

Thursday, March 12, 2015

1:30-2:30PM

[LINK TO CLIR CONNECT DISCUSSION THREAD](#)

## **Building an Inclusive Archival Community of Practice**

### **PRESENTERS:**

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### **DESCRIPTION:**

The Philadelphia area is home to hundreds of small archival repositories with important collections but insufficient resources to retain a professional archivist. Since 2011, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories (HCI-PSAR) has worked with nearly 150 such organizations to help make their collections better known and more accessible. Building on this work and the relationships they have developed with local small repositories, HCI-PSAR staff are now working to create a diverse and sustainable archival community of practice in the Philadelphia area that will be inclusive of non-professional practitioners. The goal of these efforts is to increase communication and cooperation between area small archival repositories and to help them improve their level of stewardship of their collections.

This session will seek to gather ideas from unconference participants about how to develop such a community, with an emphasis on suggestions that could be implemented locally by HCI-PSAR in one year or less. Discussion leaders will ask participants about their successful and unsuccessful past efforts to engage with non-professional archival practitioners, solicit suggestions about what could be done to welcome these practitioners into the professional community, and seek guidance on what forms of outreach and education would be most effective in raising their level of stewardship.

## **SESSION INTRODUCTION**

Quick overview of "*Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories*" project (HCI-PSAR) and context for session.

See session description above

HCI-PSAR repositories range from all-volunteer historical societies to places with professional staff but no professional archivist. Finding aids from HCI-PSAR posted to shared site created by Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSCL). See list of participants here: <http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/pacscl/index.html>

So how do we "enhance" work after HCI-PSAR is gone, make it sustainable in the long term? How do you make small/community/volunteer-run places better stewards for their collections?

## **DISCUSSION:**

*What is an "archival community of practice"? Who is included? Who is excluded? Who is an "archivist" and to what extent can/should content creators become involved in archival processes?*

Who/what is an "archivist"?

- "archivist" depends on audience - professionals use specific term in a different way than the general public
- work with collections vs. work with public (what is the role of outreach in our definition? reference?)
  - archivist must be committed to outreach and access
- caretaker v. archivist - archivist is actively responsible for preservation (but does that make you a preservationist/conservator? some archivists focus only on reference, etc.)
- archivist is trained to select, vs. local historical societies that just keep everything
  - But not necessarily! because some professional archives keep everything and some local societies are discerning
- A professional is discerning - makes best use of available resources - impossible to follow standards exactly
- Professional can guide others - have toolkit, but don't utilize all tools
- does certification matter? Certified Archivists

- diversity of professional institutions makes it difficult to generalize
- term “professional archivist” is too narrow
- Is there a diminishing value of archival labor when volunteers (students) will work for free (cheap)? What does this mean for our profession?

Should collections be kept embedded in their communities or removed to a professional repository?

- Conversation on SAA’s A&A list a few years ago: some professionals thought that repositories with insufficient resources shouldn’t have collections at all
- post-custodialism - how can archivists support archives in communities?
  - consider Zine Library
  - Partnerships between professionals and volunteers
  - Community members know about concerns that archivists wouldn’t necessarily consider
- IF NOT US, WHO? what happens when there is no logical professional “home” for collections (for example, works under copyright)
- What about local historical societies not interested in cooperating or learning more, and their collections languish/deteriorate?
- Does it matter more for vulnerable materials (like photos)?
- The community members are the experts, the ones who care, who have done the work of saving the materials

Closing the gap between professionals and non-professionals

- HCI-PSAR participants are mostly open to learning about professional standards and practices - within their available resources (but does their inability to secure more resources indicate an unwillingness to do more?)
- Scale solutions to meet the abilities of small repositories - “good enough” practices instead of “best” practices
  - Incremental improvements - keep doing more over time
- Even professionals don’t always hew to professional “standards” - you have to work with the resources available (bad data, lack of supplies)
- Standards change - inconsistencies even at professional institutions

- Is it arrogant to say something is “not professionally done”?

## **BRAINSTORMING AND ACTION STEPS**

*What can large, professional archives do to assist small archives? What resources are already available, but perhaps under-utilized? How can professional archivists reach and engage non-professional archival practitioners?*

*Create list of available resources for non-professional archivists to publish on HCI-PSAR website (<http://hsp.org/hcipsar/resources>); Create list of potential community-building activities that HCI-PSAR can investigate implementing from April 2015-April 2016*

- Hand-me-downs - gently used archival supplies discarded by large repositories passed on to small repositories
- Buddy system - pair small repositories with a professional contact at a large institution
- Advocate for contingency/sustainability plans for individual collectors and/or very small organizations - what happens when a super active collector passes away? how do we ensure long-term accessibility of collections?
- Workshops on preserving family history
  - bring in items and do work on them
  - communicate importance of preserving in archives or other family member
- Online resources
  - Library of Congress - personal archiving resources (digital and analog)
  - Disaster planning - see NEDCC and CCAHA
- Grant-writing workshops - but what grants are available to very small places? - Should we advocate for grant opportunities for small archives?
  - Could we identify foundations that give funds to small archives?
  - What about grants that aren't specifically for archives? like “awesome foundation” or arts grants?
  - Crowdfunding

- Kickstarter? - Indiegogo is better! Get to keep all money with Indiegogo
  - Dependent on community - active but dispersed communities are good for this
  - Incentives help - donate to our oral history project and we'll keep *your* oral history in perpetuity
- SUSTAINABILITY!!!
  - At least the work done during a grant is good, but it's better to create an ongoing program
- Bring in staff of small repositories to tour professional repositories
- Can we ask local universities to let nonmatriculated people sit in on relevant archival classes?
- Partnerships - we'll give them some resources (like scanning equipment, storage, Omeka) but they have to do the work
- Cultural heritage workbench - let small places bring collections to professional organizations and use space for processing, digitization, etc. for a limited time (can also be virtual):  
<http://sustainableheritagenetwork.org/content/how-provide-workbench-faq>
- Connect small repositories to each other
- Crowdsourcing transcription etc. - could we create crowdsourcing software/central spot for this? build a platform for crowdsourcing? and best practices?