

Finding a Sustainable Place for Archivists within the American Library Association: A Historical Investigation

NOAH LENSTRA

Abstract: There is a recent trend, called convergence, that has compelled many archivists, librarians and museum professionals to work together much more than they have in the past. Some have claimed that this trend is motivated entirely by digital technology. However, through research in the archives of the American Library Association I argue that many of the issues blocking collaboration between archivists and librarians have a long historical lineage. An investigation into the often failed attempts to find a place for archivists within the American Library Association offers a compelling portrait of how archive-library relationships have developed over time. Such an investigation can, in turn, offer lessons for individual archivists and for SAA in their attempts to build bridges across professional divides in the present. In terms of research methods, this paper offers an example of reading archival history through the lens of librarianship. As such, this poster re-thinks archival history by focusing not on archives and archivists themselves, but rather by focusing on how archives and archivists have been perceived and positioned in other societal venues, in this case within the American Library Association.

About the author:

Noah Lenstra is a Certificate of Advanced Study student at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He received his Master's of Library and Information Science with a certificate in Special Collections from that University in Spring 2009. He also works as a graduate assistant at the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music. His research interests center on convergence around cultural heritage, collaboration among archivists and allied professionals, and documentation initiatives aimed at preserving an inclusive portrait of the past.