

The Archival Spirit, December, 2013

Newsletter of the Archivists of Religious Collections Section, Society of American Archivists

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“Things do not change. We Change” (Thoreau)

*Colleen McFarland, Section Chair
Mennonite Church USA, Goshen, IN*

When I talk with colleagues and constituents in the Mennonite Church USA about new things happening in the archives, I almost always receive a look of surprise or skepticism and a comment that goes something like this: “Change in the archives? I thought nothing ever changed in the archives!” It’s true that some things do not, and indeed *should not* change in the archives: archivists’ love of and care for the voices of the past, our concern for the authenticity of the historical record, and our commitment to balancing access to and preservation of the unique resources in our collections. And yet, so much is changing in our archival programs because we archivists are embracing change, even as we remain loyal to our core values. Whereas our collections previously seemed to be self-contained, discrete entities, we see them now as components of an information universe of immense scope. And while our profession once seemed bound only to the historical enterprise, we find ourselves now networking with a wide variety of professionals, ranging from anthropologists to IT specialists.

ARCS, too, is changing, and I invite each and every section member to be part of that process. One change you may expect in the future is a shorter section meeting at the SAA Annual Meeting. When SAA staff approached ARCS about potentially reducing its section meeting from 120 minutes to 90 minutes, Vice Chair Anne Thomason and I agreed to this idea without hesitation. Why? For two reasons: First, the findings of the Annual Meeting Task Force suggest that SAA members want a shorter conference with more variety (structured networking, a wide variety of session formats, etc.). Giving up 30 minutes of ARCS meeting time in order to create a better annual meeting overall seems a small price to pay. Second, ARCS needs to engage its membership year round and provide opportunities for virtual networking and professional support. A shorter annual section meeting will require less planning and allow steering committee members to work on other initiatives.

What other changes will come to ARCS in the future? I don't know, but I welcome your input. If you have not already participated in our member survey, please do so [here](#)! Also, please feel free to send me suggestions regarding ARCS at any time: colleenm@mennoniteusa.org. I will respond to your email and perhaps ask you to get involved to bring about a change in ARCS that you would like to see.

Section Business Meeting Minutes, New Orleans , August 16, 2013, 12:30pm

Paul Daniels, Secretary

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, St. Paul, MN

Call to Order/Welcome Colleen McFarland, Incoming-Chair

Approval of Minutes

Paul Daniels, ARCS Secretary, asked for approval of the 2012 meeting minutes. Minutes were approved with not changes or additions.

General Announcements

- Donna McCrea, outgoing liaison to SAA Council, spoke about the formation of the Advocacy and Public Policy Committee. She also informed the group of the SAA Strategic Plan and the continued need for member feedback on this.
- Jamie Engwold, Local Events Committee for the 2014 Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., reported on the location of the conference, the Wardman Park Hotel. The meeting will include SAA, NAGARA and COSA and will be held August 10-16, 2014. She also indicated that this year's use of the conference app has been well received and seems to be effective for conveying conference information quickly. Additionally, newer formats like the fishbowl, lightning and 60 minute session will be offered. Efforts are being made to speed up the pacing of sessions. Session proposals are due September 30, 2013.
- Lee Leumas, Archdiocese of New Orleans, reported on recent activities of the ICA – Archivists of Faith Traditions Section, of which she is chair. She reported on the re-invigoration of the section, especially around more focus on the membership, not only on large institutions. The meeting schedule and format is changing. The next meeting of the Faith Traditions Section will take place in Seoul, South Korea. Dr. Leumas indicated a need for greater representation from the U.S.
- *In Memoriam*: the section gave thanks and observed a moment of silence for the lives of service of Audrey Newcomer, Blaithin Sullivan, C.S.J., Richard Seidel and John L. LeDoux (all section members). Audrey Newcomer received the Sister M. Claude Lane, O.P. Memorial Award posthumously.

Reports

- New and current officers were identified:
 - Anne Thomason – Vice-Chair
 - Joel Thoreson – elected Member-at-large
 - Colleen McFarland – Chair
 - Jim Havron – Member-at-large
 - Dee Gallo – Models and Resources
 - David Kingma – Newsletter Editor
- Jim Havron read Outgoing-Chair Terry Reilly's report.
- Colleen McFarland reported on the growth of the service project as part of the SAA annual meeting. We can be proud of the unique contributions of our section, by having brought the "religious" to a broader audience in SAA. The success of the service project is just one example of this broadening of interest in the work that we as archivists of religious sections do. The group was appreciative of Colleen's encouraging words.

- Anne Thomason reported on her concerns for the section to respond effectively to needs of its members, using the uniqueness of the section as strengths going forward, and for continued member involvement (including having enough participation to have competitive steering committee elections). A practical need is for website help – an ongoing need.

Additional Business

- Alan Lefevre updated the group on the work of the Annual Meeting Taskforce. He indicated that ARCS members can take credit for the growth of the service project event, and that this will likely continue in future meetings. He also encouraged members to provide feedback to the Taskforce on the current meeting experience.
- Lee Leumas noted the availability of a new guide on Roman Catholic Diocesan Archives.
- Colleen McFarland reminded the group of the upcoming program component of the meeting, following the business meeting.

Adjournment

The business meeting was adjourned at 1:00 PM.

Annual Section Meeting Program, *The Elephant in the Archives: Scandalous Records in Religious Archives*

New Orleans , August 16, 2013, 1:15pm

- **Overview:** Colleen McFarland and David Kingma led the program of 3 papers and a report on the survey of the membership by David. The papers were read by Anne Thomason, Dee Gallo and Trevor Alvord. David reported on the results of the 37 responses of the membership survey which addressed the presence of scandalous material in our collections, ethics, privacy and legal issues. A summary of the survey was sent to the membership. Participants were then invited to remain and form small groups for discussion. Most members stayed for the small group discussions and reported on the usefulness and importance of this program, especially as it applied to challenging situations in their own settings. (Courtesy, Paul Daniels)
- **Twitter Feed Recap:**
 - Elephants in the Archives is talking about scandalous, controversial records
 - Intended to begin conversation about records that do not necessarily reflect well on the institution
 - Talking (anonymously) about records relating to sexual abuse in religious institutions
 - First paper is discussing rape, seduction, and stalking in a Jewish archives by a boss of a subordinate employee
 - Wow, this first paper is quite intense. Includes sexual harassment and pornographic images sent to archivist at institution
 - Offending boss was required to resign, but no legal action was taken
 - Institutions both were not concerned with the victims, and even blamed them in some cases
 - Second paper is from Paige Smith retired archivist with a masters in divinity
 - Speaking to SAA's core values and ethics in reference to sensitive records
 - Must balance competing interests in archives
 - Compare religious archives to kosher hot dogs. We answer to a higher power.
 - Morals and ethics often collide
 - Daniel 2:22 he knows what is in darkness and light follows
 - Transparency is about disclosure and clarity
 - Culture of secrecy is antithetical to Christianity
 - L Tom Perry Special Collections presenting now...first up strict access policy
 - "Use of some materials is subject to restrictions" I've read that before...
 - Personal journals of prominent Mormon researcher contained details of sexual exploits
 - Brought up issues of access when researcher wanted to read them. Provided photocopies with names redacted
 - Balanced providing access with protecting university and community leaders

- Now time for results of section's survey of institutional records relating to sexual abuse holdings
- Goals of survey: look for reality check, learn about how we go about business, provide interesting conversation
- 39 respondents, 13 have had allegations of sexual abuse at their institution
- Of those 13, 5 saw significant financial impact as a result
- Unfortunately no distinct pattern in results found. Impact on operations has not been radically modified [as] a result
- Some institutions responded that even with no allegations of abuse, policy changed in response to others' situations

(Courtesy, Angelique Richardson, Brittany Turner)

- **Survey Results:** A compilation of the survey results is available [here](#).

Helping Out in the Big Easy: Service Projects at SAA 2013

Colleen McFarland, Section Chair

Liz Scott, St. Michael's College, Colchester, VT



St. Bernard Project volunteers gather for a photo at the end of their shift.

Following up on a successful service project at SAA 2012 in San Diego, the Archivists of Religious Collections Section assisted with the planning and organization of several different service projects in New Orleans. While we had hoped to lead a volunteer group to the Second Harvest Food Bank, the food bank could not accommodate our group on Wednesday morning. Additionally, SAA's Host Committee found two local archival programs in need of volunteer labor. The result was a variety of service projects for SAA members to choose from and an increase in overall service project participation.

Colleen led a group of 14 volunteers to work for a morning at an “opportunity home” under renovation by St. Bernard Project (SBP). SBP arose from the need for affordable home reconstruction in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. While the organization continues to help New Orleans residents return to their storm-damaged homes, SBP also manages a program that transforms blighted and abandoned properties into newly remodeled homes for low-income first-time homeowners. The SBP volunteers spent a morning caulking, spackling, and painting trim, doorframes, and doors in a house approaching completion. Fourteen volunteers in a small house without electricity (i.e. without air conditioning or fans) made for a very warm morning! The heat and humidity, however, did not dampen our spirits. We enjoyed meeting new colleagues while helping to improve a New Orleans neighborhood in a small way.

Liz coordinated an archival service project at the Louisiana State Museum Historical Center. For several weeks prior to the SAA Annual Meeting, she worked with curator Sarah-Elizabeth Gundlach to develop a service project for four volunteers. Choosing a project that could be completed in three to four hours was difficult, and Sarah-Elizabeth’s original plan underwent some revision. The volunteers ultimately performed basic processing on an architectural records project. Interestingly, all of the volunteers for this project were students or recent graduates who volunteered for different reasons. One was very interested in architectural records specifically; one was interested in learning more about the New Orleans archives work world; several just had empty slots in their schedule. All approached their assignment with enthusiasm, happy to work on their assigned boxes and learn a little bit more about their fellow volunteers.

Other service projects included two small archival service projects that aided the City Park Archives (coordinated by Bert Lyons) and a daylong construction project with lowernine.org (coordinated by Bill Ross). All told, 35 volunteers gave their time and talents to various organizations in New Orleans.

Standards Committee Report: The Standards Portal

Angelique Richardson

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, Smyrna, GA

As the ARCS liaison to SAA’s Standards Committee, I attended their committee meeting on Tuesday, August 14, 2013 at the SAA Annual Conference in New Orleans, LA. This was my first time attending such a meeting and I admit to being unfamiliar with the work of the Standards Committee before my appointment. However, I learned quite a bit during the meeting about what the committee does and the impact it has on every aspect of SAA.

The purpose of the Standards Committee is to facilitate the creation of standards; review and comment on relevant standards in the profession; educate the archives community; and partner with related professional organizations (ARMA, ICA, etc) on issues of mutual interest. One of the most interesting things that I learned about was something called The Standards Portal, which is what I think ARCS members may find most useful.

The Standards Portal can be found on SAA’s website at <http://www2.archivists.org/standards>. The site is maintained and updated by the Standards Committee. According to the website,

SAA's Standards Portal is designed to educate the archives community about the value and role of standards, enhance the application of standards to practice, and facilitate successful partnerships with related information standards organizations with mutual concerns and interests. The portal includes SAA-approved standards, guidelines, and best practice documents. The Society's long-term goal is to

establish a comprehensive clearinghouse that includes contextual information to assist archivists and allied professionals in moving these, and other external standards, from theory into practice.

The various standards are categorized by function and include the following: Administration and Management; Appraisal and Acquisition; Arrangement and Description; Digitization; Education; Ethics, Values and Legal Affairs; Preservation; Records and Information Management; and Reference and Access.

Any SAA member can recommend standards to be included on the website. Submissions can be either internal SAA standards or standards from external, but related, professional organizations. Instructions for how to submit standards are located on the right-hand navigation of the website.

If you are interested in learning more about the Standards Committee, you can find their Annual Reports and Meeting Minutes on their website at <http://www2.archivists.org/groups/standards-committee>.

From the Vice-Chair

Anne Thomason

Earlham College, Richmond, IN

Planning has begun for the ARCS section meeting in Washington D.C. 2014. While we have several ideas for the section meeting, we are hoping to hear from more members about what they would like to see at the section meeting. Some ideas being considered are case studies of small scale electronic records projects and how to increase collaboration among religious archivists. But we want to hear from you to know how we can serve you best. To that end please fill out the ARCS Member Survey at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/66BWTV9>

The survey asks more than just about the program. We also want to know whether we should reinstitute the ARCS reception for next year. For the past two years ARCS has sponsored service projects, and while we hope to remain involved in next year's service project, we are considering bringing back the reception as a time for members to enjoy a relaxing time getting to know each other better.

The steering committee also hopes to learn how often you would like to see our newsletter, *The Archival Spirit*, published. Are there other means of disseminating information you would prefer? How can we improve the newsletter and communication among members?

We hope for as many members as possible to fill out the survey. If you care about the future of ARCS, please respond!

Program Footnotes

Editor

Two session proposals were submitted to the SAA 2014 Program Committee with ARCS endorsement. ARCS will also host an informal reception for old friends to reconnect and new friendships to begin. Hope to see you there!