

Are Archivists Essential Workers? Documenting the Effects of COVID-19 on Funded Archival Institutions

VANESSA REYES and ANASTASIA WEIGLE

Humanities organizations continue to seek support after the start of the global pandemic. In reflecting on the year 2020, the only way to tell the stories of America's Archives is through communicating with the Archivists themselves. The American Library Association (ALA) spotlight the resilience, determination, and innovations of library workers in unprecedented circumstances. Their publication *The State of American Libraries: Special Report: Covid-19* provides a closer look at the vitality our libraries provide to our nation, our people, and community. Librarians were quickly reassigned and went from disseminating information to becoming our community's "second responders." Can this be said about Archivists working in repositories? Preservation institutions? What happened to collections and services? Lyasis, a non-profit organization serving and supporting libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural centers, shared a Pandemic-Survey conducted in the fall of 2020, documenting what it was like to collect archival materials during this time. The survey highlights those archives closed for months without environmental monitoring by staff. Archival consultants believed that disaster response assistance with pests, mold, and water leaks may be needed once buildings were reopened. Other archives, however, were granted limited access by non-archival staff. This included facilities and other staff permitted to work on-site in 4% of responses, while 21% of archives surveyed identified library administration or department heads having access to collections. One aspect the survey did not cover is what happened to the archives that remained closed and were not able to reopen. Who decided that these institutions should close? What happened to jobs and most importantly, what happened to the collections? This study aims to answer these questions by using the SAA (Society of American Archivists) core values:

- Acquire
- Identify and preserve
- Access and use (digital & physical)
- Service to community (DEI)
- Advocacy

About the authors:

Dr. Vanessa Reyes is an Assistant Professor of Instruction for the School of Information at the University of South Florida. She is Editor-in-Chief for the *Florida Libraries*, the official journal of the Florida Library Association and is a recently elected Director-At-Large for Beta Phi Mu, the International Library and Information Studies Honor Society.

Dr. Reyes is a Latina daughter of immigrants who lived in Cuba and the United States, she is sensitive to the challenges that ethnic minorities face in academia. Committed to diversity, Dr. Reyes, recognizes the barriers faced by women and minorities engaging in the library and archival sciences, and is working closely with professional organizations such as REFORMA (National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking), and the JCLC (Joint Council of Librarians of Color) to positively impact the profession through targeting these challenges.

Dr. Reyes holds a Ph.D. in Library and Information Science from Simmons College, and an M.S. in Library and Information Studies from Florida State University. Having worked in archives,

legislative, university, and public libraries, she became interested in exploring the PIM (Personal Information Management) field when she noticed that researchers' interest were sparked when they used appropriately organized and preserved personal collections for scholarly work. Her current research contributes to the emerging field of personal information management (PIM), quantifying how individual users are organizing, managing, and preserving digital information. She is the author of *Saving Your Digital Past, Present, and Future A Step-by-Step Guide*, to managing your digital life.

Anastasia Weigle has a diverse background in archives management in museums, historical societies, and libraries. Anastasia is an assistant professor at the University of Maine at Augusta in the Information and Library Science Program. Her field of interest concerns the internal dialogue between the user and physical materials during information gathering within the context of archives, material culture, and the fine arts. She is a member of Maine Archives and Museums, Maine Library Association, New England Archivists, the College Book Arts Association, College Arts Association, and New England Archivist. She serves on the Caribou Historical Center Whittier Museum board and the Biddeford Cultural and Heritage Center in Maine.

Anastasia Weigle is an archival consultant in the state of Maine. When she is not teaching or consulting, she runs a small independent bookbinding business called INABIND Studio, which provides bookbinding and conservation services.

Weigle has published in *The Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* and has contributed to the following books: *Preserving local writers, genealogy, photographs, newspapers, and related materials* (2012, Scarecrow Press), *Genealogy and the Librarian: Perspectives on Research, Instruction, Outreach and Management* (McFarland, 2018), and *Creativity and Personal Growth for Librarians* (McFarland, 2019).