

Society of American Archivists Council Meeting Chicago, IL

Manuscript Repositories Section (MRS): Annual Report (Prepared by: Laura Starratt)

Year: 2024- 2025

Current Rosters (Include full name, position title, and term end date for each):

Officers

Candace Pine, Chair (2025-2027)
Sarah Roberts Vice-Chair / Chair Elect (2025-2027)

Members At-Large:

Amy Armstrong (2024-2026)
Holly Deakyne (2024-2026)
Erica Donnis (2025-2027)
William (Bill) Hardesty (2025-2027)
Lindsay Sheldon (2024-2026)
Laura Starratt, Immediate Past Chair (2024-2026)

Council Liaison: Alison Clemens

PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

(Please indicate all projects and activities that your component group has completed this year, continues to work on, or plans to implement in the following fiscal year.)

Completed:

The Committee designed and hosted four events this year:

The Fall event was a follow-up discussion of the Spring 2024 panel; *Continuing the Discussion: Strategies for Working with Large Collections* included break out rooms with volunteer facilitators due to the 138 registrants (67 participated on the day). The notes from each group were compiled into a [one document](#) and posted on the SAA Connect page.

The Committee also added a new series this year, the *Manuscript Minute*, which is designed for section members to volunteer to lead a 30-minute discussion about a topic of their choosing. The first discussion, *Deaccessioning is my Friend!*, was led by Sarah Roberts of the Michigan State University Archives. Registration was limited to 30, and we had requests for a waitlist. We are hoping to get more interest in the section members next year to lead their own discussions.

75 section members attended our Spring event, *Outreach for Archival Institutions from Two Perspectives*, which featured Caira Spenrath, Archivist from the San Antonio African American

Community Archive and Museum, and Brenda Gunn, Associate University Librarian for Special Collections and Preservation at the University of Virginia discussing how academic and community archives use and respond to outreach activities.

As part of the annual business meeting, we hosted Kate Donovan (James D. Hart Director, Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley), Katie Rojas (Head of Technical Services, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at University of Virginia), and Amy E. Armstrong (Head of Archival Processing, Harry Ransom Center at UT Austin) for *Archival Reckoning: Problematic Collections and Difficult Legacies*, a panel at our annual meeting.

Ongoing:

The section plans to continue hosting webinars in 2025-2026 based on the results of the 2023-2024 member survey and continue to push for more engagement with programs such as the Manuscript Minute.

New:

No new initiatives are currently planned.

SAA STRATEGIC PLAN

(Please review the current [Strategic Plan](#) and indicate below how the component group has or plans to contribute to one or more of the four main goals.)

Goal 1: Advocating for Archives and Archivists

The educational programming hosted by MRS this past year provided an opportunity for attendees to learn and discuss techniques for outreach through our Spring Event, *Outreach for Archival Institutions from Two Perspectives*. This Q&A event featured speakers from a private university special collections and a public, community archives. Through a conversation between the panelists and the questions provided by the audience, we saw the difference in how outreach is done and gained new insights in how to personalize individual outreach. Additionally, our follow up discussion on the 2023-2024 panel, created a space for in-reach between archivists as we discussed how we use MPLP as well as other systems, offering support and answers to questions as well as creating more interaction between archivists. Our new program, Manuscript Minute, was created to highlight our members and their work, and while it didn't have as much participation, we think it will continue to grow. Finally, the annual meeting panel highlighted how archivists can acknowledge problematic histories while still moving forward in our professional missions. Expanding these discussions allows archivists and archives workers to better articulate and more strongly advocate for their needs related to performing their duties and convincingly explain the how and why of their methods to colleagues, patrons, and stakeholders. When we are better prepared to do this work, we are better equipped to educate and influence others about the value of our work.

Goal 2: Enhancing Professional Growth

Relying on responses to the 2023-2024 survey, the Committee continued to use online delivery of programming as the preferred method indicated by Section membership. Based on an immediate need to address possible and sustained budget cuts early in 2025 (and, especially in light of significant funding cuts to archives across the US), we focused our programming on advocacy. In addition, we created a series, the *Manuscript Minute*, to create presentation opportunities for Section members of all experience levels to lead their own discussions. This opportunity will allow new professionals to gain experience in speaking and presenting in a low-stakes environment and will allow new discussions to come up organically.

Goal 3: Advancing the Field

MRS followed up last year's Spring presentation on MPLP with break out sessions that offered space for archivists to discuss the topic and also included a number of side-conversations, especially on using MPLP in ArchivesSpace. In addition to creating new discussions, this break out discussion offered archivists the option for networking based on these discussions. The Spring 2025 panel, *Outreach for Archival Institutions from Two Perspectives*, highlighted various outreach approaches within the archives profession, and, we hope, this offers archivists better avenues for approaching their stakeholders (both established and prospective) as they speak on behalf of the profession. Also, as many of us work in organizations with problematic pasts that we are often asked to explain, we used our annual meeting platform for the panel, *Archival Reckoning: Problematic Collections and Difficult Legacies*, where the discussion covered how some organizations addressed their pasts.

Goal 4: Meeting Members' Needs

Instead of sending out another member survey, we reviewed the results from the Fall 2023 member survey, and used that as a basis to create the break-out discussion as a follow-up to the Spring event. The intention was to create space for section members. We continued to aim for programming that was in-line with section interests. We also pivoted to an advocacy-focused Spring panel, upon changes to funding and political trends. Noting the funding cuts across the country, we also saw the need for member opportunities for professional development and created the *Manuscript Minute* as a way to allow members to present to a national audience. The steering committee plans to continue creating programming this coming fall that aligns with other areas of high/interest that we were not able to address this past year.

SAA ANNUAL MEETING

Number of attendees:

61 registrants; 56 attendees

[Link to meeting minutes](#)

Summary of meeting activities and highlights:

During the annual MRS meeting, Lydia Tang gave the Council Report, and Laura updated the section on the panels and sessions we put up this year, the election results, and the issue regarding the lack of an in-coming chair. This was followed by a presentation on how to address problematic histories and collections featuring:

- Kate Donovan, James D. Hart Director at the Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, discussed the legacy of Hubert Howe Bancroft and renaming a collection.
- Katie Rojas, Head of Technical Services at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, addressed issues stemming from collections founded by prominent enslavers.
- Amy Armstrong, Head of Archival Processing at the Harry Ransom Center, UT Austin, presented a concise talk on a specific collection and its problematic creator.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

How would you describe the health or energy of the group, and how engaged are the members?

MRS could have one of the largest section memberships due to the broad nature of manuscripts and their pervasiveness in archives, so I think there is room to expand our scope and collaborate more freely with other, more specific groups. I think our membership would benefit from having closer relationships with these sections especially if we are more proactive about sharing out information from other groups via our direct communication. Section members were fairly responsive to requests for engagement and opportunities for participation throughout the year. We should look to find more direct ways to engage conversation as the listserv posts still don't result in much discussion beyond the original post. The events we've hosted continue to be well-attended with engaged members, and those discussions have been active, but that could be due to the event's synchronous nature. We received an 11% turnout of voters for the section election, so while there is some room for improvement, I feel the health and energy of the section is good, and our areas of strength can be utilized as avenues for continued growth.

Did the component group's leadership encounter any challenges in achieving its goals for the year?

No

What suggestions do you have for the SAA Council and staff that might help address these challenges in the coming term?

None

What questions or concerns do you have for the SAA Council and staff?

None