

SOLO

Newsletter of the Solo Archivists Section, Society of American Archivists

Spring 2026

Letter from the Chair

Dear Solo Archivists Section Members,

As 2026 gets into full swing, I remain grateful that I have been a part of this committee for the past few years. It's been enlightening and encouraging to hear the perspectives of archivists from different regions and work environments, and I hope that you are similarly benefitting from this section.

Our goal is to offer helpful, practical resources and enable community connections. We have an informative newsletter that shows us other solo environments, educational events that hopefully offer actionable advice, and resources to build community and knowledge sharing. I want to thank the current steering committee members Alison Quirion and Megan Garbett-Styger and former newsletter editor Allison Bundy for being a part of this committee and keeping us on target. Thanks also to the section membership for your participation in our programming and other resources - as speakers, attendees, and users.

The breadth of responsibilities we face as solo archivists can be overwhelming and this section is here to support you. However, we also need your support to function effectively - especially as SAA is a volunteer-heavy organization. Due to personal circumstances, the elected Chair of our section had to step down, and as Vice Chair, I have moved into the role. SAA sections are mandated to have at least four people in leadership positions so I encourage anyone who has been thinking about getting involved - now is the time to volunteer! You can serve as an appointed committee member until the next election cycle in June and provide valuable ideas and assistance. It's a low-stakes way to try out the committee!

We appreciate everyone's continued support and I hope you enjoy this latest newsletter and our upcoming programming.

Hilary Swett
Archivist
Writers Guild Foundation in Los Angeles



Highlights

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

Name

Kelley Woolley

Position title

Associate Director, Library & Archive Services

Institution

San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance

What kind of institution do you work at?

Non-Profit / Conservation Research Library

What's the most interesting thing in your collection?

Depends on your definition of interesting. I like to show the payroll books from the 1920s for the zoo staff, a View Master of the Sesame Street characters visiting the San Diego Safari Park and Zoo, trip notes from the earliest curators of the zoo, inventories of animals from the earliest days of the zoo to present time, slides of different field work trips, the paperwork of the beginning of the conservation side of the organization, and the founding of the Frozen Zoo paperwork

What's your major accomplishment in the last year?

Library side: Shifting the entire collection for a site visit from our accrediting organization, AZA. Archive side: completing the inventory of the archive, updating the database, and starting conversations about creating a task force to discuss an archive for the whole organization. I also coordinated the contract for the digitization of the Executive Board Minutes for the Alliance.

Is there anything else you would like to highlight?

As a zoo librarian and archivist, my day to day is always different, and I juggle projects and hats from hour to hour if not minute to minute. I am a lone arranger/solo archivist and I manage both sides, so it gets quite hectic. Being a part of the archivist community has helped me understand what I need to do to help protect the history of our organization.

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Name

Julia Wiker

Position title

Archivist/Librarian

Institution

Mennonite Life

What kind of institution do you work at?

historical society

What's the most interesting thing in your collection?

Peter Nissley's (1802-1890) 1860-1861 diary that documents Underground Railroad activity in Lancaster County

What's your major accomplishment in the last year?

I collaborated with a librarian from another institution on the event "Collections Feature: Froschauer Bible," in which the history and unique characteristics of fourteen Bibles and New Testaments and two related books, all from our collection, were displayed and discussed. The Bibles are from the sixteenth century and were reprinted by other printers into the nineteenth century, and were the first Bibles to be beloved by Swiss Anabaptists (Mennonites).



Archivist Julia Wiker stands next to a display of 16th Century bibles.
Photo Courtesy of Julia Wiker

What projects have you been working on?

Share it in the next issue of *SOLO*!

Click here for the [Highlights Submission Form](#)

Name

Monte Abbott

Position title

Director of Archives

Institution

Sisters of the Good Shepherd

What kind of institution do you work at?

Religious institute archives

What's the most interesting thing in your collection?

Letters from WW2 Portugal - a communications team assembled in Portugal from Good Shepherd administrations based in occupied France and Italy, gathered news from occupied areas (via telegrams, infrequent letters, sending people across the front lines, interviewing people returning, etc.) and sent it globally to other communities to keep them informed on news from the war zones and to disseminate administrative decisions from the generalate in Rome. The letters include what seem to be coded or intentionally obscure references and reports that would have likely been censored if they had gone through official channels of occupied countries. As artifacts, the letters are typed from edge to edge on onion skin thin paper, in very small font, perhaps 10 pitch, reflecting the economic reality of limited paper availability in war time Europe. These letters were originally sent to dozens of communities around the world but I have found 4 letters in the Toronto collection and none at all in the other five North American collections.

What's your major accomplishment in the last year?

Acquiring our Toronto archives, moving it to St. Louis for processing, and finding those WW2 letters described above.

New to *SOLO* or missed a few issues?
Check out previous issues on the Solo Archivists Section microsite

[SOLO Newsletter Archive](#)

Name

Elaine Slayton Akin

Position title

Archivist

Institution

Riverside Avondale Preservation

What kind of institution do you work at?

neighborhood preservation association

What's the most interesting thing in your collection?

Commemorative enamel cup from the Coronation of Tsar of Russia Nicolas II (1896); more info here:

<https://riversideavondale.org/commemorative-enamel-cup-of-sorrows-from-the-coronation-of-tsar-of-russia-nicolas-ii-1896/>

What's your major accomplishment in the last year?

As part of our annual summer Porchlight Series, I organized a panel event to highlight the contributions of the under-represented people of color to our historically white neighborhoods; more info here:

<https://riversideavondale.org/in-case-you-missed-it-celebrating-black-architects-and-builders-of-riverside-avondale/>



Left to right: RAP Archivist Elaine Akin, Mitch Hemann, Kelsi Hasden, Dr. Felicia Bevel, Angela Schifanella, and RAP Development Manager Casey Roth. *Courtesy of Elaine Akin*

SAS Member Updates

Rothko Chapel's First Archivist

Kristi Kohl has been hired as the first employed archivist at the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas. After volunteering in the archives for over two years (12-30 hours per week), Kristi has been hired as a full-time Archivist. She is grateful for the opportunity to provide consistency in the archives' administration; historically, it has been managed exclusively by volunteers and student interns.

Initiatives over the last two years of her time as a volunteer included implementing the arrangement of the collections, more active recruitment of student interns, moving the collections off-site due to demolition of the archives 1930s bungalow, and moving the collections back on-site into the new Administration and Archives building.

Ongoing projects include processing materials and updating records in ArchivesSpace, drafting policies and procedures, organizing and classifying the library collection, and fulfilling research requests. Plans include ensuring materials are stored in compliance with archival standards, adding tags to already digitized content, assessing series/subseries for digitization, and determining which audio-visual materials still require remediation.

For those not familiar with the Rothko Chapel, it is a spiritual space, a forum for world leaders, a place for solitude and gathering. It's an epicenter for civil rights activists, the home of the Oscar Romero Award, and a destination for the 100,000 people of all faiths who visit each year from all parts of the world. The Rothko Chapel contains 14 murals created by American artist Mark Rothko. Philip Johnson, Howard Barnstone, and Eugene Aubry were the architects. Outside, Barnett Newman's Broken Obelisk rises above the reflecting pool on the Plaza. The sculpture is dedicated to The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose active outer life in service of social justice, informed by a deeply spiritual interior life, resonated with founders John and Dominique de Menil.



Courtesy of Kristi Kohl

Section Updates & Reminders

Next Solo Session on Zoom

On Friday March 13th at 12pm PT/ 3pm ET, join your fellow Solo Archivists Section members for an informal session that gives us a chance to be alone, together. The steering committee members will be talking about **planning institutional anniversaries**. Even if you are not planning an anniversary, we encourage you to come by and introduce yourself!

The link to join the Zoom meeting is: <https://wgfoundation-org.zoom.us/j/81718252455>

Solo Archivists Buddy List Facilitates 1:1 Connections

The Solo Archivists section leadership committee is always looking for ways to help support one another in the workplace. The Buddy List initiative is a way to connect with other solo archivists outside of the listserv or SAA Connect. The idea for the program came out of a section leadership discussion on how to help members who are seeking advice, but are hesitant to post questions on the listserv due to the public-facing nature of the system.

If you are interested in connecting directly with other solo archivists to engage in conversations about work, share suggestions or advice, or bounce ideas off each other, we encourage you to submit your information to the Buddy List. To participate, fill out the [SAA Solo Archivists Section: Buddy List 2025-2026 form](#). At minimum, you are required to enter your name and email address. Any additional information you provide will help to filter participants by location, experience, and professional interests. Access to the list is limited to participants.

If you have questions or feedback on the Buddy List initiative or suggestions on additional ways to support our community of solo archivists, contact us: soloarchivists.saa@gmail.com. Happy Networking!

Valley Steam Historical Society Accessing Archives Project

By Joseph Coen | Archivist, Valley Steam Historical Society

In August 2025, the Valley Steam Historical Society (VSHS) applied to the Long Island Library Resources Council (LILRC) for their Accessing Archives Program, which is available to members of LILRC as a benefit. This program was started in 2022. Its goal is to increase the accessibility of archival materials on Long Island. Member institutions can apply for the services of the Project Archivist by submitting a detailed application for a well-defined project that could be completed within a six-week period.

The VSHS proposed that the Project Archivists remove the contents of the Archives storage area to a nearby large room so that they can be rehoused. Once all archival materials have been removed, the Project Archivists will, with the help of volunteers from VSHS or workers from the Village of Valley Stream, rearrange existing shelves and bring in other appropriate storage shelves from elsewhere or acquired with funds provided by VSHS for storage supplies.

Items such as color slides currently stored in round carousels will be rehoused in appropriate archival storage containers. Material currently stored in a variety of non-standard sized boxes will be rehoused in appropriately sized archival storage containers. Framed photographs and archival prints will be unframed and stored in appropriate archival boxes. Loose papers will be arranged and stored in acid-free folders and containers. Once all collections have been rehoused, they will be brought back into the storage room and arranged on the shelves so that their containers are adequately supported.

The VSHS's collections document the history of Valley Stream, NY, which acquired its name in 1843 when a local general store owner opened a post office and named it Valley Stream after the "valleys" (creek beds) to the north and the streams to the south of the area. It is the only community of that name in the U. S. A. and is one of the largest villages in Nassau County. It has been a gateway community to suburban life on Long Island since 1922 when William R. Gibson purchased land and built homes and a railroad station for white-collar city workers who were seeking a country-type environment along with convenience.

The collections document the changing face of the local population as well as the kinds of business and activities that characterized the village from its beginning. Collections related to aviation history document the local airfield (Rogers Airport opened in 1928 by the Advance Aircraft Corp., operated as Curtis Field 1930-33, purchased by Columbia Aircraft Corp. which

produced amphibian aircraft such as the J2F Duck during WW II, and closed in 1947 after being acquired by Commonwealth Aircraft) as well as the village's connection to early aviators such as Charles Lindberg, Amelia Earhart, and the woman's pilot association known as The Ninety-Nines. Part of the airfield site is now Green Acres Mall, a hub of retail activity.

The research collection of The Society consists of 164 linear inches plus some oversized material including a 31 x 40.5 in. bound volume of family photos and 36 x 47 in. oversized sign. Materials in the collection include correspondence, notes, manuscripts of articles, bound and unbound board minutes, programs, flyers, advertisements, local restaurant menus, and other ephemera, school yearbooks, anniversary journals, newspaper clippings, black and white as well as color photographs, slides, audio cassette recordings of oral history interviews, video cassette tapes, plus digitized copies of some of the recordings.

The VSHS was notified in late August 2025 that its application had been accepted and that work was anticipated to begin in August 2026 and end by mid-September 2026. LILRC will supply two staff members to carry out the rehousing and reshelving with assistance from VSHS Board member and archivist, Joseph Coen, C. A. The LILRC team estimates that rehousing the existing collections will enable the VSHS to regain space in its existing archives storage area at its signature location, the Pagan-Fletcher Restoration. LILRC will pay the first-year costs to incorporate finding aids in Empire Archival Discovery Cooperative (Empire ADC) and upload any digitized content to the New York Heritage Digital Collections. This will be an added benefit for the VSHS.

Have a story to share about applying for or using grant funds?
Your fellow solo archivists want to hear about it.

Share it in the next issue of *SOLO*!

Submit your story to: soloarchivists.saa@gmail.com

SOLO STORIES

An Individual Team Sport

By Sharon Wolff, CA | Deputy Director for Archive and Collection, The Stepping Stones Foundation

I didn't realize at the time how being on my high school varsity swim team would help prepare me for a career in archives, but the lessons I learned in the pool about being a part of a team despite swimming alone have served me well.

"Individual team sports"—like swimming and diving, gymnastics, and track and field, barring relay or partner events—are unique in that participants compete solo rather than as a team unit. Typically competing "teams" consist of individuals with unique specialties. In swimming, there are four individual competitive strokes, then sprint and distance events. But the score that each individual member earns in their respective event contributes towards the team score overall. Even if in the moment the person is swimming alone, ultimately their performance impacts the final result.

In my high school pool, I swam breaststroke and distance events. But sometimes my specialty stroke was needed in a relay event. Sometimes I had to swim a medley all by myself. Being able to handle all four strokes, and understanding the differences in sprinting versus swimming a distance event, was critical to my ability to put my best foot forward for the team as a whole. The same was true for all of my teammates.

In my current position at a national landmark historic home with a full-time staff of five, I am the only trained archivist. Even though our collection consists of over 100,000 documents and over 10,000 objects, having another full-time archivist is simply not feasible for my institution. But, in order to meet the best practice demands of object care, I cannot be the only person to manage and care for our collection. Nor can the Foundation afford to have me work only on archive-related tasks. In order for my "team" to reach the end of the day with a "win," all of our individual strengths need to come together to support each other, as well as the work we are doing. All of us want to ensure the preservation of our historic house museum. We do it for different reasons and in different ways, but we all strive towards the same goal.

We have all learned to truly appreciate the phrase "wearing many hats" in order to facilitate the running of a full-time historic home with only a small core staff. Not only am I on hand to answer reference questions, but I know how to welcome visitors, run our gift shop, give a tour, and occasionally manage vendors. So too, have my colleagues had to learn the basics of historic preservation. In the time before my tenure it was a necessity, and years of experience informed decisions. I am able to bring my coursework as well as my experience to the table, but sometimes it is simply not possible for me to be present when a document needs to be pulled, or a display shifted, or objects cleaned. Sometimes, even if I am present, the size or weight of

the object demands at least one other person assist me with handling it. Sometimes the person who is available to help is not even able to be staff, it is one of our many volunteers.

As a result, I've developed a quick and extremely basic "101" version of archive knowledge that I can teach to any trusted volunteer who may need it at a moment's notice. What follows is what I've determined is "need to know," and will hopefully be helpful to others who may find themselves with a "staff" of volunteers who may require training, but may also be the only option.



Staff of The Stepping Stones Foundation from left to right:
Senior Foundation Assistant & Events Manager Alisa Veverka, Deputy Director for Archive & Collection Sharon Wolff, Executive Director Sally Corbett-Turco, Deputy Director for Operations Yanina Varley. *Courtesy of The Stepping Stones Foundation intern Jake Gleason.*

The first is, “Your guess may not be right; always be gentle and cautious.” When it comes to handling the historic objects in the collection, this is something everyone needs to know up front. Some of our items are a lot more fragile to the touch than they appear to be, and need to be handled with extreme care. Some of them are a lot heavier than they might look, and the weight will only be discovered once the item begins to be lifted. More details about specific handling requirements, like which materials to wear gloves with, where is typically the safest place to grip when lifting, etc., will usually come after this. But the most critical part is trying to get people to slow down before they touch. This is important to stress for new folks, but is also important to keep stressing for experienced staff. Sometimes confidence in past experience can cause someone, even a trained archivist, to make an assumption that causes damage to an object.

Second is something that is likely familiar to most archivists: “If something cannot be undone, it’s best not to do it.” This is a much more succinct way of explaining many standard best practices, like writing only in pencil, not allowing food or drink near items, temperature and humidity control, avoiding tape, and many others. But it’s a simple concept that will usually help more detailed or complicated care requirements “click” into place for most people. Once it is understood and emphasized that the end goal is an unaltered object or document, they will start thinking through a potential harmful result of a previously assumed normal action before doing it.

Third and final is something that I, fittingly, learned from my colleagues. “Frame requirements as asking for help rather than scolding in advance.” While the only people tasked with actual hands-on object and document care are my experienced colleagues and trusted volunteers, our visitors walking through the museum do need to have some understanding of best practices because they are moving among our collection items. Presenting what is essentially a list of “don’ts” as “here is how you can help us today” provides a much more positive experience for museum guests, and is equally useful when working with a new volunteer learning how to assist me in textile cleaning. The same can be said of a new staff member assisting with a display change, who may be unfamiliar with handling historic documents.

Necessity is the mother of invention, and my experiences working at a small-staffed historic house museum have certainly led me to invent many new approaches to archival work. But it is always good to feel that while I might be a “lone archivist,” I do not have to do the work alone.

“Frame requirements as asking for help rather than scolding in advance.”

Solo Archivists Section Steering Committee

2025–2026

Hilary Swett	Vice Chair / Chair-Elect	Writers Guild Foundation
Alison Quirion	Events Coordinator	Sega of America, Inc.
Megan Garbett-Styger	Newsletter Editor	Point No Point Treaty Council

Get in Touch!

soloarchivists.saa@gmail.com

Visit Us Online!

archivists.org/groups/solo-archivists-section

solo archivist

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

Dictionary of Archives Terminology, s.v. "solo archivist," accessed September 1, 2023,
dictionary.archivists.org/entry/solo-archivist.html.



Solo Archivists
Section

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