

SOLO

Newsletter of the Lone Arrangers Section, Society of American Archivists

Spring 2022

Letter from the Chair

Lone Arrangers Section Members,

In the last year, we have seen the reemergence, deepening, and proliferation of archives programs and projects from collection care to access. As archives organizations have begun to recoup and reopen, I am honored and humbled by the strength, creativity, and resourcefulness you all have engaged. Thank you to everyone who has shared your thoughts and experiences whether in articles, posts, workshops, surveys, or conversations over the last few years.

This past year marked the beginning of defined roles for LAS leadership, including events coordinator, regional representatives, newsletter editor, and web liaison. It has been exciting to be part of and watch the team moving programs forward that reflect the LAS members' needs and interests. I can't wait to see our newest steering committee members take hold and direct LAS into the next phase, and I am forever grateful for the leadership that helped move LAS through the transition.

Many of us have pivoted within our projects, positions, or careers. In the last year, I have moved from closing a museum as head of archives and collections to preparing to open a new museum in my position as director of programs and services (including an archives program and research services). Archives professionals have experienced a changing landscape, developed concern for colleagues and the future of archives and our profession, and provided support and creativity to our community. LAS will continue to be a space of support and engagement for all of our members.

As we look forward, I am excited and proud of all the work LAS members and extended archives colleagues have contributed and will continue to contribute.

Katrina O'Brien
Director of Programs & Services, Oregon Military Museum
katrina.t.obrien.civ@army.mil



Highlights

Share what you've been up to with your fellow solo archivists!

Name

Marian Schad

Position title

Cataloging Librarian

Institution

Delaware Valley University, Joseph Krauskopf Memorial Library

What kind of institution do you work at?

Academic library

What's the most interesting thing in your collection?

The ashes of our founder, Dr. Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf.

What's your major accomplishment in the last year?

Created and mounted a display at our local historical society in honor of our school's 125th anniversary.



Name

Julia Fassero

Position title

Archivist

Institution

Benedictine College

What kind of institution do you work at?

College archives

What's the most interesting thing in your collection?

Currently, the collection is still being set up. There has never been an employed archivist

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at Benedictine College, so I am in the process of gathering, sorting, and organizing the collection. Our institution was established in 1858, so we have 164 years of history!

What's your major accomplishment in the last year?

My biggest archives accomplishment of the year was to research and write the biographies of Benedictine College students who served in the military and died in World War II. St. Martin's Memorial Hall on campus is dedicated to these fifty men, and the college held a celebration for the seventieth anniversary of its dedication. As part of the celebration, the biographies were published online. This was the first major use of the archives and was one of my primary tasks this year. benedictine.edu/about/traditions/heroes-of-st-martins

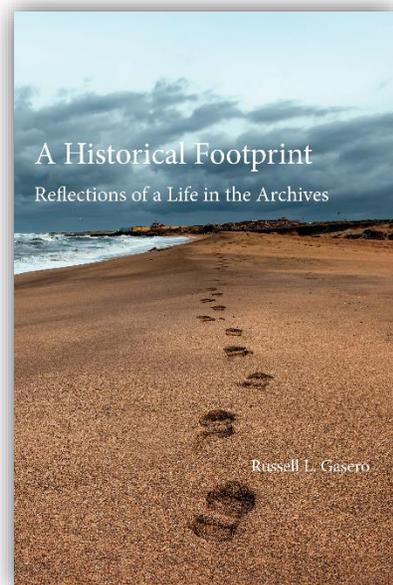
SOLO

Updates

Russell L. Gasero and Nancy Freeman were cofounders of the Lone Arrangers Section (formerly Roundtable) in 2003. Gasero served as moderator during those early years and created the first issues of the *SOLO* newsletter. After forty-eight years in the archives profession—five at the United Nations and forty-three at the Reformed Church in America (RCA)—Gasero has retired.

Gasero remains active as an archivist emeritus for the RCA and runs his own publishing company, Wit & Intellect Publishing LLC. Recently, he published an autobiography, *A Historical Footprint: Reflections on a Life in the Archives*, in which he offers aphorisms for new and solo archivists on managing an archival program, describes the development of the Archives of the Reformed Church in America, reflects on the nature of reference and research work for solo archivists, and offers archival humor. His goal is to provide some help for lone arrangers, distilled from his experience over a lifetime—or, at least, help you feel good about what you do.

He thanks the many lone arrangers who helped to make the Lone Arrangers Section such an excellent resource.



Into the Frying Pan: Establishing an Archives

By Sarah Conrad, CA | Archives and Reference Librarian, Hagerstown Community College

As lone arrangers, we all know the enormous amount of effort it takes to run an entire operation by ourselves. We are The Team: the processors, the arrangers, the digital archivists, the reference archivists, and often the sole promoter of the importance of having an archive. It can be a difficult and oftentimes overwhelming job to manage alone. And I have found it is especially difficult when you are the lone arranger establishing the very first archive an institution has had.

In my current position as the archives and reference librarian at Hagerstown Community College (HCC), I am working as many archivists do these days—wearing many hats. My position requires me to split my time between the archives and as a college librarian helping students with research. While I am part of a small team of librarians, I am the only archivist on staff, and I have been tasked with establishing a college archive from the ground up. Prior to my hire, the closest thing the college had to an archive was a back office in the library where items that were vaguely considered “archival” were placed and forgotten about. I knew it would involve a lot of work to arrange this disorganized pile of items and establish some sort of intellectual control, and I was ready to meet this challenge.

What I did not realize, at first, was how much more was needed to establish everything from scratch. I found myself in a position where, as a relatively new archivist, I was making decisions and writing documentation that at any other archival institution would probably be completed by an archivist with a lot more experience than me. Processing manuals, mission statements, and accessioning regulations had to be created just to name a few, and suddenly I was very aware that I was the only one with any kind of knowledge of how to create these protocols. There was no senior archivist I could turn to for advice, and it definitely made the process of creating these resources very stressful.

Maybe it's the perfectionist in me, but I didn't want to create documentation that would manage how the new archive would operate if those documents weren't the very best examples of archival procedures. But with only theory and very little on-the-job experience guiding me, I was nervous to say the least. Yet, like any good information professional, I did my research.



The author dressed in personal protective equipment, ready to deal with mold in the archive room. *Courtesy of Sarah Conrad.*

I reviewed documentation from other colleges and universities, referenced professional publications from my time in graduate school, and eventually, with lots of rewrites and reviews, I managed to create what I believe are professional documents that will allow the HCC archive to flourish.

With this monumental task complete, I shifted my focus to starting the next mountain of creating an archival space and tackling the backlog of items left in storage. What I was not expecting to find, however, was the mold that awaited me. Hagerstown Community College is located in Western Maryland, where the summers are hot and the humidity is high enough to make even the tamest of curly hair frizz into a tumbleweed. The office space used as archival storage prior to my arrival was ideal in some ways for storage: it was away from any outside light sources and was in a secure part of the library. Yet its one major problem created a recipe for every archivist's worst nightmare.

The room's temperature and relative humidity were both way too high for proper storage and also would fluctuate on a regular basis. There were times I would open the room and find the temperature in the low 80s and the humidity hanging around 60–70%—a perfect environment for mold to grow, which of course it did. In the first few months of a new job where I was the lone arranger, I quickly had to brush up on my conservation knowledge and figure out a way to clean the contaminated materials with a limited budget to buy supplies. Unable to purchase a HEPA vacuum to remove the mold, my best option was to wait for the mold spores to go dormant and take the items outside to brush them off and carefully disinfect them. Decked out in a dust suit, goggles, gloves, and an N95 mask during a pandemic, I definitely made a few people on campus nervous with my choice of outfit. Luckily, there was minimal damage to the books and papers; the only major loss was a single photograph where mold had eaten away at the image.

With everything clean (or as clean as one can get mold-infested items), I began the task of trying to find a way to regulate the room's temperature and humidity to help prevent any future outbreaks. At first, I considered moving the archives to a new location entirely; one that would have more space to grow the collections. However, budgeting large expenses such as the renovation of a new archive space for



The archive room finally coming together after cleaning mold and organizing the collections. *Courtesy of Sarah Conrad.*

an institution that previously had no knowledge of the importance of archives was not a winning battle. Instead, I worked closely with the maintenance team on campus to expand the current office space into the empty office space next door and, in the process, install the room's own temperature and humidity controls.

It is still a work in progress, but the room has come a long way in the process of becoming a full-fledged archive. Originally just a room to dump papers and forget about them, I have created a space where materials are housed and stored for preservation and long-term use for the very first time. It's not perfect, and I'm constantly worried about another mold outbreak, but it is safe to say that I have accomplished something meaningful. Sometimes as lone arrangers, it is easy to get bogged down by all of the tasks we have to do on our own and all of the responsibilities on our shoulders. It's nice to have a reminder that all the work we are doing, albeit difficult, is definitely worthwhile.



In It for the Long Haul: Initiating a Large-Scale Collection Survey

By [Gwenlyn Coddington](#) | Archivist & Special Collections Librarian, McDaniel College

When I began my position as the archivist at McDaniel College in fall 2019, I inherited several ongoing projects, chief among them being the launch of our new collection management system, ArchivesSpace. At first the project seemed like a simple matter of making the platform publicly available online, but I quickly realized that making the system accessible and making it useful were two different issues. The latter pointed to an underlying problem the archives had with the lack of physical and intellectual control over the collections. Simply put, there were serious gaps and inconsistencies in accession records, finding aids, and inventories that made it nearly impossible to account for a significant portion of the collections. The fact that these records were scattered across multiple platforms, a large portion of which had not been properly migrated to ArchivesSpace, further compounded this problem. Given the myriad of issues with the existing records, I realized that I wanted to conduct a full-scale collection survey to improve physical and intellectual control over the archives' holdings.

As I moved into the spring of 2020, finding the time and resources to work on this project remained difficult. And then the coronavirus pandemic hit in March 2020. Like many academic institutions, McDaniel College moved all of our services online for the remainder of that spring semester. We continued in a hybrid model for the 2020–2021 academic year. Without consistent in-person services, I suddenly found myself with a lot of free time. Not only that, I was now regularly working remotely, almost exclusively on digital projects. Those record cleanup projects that I had wanted to begin now seemed like a possibility.

Before I could begin any survey project, I needed to prepare our ArchivesSpace instance to receive the data generated by the survey. This meant cleaning up and standardizing the existing ArchivesSpace records as well as migrating what records I could from other platforms, mainly from PastPerfect. Throughout the summer of 2020 and into the fall, I worked on mapping and cleaning up the PastPerfect records to get them ready to import into ArchivesSpace via the platform's CSV importer tool. By the end of the year I had migrated about 1,000 collection and accession records.

The data migration process was the most intimidating portion of this project for me. I had no background working on data migration and, as a lone arranger, not much institutional support. While every migration project is unique, I've compiled a few general tips from my experiences that might be useful for solo practitioners looking to get started with a similar project:

1. Understand the platforms you are transferring to and from. Have a plan for how and where your data will map because it will oftentimes be imperfect.
2. Define what acceptable loss is for your data. Know what pieces of information you must have and what you can afford to lose. There may not be fields that represent the data you are trying to migrate. Can you afford to lose that data or do you need to find another way to transfer it?
3. Clean up and standardize your data in the existing management systems before you export and transfer it. Take advantage of any bulk editing tools or other features your platform might have.
4. Don't be afraid to play around with different tools for refining your data. Google is your best friend in this process. If you're working with a lot of spreadsheets like I was, you can find an Excel function to do just about anything you need to!
5. Document your procedures and label your data. This was something I did not do very well and it made sorting through my previous work time consuming and frustrating.
6. Upload your data in small batches. It's much easier to comb through ten rows of data to find a problem than one hundred.

As I worked on migrating the PastPerfect data, I also drafted procedures for the collection survey. First, I defined what the survey's goals would be. This helped me determine what types of data I should collect and how I would collect it. I focused on two buckets: physical characteristics of the collections (location information, preservation needs, and material formats) and any descriptive information available (collection identifiers, donor information, and level of description present in existing collection records). This data helped me get a sense of what was in each collection, understand its preservation risks, and know how well it had been arranged and described. Using this data, I assigned each collection a processing priority of low, medium, or high. I plan on using these levels to determine a processing strategy for our backlogged collections.

Once I had the bones of the survey in place, I started to explore what tools would be most useful in administering the survey. I decided to use the survey software, Qualtrics, as the main platform. I had access to the software through the college, and the digital platform made it easy to manage the amount of data I was generating. In addition, its robust logic display for questions impressed me. This allowed for flexibility in including details and subpages that are easy for the surveyor to navigate. Depending on what's in each container being surveyed, it takes about five to fifteen minutes to collect all the data for each box.

Since beginning the survey a year ago, my student worker and I have inventoried approximately 1,000 containers, cleared 259 shelves, created 159 records for uncataloged materials, and started 25 new finding aids. In fall 2021, the college returned to in-person operations, which has also meant that I have resumed a regular teaching and reference load. This significantly trimmed the amount of time I've been able to spend on this project and slowed its progress considerably. While winter break allowed me to return my attention to the survey, time management will continue to be an issue in finishing the survey.

Despite this challenge, I already see how the data will augment the archives' day-to-day operations and further future goals. For one, getting these materials properly described in ArchivesSpace will make them more discoverable online to a wider range of users. Additionally, this close examination of our collections has helped us locate and spotlight materials that speak to the experiences of people traditionally underrepresented in archives. Finally, gathering data at this scale will be useful in formulating a strategic plan for the archives by providing concrete evidence to support collection care decisions. Any extended project can feel like an overcommitment for a solo archivist, but careful planning and flexibility can help a large project bear fruit.



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Ignition Point: Preparing a Large Collection for Research on a Deadline

By Erin McBrien | Archivist, Anoka County Historical Society

When I was hired by the Anoka County Historical Society (ACHS) in December 2020, I learned about one of their major ongoing collections projects: the Federal Cartridge Company 100th anniversary collection. The Federal Cartridge Company (now Federal Premium Ammunition, owned by Vista Outdoor) is an internationally renowned ammunitions manufacturer, a local business, and a major employer in Anoka County, Minnesota. This year marks their 100th anniversary and they have an enormous celebration in the works, part of which includes the accession of their business archive into the ACHS collection. This collection had already been partially processed when I was hired, but it was far from complete.

The Federal Cartridge collection includes not only documents, but also developed photographs, moving image film, still image negatives, 3D artifacts, ammunitions packaging, printing plates, and framed art. After weeding, it measures slightly over 85 linear feet of archival material, not including more than 100 framed objects and more than 100 printing plates. Needless to say, processing this collection was an extremely daunting task! At ACHS there's only me, fresh out of my MLIS degree and with very limited experience; one part-time employee (ten hours per week); and the promise of a few volunteers "after" COVID-19.

Added to the unwieldy size of the collection was the uncertainty of what had already been done with it. Thankfully, ACHS's previous archivist was still in touch and I was able to receive a work-in-progress report from her. Even with this, though, assessment was still the primary focus of my work on the collection for the first few months. I combed through what had already been weeded, how the collection had been organized, and what metadata was being used. I tried to assess how original order (what little there was) had determined the current arrangement and whether or not it needed to be tweaked. I took copious notes, rearranged those notes continuously, and edited my processing plan every few days.

By the end of February 2021, I was weeding developed photographs (the largest part of the collection that hadn't already been worked on), and by March I had written a proposal for hiring a summer intern (eventually we got both the ACHS board and Federal Premium Ammunition involved and we were able to hire two). This gave me until mid-May to have the organizational infrastructure and processing plan finalized. I drew up a hierarchy that worked with our collections management software as well as keyword trees that needed to be built out in the system and what fields needed to be filled within object records. Then I drew up how the largest parts of the collection could be internally organized at a box and folder level.

With the 100th anniversary in 2022, time was our biggest challenge. Not only did we need everything



The Federal Cartridge Company 100th anniversary collection during Erin McBrien's first week of work in early 2021. Due to the unusual size of the collection, the Anoka County Historical Society cordoned off about one quarter of the exhibit hall to provide enough space to work. Some boxes were already organized while others were still full of mixed documents, photos, and artifacts. *Courtesy of Erin McBrien.*

accounted for to build out our 2022 exhibit, Federal needed access to their collection to develop publications by late summer 2021. This meant that we needed the collection to be mostly searchable and usable for research by August. Because of this, I was worried that we might have to compromise our processing in order to make the deadline. I was also extremely worried about things getting lost. The corporate employees at Federal didn't understand how much time archival work takes no matter how many times I explained it to them. Because of these issues, I started developing skeleton records, which were records that could be created quickly but still contained all of the vital information they needed so that details could be easily fleshed out later. This allowed us to keep track of everything and start moving the collection into proper storage rather than its temporary COVID-19 home in the exhibit hall.

Even with a team of three other people, the size of the collection and the tight timeline combined meant that every day was a race against the clock. I was forging a new direction with every decision made about the collection, as ACHS had never before taken on a gift nearly the size of the Federal anniversary collection. I also do not recommend providing research services on a collection that is still in the middle of being processed, though that may seem obvious. We didn't have much of a choice on that, but it wasn't a good situation. This was my first experience with managing people, teaching interns in particular, and establishing the way in which an enormous and influential collection would be organized. Most of 2021 is a blur, but despite these hurdles, we have been able to complete both processing and basic cataloging on everything in the collection. I don't really know how we did it, but it definitely started my career off with a bang.



Just over a year since Erin McBrien started work in 2020, the Federal Cartridge Company collection is finally in archival storage and ready to be accessed by the community. *Courtesy of Erin McBrien.*

Process, Preserve, and Present: Curating Local History in a Public Library's Archives

By Selena Martinez | Librarian, Tampa–Hillsborough County Public Library

“What is being done with those?” I asked and pointed to the six, three-shelf bookcases with various old and large books on my official tour of the Florida History and Genealogy Library located on the fourth floor of the John F. Germany Library in Tampa, Florida. My supervisor, Carmen Negron Biempica, explained that they were bank ledgers that had been donated a while back and were basically only brought out on school tours to impress children. Understanding that I was to graduate with a concentration in archival management, she asked me to look and see if they could be preserved and saved.

Fresh off my Preservation Management and Introduction to Archival Theory and Practice classes at Simmons University, I was excited by the task of doing what I had only discussed and practiced in theory through virtual classes. I set to work making a processing plan using a template that I had created for the introductory class along with a spreadsheet of supplies to purchase from Gaylord.

Then it was time to get to work. I learned that classes and reading can only go so far. In real life, archival work is messier. Working at a public library means wearing many hats, and the needs of the public often must come before that of saving books the public has never seen. So, while I would love to have been given three months to process the collection according to More Product, Less Process, I only had a few hours per week to work on more than eighty items.

Still a work in progress, I have prioritized the items in the most disrepair. If I can't fix them immediately, I set them on carts away from the public so that the decaying red leather spines don't continue to shed on the carpet. So far, I have cleaned and fixed ten items and, with additional help, cataloged six of those items.

The ledgers have presented challenges, and now I firmly believe that Scotch tape is the work of the devil. I have read many forums, textbooks, and blog posts about tape removal and implemented mad-scientist-esque experiments in my work space. For example, I brought in my Drybar hair dryer to heat the tape for several minutes and try to peel it back with tweezers because Dr. YouTube told me it worked for someone in New Jersey. This did not work, and I had to come to terms with the fact that not everything can always be saved.

My role as an archivist is to help slow the progression of decay while giving the public access to the materials. After trying various methods, I reached the point where the textbooks and blog posts suggest going to a professional. Unfortunately, most public libraries have limited funding, so there will not be chemical bath treatments from a Smithsonian-trained professional to remove the tape and fix the yellowing of pages. Instead, I stick to cleaning the pages with

microfiber cloths, PrismaColor Magic Rub erasers, and the occasional knife and microspatula for those hard-to-remove bugs that are especially prevalent in high-humidity states such as Florida.

In other cases, the internet has been more helpful; for example, when I ran across Social Security numbers in the back of one of the ledgers, I remembered from one of my classes that there was a rule regarding privacy and found a PDF from the National Archives explaining the details so that we could write a proper note about access restrictions in both the MARC record and the finding aid.*

I've also found that working in an archives within a public library requires more self-promotion in order to gain the attention of the public and generate interest to keep the project's momentum going. Through the guidance of my supervisor, I created a museum display for the records I was processing to show how useful they could be to the public.

I realize in hindsight that it's lucky that I'm local to Tampa, so I have a large knowledge of local history to fall back on or this project might not have been as easy to accomplish. I constantly recognized names of old founding families and of buildings and locations I had driven past my entire life. I wrote narratives for each bank we had materials on.

One told the story of a local family, the Cotters, and the other gave the history of the oldest bank in Pinellas County, the Bank of Dunedin. This display can be seen on the fourth floor of the John F. Germany Library and includes a display case, which features two ledgers, multiple photographs, and a membership certificate, as well as two wall panels that explain the history of banking in Florida and the preservation process the records and materials have undergone so far.



Display of materials from the Florida banking collection, created by Selena Martinez. *Courtesy of Selena Martinez.*

History of Banking In Florida



Above: State capital Department and staff at work, using a variety of mixed office equipment, circa 1900-1910. Source: Florida PA

Florida has always been ripe with industry, through citrus, tourism and real estate. All these industries, especially real estate, contributed to the growth of investment banking in Florida at the turn of the 20th century. In 1924, the Florida constitution passed an act that abolished state income tax and inheritance tax. This made it easy for developers to buy up property quickly and sometimes with fraudulent means.

This led first to an economic panic that shut down several banks in 1926. There were darker times ahead and on July 17, 1929, people flooded Citizens Bank and Trust Company after hearing a rumor that they would not be opening their doors. The bank handled over one million dollars in cash.

With no money in their vaults the banks called the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta to help them out. Money was flown down in a plane by pilot Laune Yonge and an official of the bank. This money helped them weather the emergency, but Citizens Bank and 10 other banks would close their doors that week.



Above: Tampa Times from July 15, 1929

Left: Citizens Bank And Trust Co. Tampa, Fla. Tampa Library, University of South Florida

"All Florida was like a mighty vacuum sucking in all the loose money in the world."
~Jane Fisher, wife of real estate developer Carl Fisher



The Florida Banking Records Collection

"Economic history is the most fundamental branch of history, not the most important. Foundations exist to carry better things."
— John Clapham

The Florida Banking Records collection is an important part of the public library's collection because the records represent the banks that survived these turbulent times during and leading up to the Great Depression. Entries in the ledgers represent business, churches, schools, and individuals of the community. They are a great example of the local economic history of the Tampa Bay Area.



Left: Bills receivable ledger from Bank of Dunedin



Right: Staff member Selena Martinez cleans a ledger

Originally the records had been stored for several years in a warehouse and were scheduled to be destroyed. In 2014, a SunTrust bank employee asked the Florida History & Genealogy Library if they would accept the donation. He used his personal vehicle and loaded the records and moved them into the library himself.

In 2021, it was decided to start an in-house preservation project. This includes cataloging and creating new spines for the ledgers. Items like tape and rusty staples are removed to prevent further damage. Once the ledgers have been preserved, they will be available for the public to use and learn from.



On the fourth floor of the library, two wall panels hanging above the display case explain the history of banking in Florida and the preservation of the Florida banking records. *Courtesy of Selena Martinez.*

While the Cotter family was the most interesting to research because every time I opened a city directory or newspaper I seemed to get more pieces to put together this puzzle of the family, my favorite part of the project was the Bank of Dunedin display. I believe that as archivists, we have the secret yearning to have our "moment," like Abigail Chase from the film *National Treasure*. We all want to find something hidden. I had mine while cleaning a ledger. I noticed rusted staples in the back of the book and decided to pull them out with my microspatula that I fitted under the staples and used to lift them up. As the paper separated, I noticed something slip toward the bottom, and as I opened it up, I pulled out a certificate of membership for the bank from an association that no longer exists!

While there is still a lot of work and more than eighty-five percent of the collection left to process, I hope that I'm doing a little good in the seemingly small world of public library archives. Hopefully my story will help another lone arranger.

Note

* National Archives. "PII Considerations in Screening Archival Records." Accessed January 12, 2022. <https://www.archives.gov/files/Before-Screening-Records.pdf>.

Lone Arrangers Section Steering Committee

2021–2022

Katrina O'Brien	Chair	Oregon Military Museum
Micaela Terronez	Vice Chair / Chair-Elect	Augustana College, Tredway Library
Rebecca Leung	Events Coordinator	Mills College Library
Sauda Mitchell	Regional Representatives Co-Lead	Savannah College of Art and Design, Jen Library
Julie Yamashita	Regional Representatives Co-Lead	Lanternman House Museum and Archives
Katy Sternberger	Newsletter Editor	Portsmouth Athenaeum
Margaret Hewitt	Web Liaison	Butler Area Public Library

Get in Touch!

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archivists.org/groups/lone-arrangers-section

lone arranger

n. ~ an individual who is the only staff member
or the only professional archivist working in an archives

Dictionary of Archives Terminology, s.v. "lone arranger," accessed March 1, 2022,
dictionary.archivists.org/entry/lone-arranger.html.

SOLO, newsletter of the Lone Arrangers Section, is published twice each year in the spring and fall. Deadlines for contributions are **January 15** (spring issue) and **July 15** (fall issue). Articles, photos, and announcements of interest to the community of solo archivists should be submitted to the LAS newsletter editor at lonearrangersectionsaa@gmail.com.