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Public Library Roundtable – Society of American Archivists
Petition documentation for consideration of the SAA Council
December 2009

Submitted by Renée DesRoberts, Archivist/Librarian
McArthur Public Library
Biddeford, Maine

Our mission & goals:
The Public Library Archives/Special Collections Roundtable serves to encourage advocacy for and education about archival, manuscript, local history, genealogy, and other historic and special collections within public libraries of all sizes.

The Roundtable provides an arena for discussion and dissemination of best practices of the archival, library, museum and history fields; and works to support the informational, historical, and cultural interests which converge in public library archives and special collections.

Why Public Libraries need their own Roundtable:
The organization and structure of archives within public libraries varies widely, however they all carry a mission of service to their communities and the obligation to support accessibility. This often creates special complexities for the caretakers of these collections and perhaps a different point of view along the spectrum between libraries and archives.

Additionally, collections caretakers in public libraries are often charged with oversight of such varied collections that to keep abreast of current & best practices in the areas of archives, museums, public history, genealogy, and of course public librarianship is overwhelming.

Most caretakers cannot possibly belong to the myriad local, state, regional and/or national organization(s) which pertain to the work they do, but which would help them in their duties. A clearinghouse in which it all comes together, and where these caretakers could comfortably question, discuss and learn about all aspects of their work would be a unique accomplishment.

The benefit of this roundtable to the Society:
First, there are a great number of people who work with historic collections within public institutions, including libraries, who do not identify themselves as archivists. Because SAA roundtables are open to non-members, the group will be in a great position to inform those caretakers about the work of the Society, how it pertains to what they do, and the advantages of membership.

Also, there is a growing realization that caretakers of historical collections in public libraries face huge obstacles to implementing management programs for their collections. This is compounded by lack of staffing and funding for the archival programs. Sharing education and funding opportunities with these caretakers (i.e. preservation, security) would be a key benefit.

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