

# “Not My Job”: A Manifesto for Macro-Preservation and Archival Ethics

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**Abstract:** Macro-preservation in the archives often lies at the intersection of archives, facilities, and janitorial work in its most mundane and granular respect, but presents wide-ranging ramifications that archivists all-too-often neglect because it is either seen as too low a priority or not considered to be within the scope of one’s professional responsibilities. Many archivists may not consider it to be a good use of their time to address or deal with the broken chairs or 20-year old exhibit supplies that have never been used, but they should for a variety of reasons. This behavior limits the efficacy of advocacy by reinforcing negative professional stereotypes of archives and archivists; is detrimental to physical holdings maintenance and space management; and contributes to environments that are adverse to overall preservation. Archivists and conservators know about the importance of creating such an environment and yet these behaviors continue.

Presenting this issue as an ethical obligation rather than a chore by merging the quantitative data on macro-preservation and recent trends concerning professional ethics could help alter that perception. Much has been written about an archivist’s code of ethics concerning specific and dramatic incidents; while undoubtedly important, a shift in focus from the dramatic and unlikely to the boring but ubiquitous could help archivists re-evaluate the wide-ranging and long-term significance of this aspect of archival collections management. This proposal originates from an individual case study which used and recorded empirical data in an attempt to solve practical collections management problems.

## **About the author:**

*Rachel Searcy* is an archivist at the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives at New York University. She holds a Master of Arts in History and a Master of Library Science with a concentration in Archives and Records Management from Simmons College. She has previously held positions at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston Archives. Her primary professional interests include archival instruction for students as well as descriptive standards and practices.