**From:** Robert K. Elder <robertkelder@gmail.com>
**Sent:** Friday, January 12, 2024 1:57 PM
**To:** Joanna Kolosov <jkolosov@sonomalibrary.org>
**Subject:** Diary and Letter Archive project / Public Library Archives and Special Collections Section at the SAA Conference

Hello Joanna --

Thanks for taking time with me on the phone just now! Again, I'm reaching out on the advice of Hannah Stryker at the Society of American Archivists.

I'm writing to ask if there's a way for me to present to or interact with your Public Library Archives/Special Collections Section in August at the SAA Conference.

Here's a boilerplate about my project and what we're doing:

I'm teaming up with some friends—diary historian Sally Ivey McNamara, author Babbette Hines, playwright/performer David Kodeski, and one private massive collector—and we are pooling our collections of diaries, letters, and photographs from everyday people from the 1700s to the present. We are looking for a home for them, but we also have slightly larger ambitions.

In short, we'd like to create a public diary and letter archive, where people can send in materials. Last year, *The Atlantic* wrote about Sally and touched on our efforts to establish a national diary archive. Part of the initial donation would not only be our own materials, but also my ownership of the URLs diaryarchive.com, diaryarchive.org, letterarchive.com, and letterarchive.org.

(This isn't without precedent, as the United Kingdom has the Great Diary Project, housed at Bishopsgate Institute in London. Two of its patrons include actors Michael Palin and Stephen Fry.)

We have been rescuing these historical items from estate sales, flea markets, garage sales, and even dumpsters. Not only do they reveal the rich inner lives of people who are not famous, but many also give us on-the-ground, first-person perspectives from important points in history. We

feel it's important that these voices and experiences not get lost. With email and photos on our phones, this is perhaps the last generation to use paper for letters and diaries—and it's important to preserve this history.

You can watch Sally's TEDx Talk about what she learned from reading 10,000 dairies:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIopFzbIPJw

Or listen to a radio version of David's play based on a Chicago woman's diary:
https://www.npr.org/2003/12/25/1569527/tales-from-a-diary-another-lousy-day

Read about a letter from my collection here.

https://thebulletin.org/2022/04/wwii-letter-contains-parallels-with-russias-attack-on-ukrainian-civilians/#post-heading

Or read my interview with Babbette in the Chicago Tribune:
https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2005-02-09-0502090262-story.html

We're just in the initial planning stages and are not exactly sure what obstacles we will face. Ultimately, we'd like to find the right partner(s) and the right institutional home. I'm hoping that your section might provide us with some opportunities to talk about what we're doing, get advice and maybe even find a few partners.

What do you think?

Best,

Rob

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