



# Acquisitions & Appraisal Section Newsletter

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## Section Meeting for the 2014 Annual Meeting

Thursday, August 14, 3:30pm-5:30pm

Following our business meeting, join us for a panel discussion on acquisition and appraisal of electronic records. Archivists and other electronic records specialists discuss strategies for appraising and acquiring electronic/born-digital records and share their experiences with ingest and forensics tools, website capture, audiovisual materials, email, and developing policies for management and acquisition of electronic records.

### Presenters:

**Skip Kendall**, Harvard University Archives: Web archiving as an outreach and collection development tool

**Cal Lee**, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: BitCurator talk and demo

**Donald Mennerich**, New York University: Tools and approaches to appraise and acquire digital archival materials

**Courtney Mumma**, Artefactual/Archivematica: Archivematica as an open-source digital preservation solution with strong adherence to professional standards and best practices

**Joshua Ranger**, AVPreserve: Tools, metadata and ingest of audio visual materials

**Josh Schneider** (Stanford University Special Collections and University Archives): ePADD

## From the Chair

Happy summer! In a few weeks we will be convening in Washington, D.C. for the CoSA, NAGARA, and SAA joint conference *ARCHIVES ★ RECORDS: Ensuring Access!* The Acquisitions and Appraisal Section Steering Committee is looking forward to our section meeting, catching up with our members and presenting a great section program on digital forensics and acquisition and appraisal of electronic and born digital material.

At last year's section meeting, the Steering Committee voted to focus on two areas of work for the coming year. The first was to improve our section website and social media presence, and bring a new web liaison onboard. We also wanted to launch a "Dear Abby"- type column for our colleagues who are seeking out advice on dealing with difficult appraisal and acquisitions issues.

In an effort provide a more social and visible forum, the section created a Facebook group. I am pleased to report that we are up to 85 members; and thanks to our fabulous intern Toni Rhorer, the site has been actively populated with news, articles and other information of interest to the A&A section membership. Toni will be cycling off her internship in August and the Steering Committee will be looking for a new intern for managing the page. Anyone interested in this internship should contact our incoming Chair, Laura Sullivan, at [lsulli12@iastate.edu](mailto:lsulli12@iastate.edu). And thank you to Toni for all her wonderful work!

This summer the Steering Committee launched a new blog called "Assigning Value," which provides a forum for discussion of issues and interests pertaining to the acquisition and appraisal of public records, private papers, and other archival or manuscript collections. Anyone can access the blog and submit issues for discussion here: <http://appraisalsaa.wordpress.com/>

Part of the blog contains our aforementioned "Dear Abby" forum entitled "Valuable Inquiries." This forum is an advice-column style discussion of acquisitions and appraisal related issues. We hope to feature letters, comments, and conundrums from a variety of different institutional settings and areas. If you have a question related to appraisal or acquisitions, or a great story to share about a thorny issue that you have encountered, submit it to our blog and your community can weigh in on how to handle it. We want to hear from you!

Because we have been focusing so much on our social media presence, and the section web liaison position has been vacant, the section website has been a bit neglected. I am happy to report that we have recently appointed Denise Rayman as our new web liaison, and looking forward to working with Denise to bring the website up to date.

In responding to a strong interest from Section membership that we sponsor and provide more programming around appraisal and acquisition of electronic records, the Section voted to endorse two sessions at this year's SAA conference addressing these issues. They are Session 205: *Burning Decisions: Case Studies on Appraisal for Access* and Session 401: *Ensuring Access to the Bits: Archival Application of Digital Forensics*.

We look forward to seeing you all in Washington DC!

Virginia Hunt, Section Chair

## Meet Your Vice Chair/Chair Elect



Laura Sullivan is the Collections Archivist and Assistant Department Head at Iowa State University's Special Collections Department, where she has worked since 2008. Previously, she worked at Ford Motor Company's corporate archives. In 2006, Laura received her MLIS, with a Specialization in Archives and Records Administration, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is currently SAA's Key Contact for Iowa, serves on the Midwest Archives Conference's Archie Motley Memorial Scholarship Committee, and is on the Iowa Historical Records Advisory Board. As the Section's Chair in the coming year, she is looking forward to working on developing the Section's new blog, "Assigning Value," in addition to the Section's other activities in the coming year.

## "Assigning Value" Section Blog and Advice Column



Take a look at the Section's new blog, "Assigning Value." The blog will provide a forum for discussion of issues and interests pertaining to the acquisition and appraisal of public records, private papers, and other archival or manuscript collections. While the [SAA microsite](#) will continue to be the place to find official documentation (annual reports, meeting minutes, newsletters), we

hope that this blog will give members an opportunity to engage in additional conversation about issues related to the core archival functions of appraisal and acquisition.

The Valuable Inquiries advice column section of the blog will feature letters, comments, and conundrums from a variety of different institutional settings and areas. Please contribute to the Section's first Valuable Inquiry: <http://appraisalsaa.wordpress.com/2014/06/17/valuable-inquiry-1/>. We welcome your thoughts, ideas, comments, and suggestions for additional content!

## Acquisitions & Appraisal Related Sessions at the Annual Meeting

Thursday, August 14<sup>th</sup>

1:30pm-2:45pm

[SESSION 205 - Burning Decisions: Case Studies on Appraisal for Access](#)

In the United States, archival appraisal has been a key step in providing access to records, largely in response to the bulk of modern organizational records, the gaps in documenting underrepresented individuals and groups, and the shrinking of resources. With Frank Boles moderating and commenting, four archivists describe appraisal decisions that they applied while acquiring or administering large or complex collections and reflect on the selection paradigms that they applied in the decision-making process to enable access.

Friday, August 15<sup>th</sup>

9:15am-10:15am

[SESSION 306 - Integrating History: A Search-and-Recovery Effort in Alabama Archives](#)

Modern archivists in Alabama face the challenge that, for generations, documentation of African-American history in the South was ignored or even actively discouraged in many communities. Four Alabama archivists share the perspectives of one county government, one public library, and two historically black colleges and universities on their efforts to build relationships, discover and develop collections, and ensure access to black history resources.

Friday, August 15<sup>th</sup>

10:30am-11:45am

[SESSION 401 - Ensuring Access to the Bits: Archival Application of Digital Forensics](#)

Digital forensics tools and techniques have become an area of both research and application in archival repositories. Among evolving best practices for electronic records, forensic methodologies have gained favor for the unique ways in which they address core issues of the archival enterprise, including authenticity, reliability, appraisal, preservation, and access. Panelists discuss current archival uses of forensic hardware and software, examine what has and has not been successful, and look to future developments.

Friday, August 15<sup>th</sup>

2:45pm-3:45pm

[SESSION 507: Appraising Government Records: What Constitutes Value?](#)

Appraisal is at the heart of the archival enterprise and nowhere more so than in the government records environment. Selecting the subset of government records with enduring value has become more demanding in a networked world of big data, open data, and open government. Are archivists identifying for permanent retention the government records 21st century citizens want and need? This session explores key questions facing government archivists responsible for shaping the historical record.

Saturday, August 16<sup>th</sup>

[SESSION 704 - Live Long and Prosper: Science Fiction in Archives and Special Collections](#)

Enthusiasm for science fiction has saturated popular culture. Yet what about the archival record? What are we doing to record a genre that has permeated popular culture for more than a century -- and particularly the records of those who create the worlds that fans love so much? Speakers discuss: Why document science fiction? What are our experiences with accessioning and processing science fiction collections? How are science fiction collections being used? How can we effectively promote our collections?

## News from Members

### Musings on Acquisitions

by Jamie Seemiller (Denver Public Library)

For the past year as the Acquisitions Librarian at the Denver Public Library (DPL) Western History/Genealogy Department (WHG) and teaching Archival Appraisal at the University of Denver, I have been taking a long hard look at “what” and “how” we are collecting. In years past, WHG had a collector mentality and an open door policy in accepting collections. In recent years, we have begun to take a more critical look at what is coming in and what we would like to acquire. I often reflect on the words of F. Gerald Ham (Boles, 2005) who said in 1974 in his SAA Presidential Address:

Our most important and intellectually demanding task as archivists is to make an informed selection of information that will provide the future with a representative record of the human experience. But why must we do it so badly? (p.18)

Ham's quote not only speaks to the core of what we do as archivists, but also challenges us to reflect on the quality of the collections we are acquiring. Are we acquiring collections that will be useful to researchers in the future? Are we documenting the right subject matter? I struggle with these questions on a daily basis and I suspect many of you do as well. To move forward, I am trying to make peace with the collecting decisions of my predecessors and to value WHG's commitment to those collections. My hope is to not change decisions made in the past, but to guide our collecting philosophy today and in the future.

The first question to address is "what are we collecting?" Many times the sheer volume of calls from donors makes me go into reaction mode and all I can do is try to keep up with the requests coming in. The Staff Acquisition Committee (SAC) in WHG realized that this is can be a major barrier to taking a proactive role in collection development. SAC found that our broad mission to collect material west of the Mississippi River often makes it hard to identify collection areas. So we started to ask a few questions: What subjects does WHG document well? What subjects are underrepresented in our collection? What do researchers want? As a result, we established collection development guidelines for the next few years that are driven by researcher and staff feedback and the need to document contemporary Denver history. So it is time to say goodbye to acquiring 19<sup>th</sup> Century collections? 19<sup>th</sup> century material still has a place in our collection, but the momentum is shifting to the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

I also feel that when it comes to "what" we collect that there has been a shift in the last few years to a more collaborative community of archives working together. The competitive nature of collecting from the 1970's to 1990's has given way to archivists working together to find the best home for collections where they will benefit researchers. I have tried to eliminate barriers by initiating conversations about our collecting priorities. This has lead to some great conversations with my colleagues at History Colorado and the Auraria Library, where we often have similar collections or donors calling several of us to make donations. Each institution has its own strength in different collecting areas, so it is not the best use of our resources to pursue subjects which are represented elsewhere.

In addition to "what", we also took a closer look at "how" we are collecting material. Our acquisition workflows were created over 15 years ago at a time when storage space and resources were at a different level. After bringing in several large collections during my first few months in the position, I realized that our staff and volunteers could not keep pace with my collecting efforts. By the end of 2013, we had a backlog of material to be accessioned and inventoried. Our solution to the problem was to suspend bringing in new material for the last quarter of the year. This allowed staff to catch up on the backlog and start fresh in 2014. In hindsight, suspending collecting for 3 months was great for staff but had some consequences in our public relations with donors. A few donors found the notion that we would stop collecting even for a few months to be troubling.

This year, I am monitoring the amount of donations we accept every month to match our available resources. We calculated an average per month that can be accessioned and inventoried. With this average in mind, I now have a benchmark of what I can bring in per month. If we exceed our average, I can arrange to delay transfer of materials until the next month. My hope is that this will prevent an end of the year backlog and eliminate the need to stop collecting material.

Part of this process is also working more closely with donors up-front, before the donation. My first step is to have a face-to face meeting with the donor to discuss the collection. During the donation interview, I get biographical information about the person/organization, take photos of the collection and try to pre-weed the collection for potential items that we do not accept. If an in-person meeting is not possible, I will ask the donor to email an inventory or scans of the collection along with a description. I will use this information to create a donor report. The reports are reviewed by SAC on a monthly basis, where we vote on what collections to accept or decline. SAC members often ask questions about the material or offers ideas for other institutions that might be interested if it does not fit our collecting criteria. If the collection is accepted, I will work with the donor to transfer the collection to the library and complete a Deed of Gift. In the past, we had a donor fill out a Gift Acknowledgement Form during the transfer and then sent an Acquisition Agreement with the thank you letter after the collection was inventoried. This process resulted in the Acquisition Agreement not always being returned and cost valuable staff time trying to track down the agreements. We decided to try to reduce the redundancy of having two forms by creating one Deed of Gift that serves the purpose of the two previous forms. We now have the donor sign the Deed of Gift when the material is transferred to WHG. While not perfect, we hope that this will reduce staff time in the long run.

In reaction to F. Gerald Ham's comment, I think we can do a better job shaping the record of human existence by taking a closer look at what we collect and how we do it. We are building the research collections of the future, so now is the best time to take a fresh look at our work.

#### Reference

Boles, F. (2005). *Selecting and appraising archives and manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 18.

### **Acquisitions & Appraisal Section Officers (2013-2014)**

Virginia Hunt, Chair (Harvard University Archives)

Laura Sullivan, Vice Chair/Chair-Elect (Iowa State University)

Bethany Anderson, Steering Committee Member (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)

Adriana Cuervo, Steering Committee Member (Rutgers University)

Jamie Quaglino, Steering Committee Member (Gates Archive)

Heather Soyka, Steering Committee Member (University of Pittsburgh)

Laura Uglean Jackson, Immediate Past Chair (University of California, Irvine)

Toni Rhorer, Intern

Lisa Mangiafico, Council Liaison (Soroptimist International of the Americas)