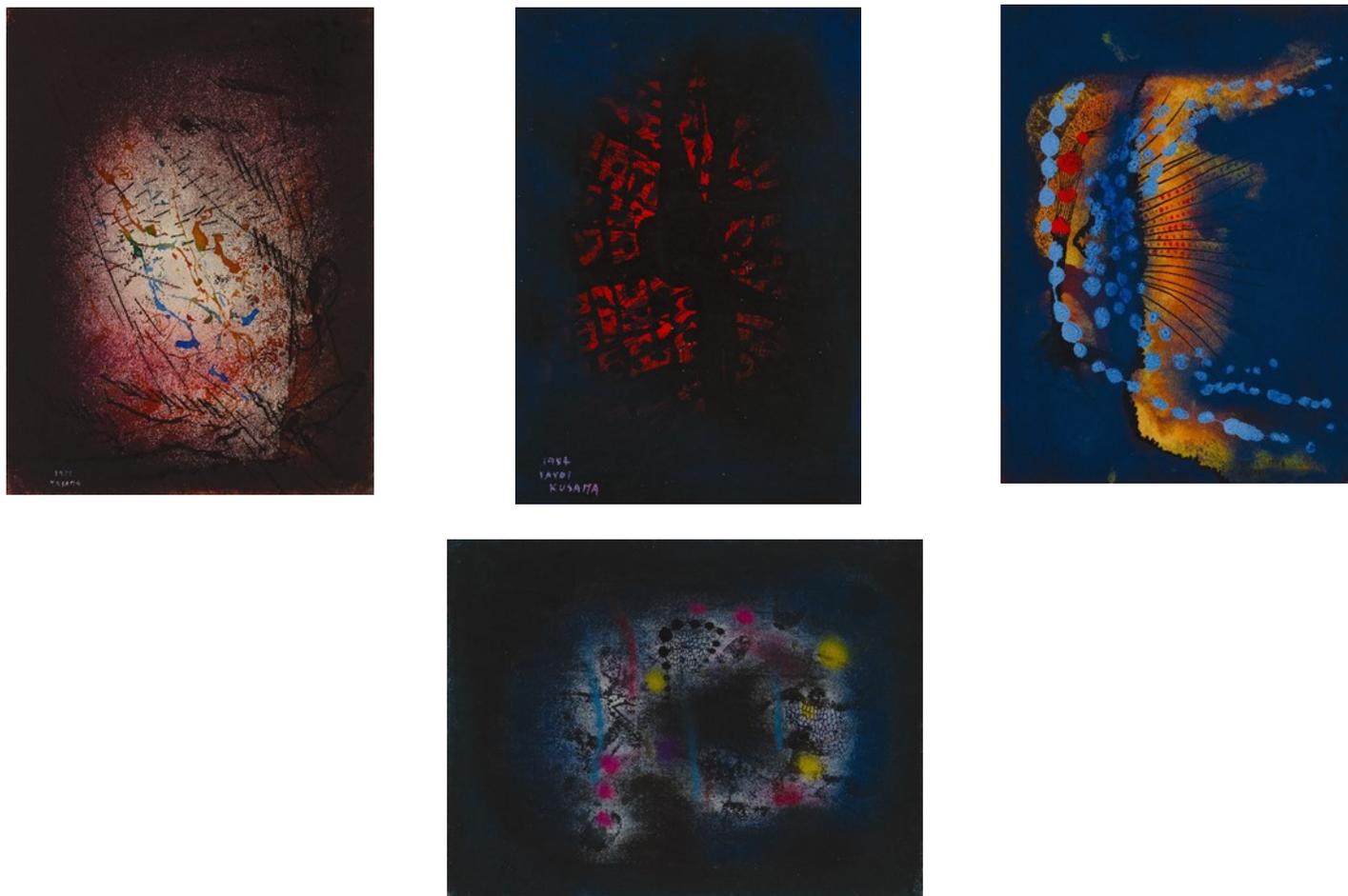
The portal contains over 6,600 items, which represent more than 50,000 images total, dating from 1947 to 2005. The digital portal is arranged like the physical archive, but it has been broken down into 50 parts to assist users in browsing the sections of the archive of most interest to them. Manuscript materials include correspondence, clippings, notebooks, exhibition announcements, and publications; photographic materials include contact sheets, prints, slides, and negatives; and photographic equipment includes cameras, lenses, filters, and exposure meters.



Images from the Draper Archive

## Discovering Yayoi Kusama's Watercolors

By Anna Rimel, Archivist for the Joseph Cornell Study Center  
Smithsonian American Art Museum



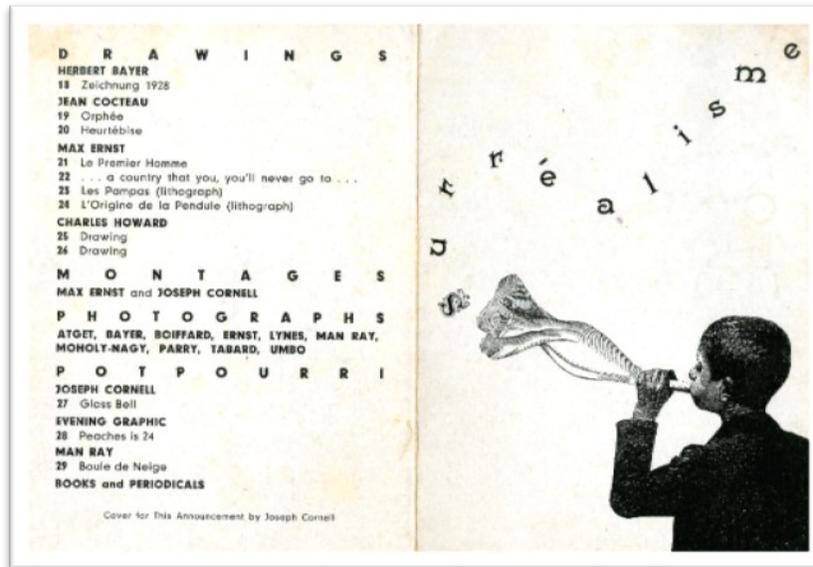
(Figure 1) Yayoi Kusama, (from left to right) "Autumn," 1953 (2019.32.1); "Deep Grief," 1954 (2019.32.2); "Fire," circa 1954 (2019.32.3); "Forlorn Spot," 1953 (2019.32.4), Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John A. Benton and The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation

Hired as the Archivist for the Joseph Cornell Study Center in 2017, with generous funding from the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation, I have been working steadily through hundreds of linear feet of artist Joseph Cornell's two- and three-dimensional source material, family and estate papers, and collected artifacts and ephemera. The collection also includes a collection of over 150 record albums, and a personal library and book collection of over 2500 titles.

In 1978, the Joseph Cornell Study Center was founded with a donation from Joseph Cornell's sister and brother-in-law, Elizabeth Cornell Benton and John A. Benton, to the Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM). There were several subsequent donations from his estate, the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation, further donations from Elizabeth Cornell and John A. Benton, and transfers from other Smithsonian repositories, which make up the Joseph Cornell Study Center collection today.

Though the project to archivally process the collection is still in progress, and a partial finding aid forthcoming, an exciting discovery has been making its way through the art world. In the process of conducting a preliminary survey of all contents of the collection, four small watercolors by Yayoi Kusama were found still in the original Manila envelope, alongside the receipt for purchase by Joseph Cornell from Kusama for \$200 on August 22, 1964 [1]. Upon notifying curatorial staff, Melisa Ho, SAAM's curator of 20th-century art, was vocal in getting the delicate watercolors accessioned into SAAM's permanent collections, which previously held no works by Kusama. "Rendered in watercolor, ink, pastel, and tempera paint," Melissa Ho explained that these works, created in the mid-fifties, "represent a crucial body of work that bridged Kusama's transition from Japan to the United States." [2] In a blog post for the museum on December 17, 2019, she continues to write: "They were among the roughly 2,000 works on paper Kusama brought with her when she left Japan in 1957, hoping to sell them to support herself." [3]

Joseph Cornell (1903-1972) was an artist known primarily for his assemblage box constructions, who also created two-dimensional collages and avant-garde films. He had two younger sisters, Helen and Elizabeth, who married and lived on Long Island. Joseph lived with his younger brother, Robert, and his mother, Helen, in Queens, New York, from 1921 until their deaths in 1965 and 1966, respectively. He would remain in the same home on Utopia Parkway until his death in 1972. Initially thought to be somewhat reclusive, the artist is now known to have had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances in the art world. His first exhibition was a group show at the Julien Levy Gallery in 1932, "Surréalisme," alongside artists Jean Cocteau, Salvador Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Pablo Picasso, Man Ray, and Pierre Roy, for which Cornell also designed the announcement. [4,5]



(Figure 2) "Surréalisme" (1932) exhibition announcement. Joseph Cornell Study Center, Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Cornell met artist Yayoi Kusama in early 1964, introduced by art dealer Gertrude Stein when he expressed a desire to learn to draw and asked Stein to bring him models to sketch. A number of these sketches apparently survive among her papers. [6] After sketching Kusama, they appear to have formed a bond, and continued to meet and correspond.

Other Kusama-related materials, including letters with sentiments like, "You and Me – Birds of a Feather," as

well as numerous photographs of Kusama, still remain within the Joseph Cornell Study Center collection. [7]



(Figure 3) Letter from Yayoi Kusama to Joseph Cornell, circa 1972. Joseph Cornell Study Center, Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The collection remains open to researchers, and more information can be found on the Joseph Cornell Study Center website, at <https://americanart.si.edu/research/cornell>.

---

## Citations

[1] See (Figure 1).

[2] Melissa Ho, "The Lost Kusamas." *Eye Level* (blog), Smithsonian American Art Museum, December 17, 2019. <https://americanart.si.edu/blog/lost-kusamas>.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Other Press, 1997), 87.

See (Figure 2).

[5] Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Other Press, 1997), 380-381.

See (Figure 3).

[6] Deborah Solomon, *Utopia Parkway: The Life and Work of Joseph Cornell* (New York: Other Press, 1997), 380-381.

[7] See (Figure 3).

# Outlier Recoveries at the University of Portland Archives and Museum

Rev. J. A. Schneibel, CSC, University Archivist, Archives & Artifacts

Our institution is a private, Catholic residential University. Founded in 1901. Enrollment in 1927 when Howard Hall was constructed was 314 high school and collegiate students; today 4000+ undergraduate and graduate students are enrolled.

## Outlier Recoveries

The theme of this article is in praise of data-bases and the art of description. With fulsome gratitude to the compilers of indices. These warm sentiments come out of a case-study problem addressed by the University Archives and Museum in 2019. We received no answer via key-word or thesaurus-based searches through the pages of the primary sources held by our Museum and Archives. The information that anchors the positive solution was discovered in subject-lines of the data-bases compiled by cataloguers, the 'secondary-tools' of research.



Foundation outline, 3<sup>rd</sup> fl. Stairwell, administration bldg.

The University of Portland is a century-old, private, regional Catholic university. Originally we were a 71-acre campus, which was enough for classrooms, administration, transportation, utilities, and even a farm to service the resident community when the school was founded in 1901. In 2017, healthy and growing, we retired a ninety-year old gymnasium and auditorium that had long survived its used-by date, having served through several generations of students.

A new academic center now occupies this prime campus space and former gymnasium site. During the course of site-remediation (re: demolition), the experts suggested, based on their professional experience, that a 1927 public building must surely contain a time-capsule. The inquiry, relayed to our office, is the first hint any of us (okay, the two of us) have had of that interesting possibility. Key-word searches through all electronic files arrive at a blank however. But a transverse search of campus publications discovers an Alumni-Appeal reporting on and extolling the Homecoming Game cornerstone dedication, including the promising mention of a 'treasure box of papers and relics' sealed therein.

At the demolition site, diamond-saws cut into the cornerstone recovering a corroded metal box containing a newspaper of the day, the Registrar's enrollment list of 300 students, and the pulped remains of the 1927 Homecoming Souvenir Program. Brilliant.

The terms *time-capsule* and *treasure box* correlate, but the discovery comes by way of only one of the three contemporaneous notices about the opening of the New Gymnasium. None of which focus on a time-

capsule or memory file. The time-capsule itself appears to have been hastily arranged and most inadequately sealed. The alumni report of a ‘treasure box of relics’ exaggerating, perhaps, the character of the contents. In fact, the descriptions of the events of that rainy day are dominated by the magnificence of the visiting Archbishop installing and blessing the cornerstone (the featured Homecoming football game ended in defeat for the home team). Finding reference to the time-capsule is itself a treasure hunt.

Second Puzzle, same Site. Completing the landscaping surrounding the new academic building, the grounds crew discovered an obstacle while placing irrigation tubes and filters. There is a stone and mortar outline-foundation at rest just below the surface of the lawn. Where, to all local knowledge, no building has ever stood.

Questions are once more directed to the Archives & University Museum. The story is recovered from building lists, oral histories, publications and photos in the Archives. (The lists have several names of early buildings that did not survive into the historical record.) In 2019, the excavators have found the Bath House, built in 1906 as an auxiliary out-building for the track & field facility; the structure was more lavatory than locker room, later converted into a work-shop, and at the end a storage shed; removed in 1936.

Now in the first puzzle, the leap from time-capsule to treasure-box is not much of a challenge. However, the second puzzle, comprised of grandiose titles and modest ruins, needed the group legacy of a series of archivists to solve two unanswered questions. The discovery of the physical traces was the sole prompt to repair the historical gap around an unidentified building name. ‘Bath House’ signifies differently today, but even in 1906 it was a generous appellation for a stone lavatory; a mask dividing form and function, cloaking the humble utilitarian structure. Though at the center of campus, the underground footprint of the Bath House somehow dodged all subsequent campus improvements and installations (from steam-lines and modern plumbing, to coaxial internet cable), enduring undisturbed and forgotten. The building was never listed on campus maps, is unlabeled on photos, and earned no feature articles in the alumni newsletter.

And so, wearing a name that is frank misdirection, geography and a stray data-point reference—diligently catalogued, described, recorded— connects-the-dots between an unknown early structure and the stone foundation impeding today’s landscapers.

The archives triangulation::

The caution here is that when name and form do not align, a key-word search engine is an inadequate tool. In these two examples, the step from time-capsule to treasure-box is a small intuition, mapping a thesaurus-level language shift; but to unmask the Bath House and arrive at a lavatory-shed asks us to recognize and see through a smiling euphemism masking the genteel modesty of adolescent athletes of an earlier generation. Thanks to hard-nosed data-base descriptions!

Also, we shamelessly converted these questions into self-publicity, putting together photos and text and story for our monthly digital outreach educational Museum posts:



Time-Capsule, 1927-2017

<https://sites.up.edu/museum/campus-archaeology-on-the-shoulders-of-giants/>

<https://sites.up.edu/museum/durable-goods-and-bigger-dreams/>

## Creating an Oral History Program at the Yale Center for British Art

**Nina Farizova, Graduate Research Assistant  
Institutional Archives, Yale Center for British Art**

During the fall semester of 2019 I worked as a research assistant to Senior Archivist Rachel Chatalbash at the Institutional Archives of the Yale Center for British Art. My job was to kick-start the oral history program of the YCBA. Where does one begin when facing such a huge task as collecting narratives about the entire history of a decades-old institution? First, I needed to learn about the best practices of oral history. I undertook to create a manual—a kind of conceptual blueprint for how we should proceed. Its purpose, initially, was to help those who would come to work on the program after me, but it also became a space where my ideas about our project slowly formed, reflecting my learning curve.

Second, we of course needed to create a list of potential interviewees. To narrow it down, Rachel and I decided that it would be logical if I compiled information on the individuals who had been associated with the institution during its earliest days. Going through the archival materials and printed resources in chronological order, decade by decade, seemed like a reasonable method. The unexpected side effect was that I learnt quite a bit about the original vision that went into the creation of the YCBA. I got an idea of what the mission of our institution was when it came into being: how it was

shaped by Paul Mellon, who gifted the Center to Yale; how it was advanced by the first employees and persons involved. I read about the exhibitions and the events from the first decade. I became an expert on the Center between 1966 and 1977.

All the while, I was eager to start collecting oral histories. Doing the preparatory work is important, but at some point one must venture out and do the interviewing. I realized that a good place to start would be to interview members of the Yale community. Specifically, I set my sights on collecting oral histories from the professors who use the Center's resources in their teaching. I had studied with three such individuals, and this proved to be a great advantage. As a graduate student on campus, I knew exactly the context of their work. Having an understanding of the history of the Center was further helping me to craft meaningful questions for my interviewees.

What brought all these efforts into clear focus was the keyword that I came up with: "identity." The Center is an art gallery, a campus museum, a research and teaching facility, a local landmark...the list goes on. One might wonder: Why Yale? Why British? What does this institution represent? The more I thought about the YCBA, the more I realized how difficult it is to define it. As something that sprung from the vision of one man, who "was interested in a kind of gracious view of Britain," as one of our interviewees, Professor Katie Trumpener, put it, the Center has a particular point of view on British art. Yet the institution grows and changes and tries to address the more painful and disturbing sides of British history, to achieve more diversity in genres and media represented, in short: to do more. I did not want to perform a straightforward collecting of facts in chronological order, even though that is certainly a valid style of doing oral history. I thought that my mission as an oral historian was to formulate questions that would address all these facets of our institution, already present when it was just an idea and even more salient today.

An art museum is often a site of silent looking and ephemeral feeling. The hardships and joys of



Nina Farizova

teaching are usually not public either. In talking to the professors, I wanted to disrupt this silence. I hoped that in speaking about their emotional and critical responses to this unique place, my interviewees would approach the true depth of their professional and personal relationship with the Center. And my hopes were rewarded. I learnt from my interviews that in breaking the silence we can talk about the multiplicity of things that are and are not there—about what we enjoy and love, what we are critical of, as well as what we think is missing. An oral history of an institution, in a certain sense, is a long and detailed feedback form.

At the same time, oral history is about people. And this is where my keyword helped me again. Every interview was about the identity of the Center, but it was influenced by the identity of the interviewer who prepared the questions and guided the conversation and by the identity of the narrator with their thought-provoking responses. For my part, I sought to do work at the YCBA because of my longstanding passion for all things British. On social occasions I used to present myself as a Shakespeare nerd, a Pre-Raphaelite fan, and the Beatles enthusiast. Over time, I felt the need to break through to a different level: all these attractions were becoming more than a random list of activities to pursue at leisure. British studies were turning into an academic interest, which, at its best, can be a varnish that brings things into cohesion yet allows them to catch light in all their complexity. In other words, I was rapidly outgrowing a superficial Anglophilia of mine, but did not plan on losing the connection altogether. After a semester of hard work, I realized that I was not alone in my desire at once to maintain genuine excitement about British things and to develop an informed, nuanced take on them.

Probing into the identity of the Yale Center for British Art helped me to answer a lot of my own questions. I hope that the future readers of the historical documents I created will find answers to their questions as well. The oral histories of the Yale Center for British Art are preserved at the Institutional Archives in the form of audio recordings and lightly annotated transcripts. While some of our narrators choose to restrict the access for 35 years, other interviews are immediately available for research.

## Stay Connected with the Museum Archives Section

The Museum Archives Section has an official SAA email list as well as a Museum Archives listserv. The listserv relays news items related to the profession and serves as a forum for members to assist one another with issues encountered in archives.

### 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.

### Museum Archives Listserv (SAAMUS-L)

While emails do circulate on SAA Museum Archives email list, section discussion also takes place on the SAAMUS-L listserv. To join the Museum Archives listserv send an email to [LISTSERV@SI-LISTSERV.SI.EDU](mailto:LISTSERV@SI-LISTSERV.SI.EDU) with the following commands in the body of the email: subscribe SAAMUS-L firstname lastname. Replace "firstname lastname" with your own name; for example: subscribe SAAMUS-L John Smith. To post to the list, send email to [SAAMUS-L@SI-LISTSERV.SI.EDU](mailto:SAAMUS-L@SI-LISTSERV.SI.EDU).

The Museum Archives listserv, SAAMUS-L, is hosted by the Smithsonian Institution. If you have any questions about the Museum Archives listserv, please contact [Marisa Bourgoin](mailto:Marisa.Bourgoin).

## Submit to the *Museum Archivist!*

*Museum Archivist* is issued two times each year by the Museum Archives Section of the Society of American Archivists. Articles, news and comments from the museum archives community are welcome. Submission deadlines for the winter and summer issues are the second Fridays in January and June or as announced on the listserv.

All submissions should be sent to the Newsletter Editor, Cate Peebles:  
[catherine.peebles@yale.edu](mailto:catherine.peebles@yale.edu)

# Internship Profile: Nantucket Historical Society

By Sara David, Archives Intern  
Nantucket Historical Society



I had just finished reading *Moby Dick* when the spring archival internship at the [Nantucket Historical Association](#) was posted. Though moving from south Florida to Massachusetts in the middle of January would certainly be a change, I had chosen to do my Master of Science in Information online through Florida State University precisely so I could pursue internship opportunities throughout the school semester. Now in the final semester of my degree, I have only had one internship, as my extended time and work at the NHA developed into full-time employment dedicated to digitization and transcription. The position was created and funded with the goal of having all Research Library holdings digitized, transcribed, and connected to their corresponding records in the organization's [recently re-launched catalog](#), providing a seamless and comprehensive resource. As it's a long-term project expected to span several years, for the short-term, we decided to start with one of the more popular collections: ships' logbooks.

Working with the logbooks is particularly fun and engaging as you can follow along on a 2-5 year long whaling voyage in a much more accessible time frame. My favorite things to come across are doodles, illustrations, and poems, as they offer insight into not only history, sailing, and whaling, but also the human condition. I think it's these smaller details that make history come alive, and by digitizing these materials, the NHA can help others discover and connect with our collections. Digitization and transcription are important to making our collections not only available but accessible for all. Cursive handwriting, nautical terminology, and abbreviations are more specialized knowledge, so by transcribing this information, we can make it legible and text-searchable for more to use. Scanning, metadata creation, file management, and transcription can be tedious and time intensive. Though technologies like planetary scanners and Optical/Intelligent Character Recognition software certainly have their applications, they also have limitations, and ultimately, the success of the project seems to come down to people power and patience.

It is sometimes hard to emphasize the necessity of these resources to those unfamiliar with the "behind the scenes" process of how things become available online. This position has really taught me the importance of documenting "invisible work." If I do my job right, people shouldn't really notice it; however, I still need to be able to communicate what I am working on and report progress to the project stakeholders. So far, I have found it helpful to quantify and qualify my work by keeping meticulous spreadsheets that track what was scanned when, how long it took, and the total number of images, as well as conditional notes on the material. At this point, almost a quarter of the collection has been digitized, and we are now working to connect those resources to the catalog and get them transcribed through a crowdsourcing transcription program, [FromThePage](#).

I have found digitization provides the exciting and immersive opportunity to work directly with historic materials, while transcription is exciting because it provides the opportunity for innovation and creativity. I have also found through transcription efforts that I really enjoy working with people, and hope to eventually get more experience working with patrons, donors, and other staff. In the meantime, I feel so fortunate to have the opportunity to work with a really great collection under the guidance of really great mentors. You can learn more about the NHA's digitization and transcription efforts (and help transcribe some logbooks) [here!](#)

## News & Notes

### Introducing Dia Art Foundation's New Archive Program

By Janeen Schiff, Archivist  
DIA Art Foundation

In 2016, Dia Art Foundation initiated a full-scale archive program with foundational support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support the formation of a new archive facility and begin assessing, organizing, and preserving Dia's archives. Dia was founded in New York City in 1974 by Philippa de Menil, Heiner Friedrich, and Helen Winkler to help artists execute visionary projects that might not otherwise be realized because of scale or scope. Dia's collection consists of permanent sites in New York City, the American West, and Kassel, Germany, and locations in Bridgehampton, Beacon, and Chelsea, New York. The foundation's archive documents its long history with artists' projects, sites, and the work of its founders and staff.

The mission of Dia Art Foundation Archive is to identify, organize, and preserve the institutional records of enduring historical value since Dia's founding. The archive simultaneously supports the institution's contemporary activities by documenting the vital and ongoing role it plays in the commission, creation, and presentation of public programs and site-specific, long-term installations and exhibitions.

Beginning in winter 2016, our archivist and a team of operations staff renovated a space in the basement of Dia Beacon in Beacon, New York, where much of Dia's collection is displayed. This included cleaning up an existing space in the basement, purchasing shelving, and coordinating moving materials into a new storage facility. Once the facility was under construction, the archivist surveyed all the foundation's records and packed them for shipping from Dia sites in New York City, Bridgehampton, and the New Mexico office to Dia Beacon. Upon closer inspection of the types and conditions of materials, the archivist, in consultation with institutional leaders, decided to bring all the contents from our sites to one place so we could manage, organize, and preserve them.

Dia's collection focuses on core Minimal, Postminimal, and Land artists who came of age in the 1960s and 70s, with works by Carl Andre, Joseph Beuys, John Chamberlain, Walter De Maria, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Imi Knoebel, Barnett Newman, Blinky Palermo, Fred Sandback, Cy Twombly, Andy Warhol, Robert Whitman, and La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, among others. The archives include materials that document the lives and practices of artists in the collection, as well as providing information about how the works were constructed. Other types of records housed in Dia's archive reveal important information about a vast publication history, forty years of groundbreaking public programs and performances, and a detailed catalog of memoranda, correspondences, and daily log reports that document staff activities and institutional initiatives.

Although we have completed three years of processing, we still have so much more work to do. Looking to the future, we hope to provide access to the archives to support all levels of scholarly research and outreach. Dia also plans to implement a preservation strategy for its digitized and born-digital artworks and other program recordings. If you would like to contact us, we welcome any comments to [archives@diaart.org](mailto:archives@diaart.org) and look forward to sharing more about our past soon.

## News from the Metropolitan Museum of Art

### Metropolitan Museum of Art Digitizes Records of Francis Henry Taylor



Francis Henry Taylor was the fifth director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, serving from 1940 to 1955. Taylor led the Museum through World War II and the beginning of America's involvement in the Cold War, as well as a \$9 million renovation of the Museum's exhibition space and organizational restructuring. During his tenure the Museum tripled membership, doubled its endowment, and attendance figures rose dramatically. Taylor is highly regarded for his efforts to strengthen the Museum's educational programming and public outreach, and led the formation of the Department of Education and Museum Extension. Taylor was committed to expanding audiences through radio, television, and off-site art exhibitions. His oversight of an ambitious program of loan exhibitions enabled thousands of Museum visitors to view masterworks from European collections. Taylor's Met records include correspondence, meeting minutes, reports, memoranda, architectural drawings, and ephemera. They were processed and digitized with generous support of the Leon Levy Foundation. For additional information and access to the digital content visit <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/libraries-and-research-centers/watson-digital-collections/manuscript-collections/francis-henry-taylor-records>

### Special Exhibition Features Founding Documents of New York City Museums



*Cultivating Culture: 34 Institutions that Changed New York* is an exhibition at Museum of the City of New York focused on the Cultural Institutions Group, a public-private initiative dating back to the 19th century. Today, it provides support to 34 institutions ranging from the The Metropolitan Museum of Art and The Public Theater to the Brooklyn Museum, the Queens Botanical Garden, the Staten Island Museum, and the Wildlife Conservation. *Cultivating Culture* tells these institutions' stories through original imagery and objects, including founding charters, tickets and ephemera related to opening night performances, and other original artifacts that bring the history of the city's cultural riches to life. Included in the display is a printed copy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art charter, signed by the Met's founding trustees. For further information visit <https://www.mcny.org/exhibition/cultivating-culture-34-institutions-changed-new-york>

## Making the Met: Celebrating 150 Years of The Metropolitan Museum of Art



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, founded in 1870, will celebrate its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary throughout the 2020 year. In preparation for this momentous event, the Met Archives team collaborated with staff across the institution to prepare exhibitions, publications and public events focused on the institution's rich history and encyclopedic collections. Information about the full range 150<sup>th</sup> commemorative activities is available here: <https://www.metmuseum.org/150>

The centerpiece will be the major exhibition *Making the Met, 1870-2020*, which will lead visitors on an immersive, thought-provoking journey through the history of one of the world's preeminent cultural institutions. It will feature more than 250 superlative works of art of nearly every type, from visitor favorites to fragile treasures that can only be placed on view from time to time. Organized around transformational moments in the evolution of the Museum's collection, buildings, and ambitions, the exhibition will reveal the visionary figures and cultural forces that propelled The Met in new directions from its founding in 1870 to the present day. Rarely seen archival photographs and documents, innovative digital features, and stories of both behind-the-scenes work and the Museum's community outreach will enhance this unique experience. The exhibition will be accompanied by a catalogue that includes additional historical images and documents drawn from Met archival holdings. *Making the Met* opens on March 30 and will remain on view through August 20. For further information visit: <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2020/making-the-met-1870-to-2020>

Other historical programming related to the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary is already underway. Staff in the Museum's Watson Library recently launched a series of blog posts that will tell the story of The Met's great library; the first is now online here: <https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/in-circulation/2019/history-of-the-library-part-1>. Watson Library has also installed a reading room exhibition focused on this theme, on view through March 15, and ongoing in an online version here: <https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/in-circulation/2019/library-lane>

## News from the Indianapolis Museum of Art

The Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields announces the landmark acquisition of the Stephen Sprouse fashion collection and archives. One of the largest single gifts Newfields has received, it includes thousands of men's and women's clothing, accessories, audio-visual and photographic materials, business documentation, and press clippings. A fashion visionary, Stephen Sprouse (1953-2004) is best known for his New York downtown scene inspired clothing. The Archives, Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields, will seek funding and begin arrangement and description of the records over the next several years. The personal papers, business records, visual media, and by-product design materials (sketches, patterns, textile samples) will support care of the fashion and art collection in addition to providing a rich research corpus for design students, historians, and the general public. Joanne Sprouse and Brad Sprouse, Stephen's mother and brother, donated the archives and collection in memory of Stephen to honor his legacy.



Small sample of the variety of media accessioned by the archives

## News from the Museum of Flight

The archives team at the Museum of Flight has a few new online resources to announce: the finding aids for the William E. Boeing, Sr. Papers, the Douglas Aircraft Company Records, and the Museum of Flight Oral History Collection.

The [William E. Boeing, Sr. Papers](#) are comprised of visual and textual materials related to the personal life and career of William E. Boeing, Sr., founder of the Boeing Company. The collection includes correspondence, philately, business-related materials, clippings and ephemera as well as photographs and illustrations, ranging from 1783-2008. Major areas of interest include family photographs and extensive personal and business-related correspondence, especially during the founding of The Boeing Company, and several rare pieces of aerophilately. We will soon work to digitize the collection and make it available online.

The [Douglas Aircraft Company Records](#) contain administrative, financial, and legal records relating to

the Douglas Aircraft Company from 1921-1945. The Douglas Aircraft Company was a pioneer in early aviation and is best known for its DC-3 transport aircraft. The collection consists of corporate documents, ledgers, and business correspondence relating to the three iterations of the Douglas Aircraft Company: The Davis-Douglas Company, the Douglas Company, and the Douglas Aircraft Company. The records will be of interest to scholars researching historical aspects of early aviation businesses and the growth of the industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The [Museum of Flight Oral History Collection](#) chronicles the personal stories of individuals in the fields of aviation and aerospace, from pilots and engineers to executives. This collection, which dates from 2013 to present, consists of digital video recordings and transcripts, which illustrate these individuals' experiences, relationship with aviation, and advice for those interested in the field. The personal stories in this collection span much of the modern history of flight, from the Golden Age of Aviation in the 1930s, to the evolution of jet aircraft in the mid-twentieth century, to the ongoing developments of the Space Age. The selected interviewees represent a wide range of career paths and a diverse cross-section of professionals, each of whom made significant contributions to their field. Among the many interviewees are Calvin Kam, a United States Army veteran who served as a helicopter pilot during the Vietnam War; Robert "Bob" Alexander, a mechanical engineer who helped design the Hubble Telescope; and Betty Riley Stockard, a flight attendant during the 1940s who once acted as a secret parcel carrier during World War II. As we finalize the transcripts and catalog the recordings, we are making them available on our [Digital Collections site](#).

#### MARK ARMSTRONG ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW



**Title**  
Mark Armstrong oral history interview

**Creator**  
[Museum of Flight \(Seattle, Wash.\)](#)

**Description**  
Mark Armstrong is interviewed about his father, astronaut Neil Armstrong, as well as his own experiences with the Space Program during the 1960s and beyond. He describes his father's aviation and space career and shares details about his childhood, growing up in the midst of the Apollo 11 mission. He also touches on his professional career in technology. Topics discussed his childhood memories of his father, his interest in physics and software programming, his thoughts on the Space Program, and his position as a trustee at The Museum of Flight.

**Transcription**  
[View the transcript](#)

**Interviewee**  
[Armstrong, Mark -1963-](#)

**Interviewer**  
[Hunn, Geoff](#)

## Book Review

### Archives in an Era of Democratization of Knowledge

**By Anna Fitzgerald , MA-LIS Graduate Student  
University of Arizona**

*The Future of Museums*, edited by Gerald Bast, Elias Carayannis, and David Campbell. (Springer International Publishing 145,59 €)

This collection of essays by Gerald Bast, President of the University of Applied Arts Vienna, and other scholars and field experts help delineate and explore operational, attraction, and retention challenges facing museums today. The authors argue for a fundamental reevaluation of the role of museums in the public sphere and for institutions to advance their comprehension of contemporary audience behaviors and technological innovation. The priority of addressing the needs and desires of the visitor is a central theme

throughout, as is the necessity of museums to become integral to society as fact-driven knowledge disseminators.

There are few other texts that comprehensively discuss media usage, tourism effects, and social behavior as they relate to museum survival. The wide range of pedigrees, disciplines, and nationalities of the authors gives weight and credibility to their points, and the organization of the collection moves you progressively from topics on societal evolution to digital ingenuity. However, most of the essays lean on citations instead of factual support from conducting studies, which introduces probability and efficacy questions. Only, "Museum Services in the Era of Tourism" by Elani Mavragani, International Hellenic University, includes details on the approach and results of her study. By interacting with the audiences of five test institutions, the Delphi Museum, the Mycenae Museum, the Olympia Museum, the Corinth Museum, and the Epidauros Museum, it is clear that those museums have to resolve for and satisfy three distinct and widely-varied target audiences.

With the increasingly rapid advancement of technologically-savvy and social audiences, the future museum becomes an integral part of society's health and education. The institution must evolve in how it communicates with recipients and in its use of intelligent but playful technology. However, as co-authors Zsófia Ruttkay and Judit Bényei point out in "Renewal of the Museum in the Digital Epoch," there is validation research needed, which requires capturing audience reflections and conducting user-based analysis.

