

Find the Person in the Personal Digital Archive: Missing Curator Mystery Edition!



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August 3, 2016 - Society of American Archivists, SAA Annual Meeting, Atlanta

Outline of activity session (60 minutes):

- I. Introductions and explanation (5 minutes)
- II. Find the Person in the Personal Digital Archive: Missing Curator Mystery Edition! (small groups of 3-5 people) (40 minutes)
- III. Sharing and Discussion (15 minutes)

Find the Person in the Personal Digital Archive: Missing Curator Mystery Edition! (40 minutes)

Time to channel Miss Marple, Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, Father Brown, or your favorite solver-of-mysteries (British, fictional, or otherwise!) Imagine that you are a project archivist at the Three Hills Museum in Duluth, Minnesota, where Jane Stevens is the lead curator and director. You are a project archivist Jane hired to build a digital archive for the museum. You work on-site at the museum two days a week and from home the other days, answering Jane's often-frantic emails.

A week has elapsed since you last reported to the museum to work, and you have not heard from Jane during that time, which is extremely unusual. You arrive at the museum and can't find Jane. This is unexpected; Jane once came to work at the museum while still on pain medication after having her appendix removed. Something must be seriously wrong.



You spend a few hours busying yourself with your work, waiting for Jane to arrive. You try calling and emailing Jane, but she doesn't answer. By the afternoon, you decide to visit her office for clues. You open the door, shuffle through a few piles of papers on the desk, and attempt to make sense of the Post-it notes stuck to the walls. You boot up her computer, but you don't have the required login credentials. Just as you're about to leave, you notice a small drawer in the desk. You open it, and inside you find a flash drive and a note

that reads: "If I don't return, examine these files. -JS, 7/23/16." You plug the flashdrive into your computer and take a look...

Activity Questions

As a group, discuss and answer the following:

Solving the mystery:

1. What is the specialty of the Three Hills Museum?
2. When was Jane last at the Museum?

3. Why is Jane not at work?
4. Where in the world is Jane?
5. Do you need to call the police?

Imagine you need to plan for adding Jane's files to the museum's archives at some point in the future:

1. What types of digital preservation issues can you identify in the files?
2. How would you quickly create an inventory of the contents (files, directories)?
3. Are all the files important to keep for the long-term? If not, how would you handle the fact that not all of the files need to be kept?
4. Imagine that the Three Hills Museum has a generous budget for digital archives. What tools and workflows would you use to capture and preserve Jane's files, making sure to protect the files' context and integrity?
5. Do any of the files contain personal information? If so, what should you do with files containing personal information?

Group Sharing and Discussion (10 minutes)

The entire workshop group will gather together to share insights.

1. What themes and insights did your group discover during the Missing Curator challenge? What is Jane's story? What did you discover about her personal digital archiving practices? What decisions about her records did you make concerning retention and transfer to the archives?
2. What themes, insights, and questions arose during your group reflection and discussion about digital archiving and electronic records?

