The Last Revolution and the Next

John A. Fleckner*

There are two key points that I would like to consider as we address issues and opportunities archivists face in our new circumstances. First, that new information and communications technologies have so increased access to archives (and changed archival methods) that our entire enterprise has been transformed. Yes, there has been a revolution in archives. My second point is that it is more urgent than ever for us to make the case for archives in the larger civic life of our society. Archives are not expendable!

The new world of archives, which we now inhabit, did not dawn in a single moment. Rather, various pieces came together over two decades. Although no archives has been unaffected, progress has been irregular, varying with institutional resources, vision, and mission. Libraries began creating and sharing electronic cataloging information in the late 1970s. By the mid-1980s -- after several decades trying to design automated systems specifically for archival applications -- the archives profession took up with the flourishing library automation field. As a result, brief, collection level descriptions of archival materials began to appear in automated catalogs. About the same time -- in the early 1980s -- a second breakthrough occurred. Word processing appeared in the archives, first in minicomputers like the Wang system and then in

* John A. Fleckner is Chief Archivist of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560-0601. Email: flecknerj@si.edu. This article is a revised version of a paper presented in a session titled “Talkin’ ‘bout a Revolution:” Rethinking Archival Practice,” at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, Trenton, N.J., April 25, 2003
desktop, personal computers. Here was a really “smart” typewriter to ease the laborious task of creating, editing, and revising traditional finding aids with their long blocks of narrative text and lengthy container lists. And even the earliest printers produced handsome documents to file in the reference room for appreciative on-site researchers. Over time, as computers became more powerful, and archivists more knowledgeable and clever, desktop machines could create in-house databases for various access and collections management tasks.

These developments -- on-line catalogs, national bibliographic networks, and finding aids in electronic form -- along with email -- were the basic ingredients for the archival revolution. The Internet and the worldwide web -- which appeared in 1990s -- were the catalysts which energized these elements. Access to library databases came first, opening them to users regardless of location, institutional affiliation, or time of day. Archives soon followed with web pages of institutional information and -- with the proliferation of desktop scanning technology -- facsimiles of archival documents. Most importantly, our finding aids went on-line. For the first time, the most basic source of information about a body of records or papers could be presented to the widest public at minimal expense. The creation of statewide databases of finding aids (in Virginia and California, to name two) and the international RLIN and OCLC databases have carried forward the transformation. Thus, in a few brief years, building on shared standards for information formats and exchange and new information technologies, we had achieved a degree of accessibility and integration in the archival world never before imagined.

The revolution in archives is all the more profound for the speed with which it has come upon us. From the perspective of its use of technology, and its accessibility to the public, the world of archives in 1975 was not significantly different from that of 1900 (with the exception of the limited use of microfilm by some archives). Cardboard boxes and paper folders were the
primary tools in both eras. Information about the contents of archives was produced by typewriter (although electrified in the 20th century), often on 3x5 library cards. Published guides, issued in small print runs, described some of the holdings of some major repositories, while the rest would be known only by word of mouth or citations in scholarly works. In sum, archives a century ago, and a quarter century ago, existed largely in isolation from one another and distant from public view. They were technologically self sufficient; and most archivists had gained most of their knowledge of archival practice from on the job training.

To describe these changes metaphorically, the “old world of archives” consisted of widely dispersed, difficult to find, closed vaults, each with one heavily barred door, opened for a few hours to those privileged and able to make their way to it. By contrast, the “new archives” is a highly publicized, brightly lit apartment in a great glass high rise building, open day and night, where everyone -- not least professional colleagues -- can see inside, inspect catalog records and finding aids in depth and at leisure, review policies and professional practices, and reach an archivist at the tap of a keystroke.

All this, of course, dramatically changed how we do archives work. We have altered the content and flow of our daily lives and remade archival education to provide us with new technical skills and knowledge. Computers are essential tools, appearing on every desktop. We have exotic new vocabularies like MARC, EAD, and HTML. We operate new software for word processing, for database creation, for digital imaging, and for managing all the rest of these software programs applications and our new digital assets and the frequently changing versions of both.

These changes are familiar enough to us as archives insiders, but even more significant and more challenging, I believe, are the changes in the relationships of archives to the worlds
outside our walls. For better, and for worse, our relationships with the users of archives, with other archives and cultural institutions, and with the wider society have changed fundamentally. We are called upon to meet new expectations and take on new roles. Our long-term health, perhaps even survival, will turn on how we meet these challenges from the outside environment.

Great changes such as these challenge everyone experiencing them. Among the users of archives, those already familiar with the “old world of archives,” perhaps have had the easier transition to the “new”. Often with our assistance as reference archivists/educators, they have learned to navigate our catalogs and on-line finding aids. They have located compilations of other on line sources, like the University of Idaho listing of more than 5,000 repository websites, and the National Union Catalog of Manuscripts Collections in its digital form. They have been grateful to see the gradual appearance of facsimiles of documents on archival websites. Having lived through the process of transformation they know that it has proceeded unevenly and that much archival descriptive information and most documents remain undigitized.

For those encountering the “new world of archives” without the experience of the old, the way is more difficult. If they have grown up with computers, these users may be very comfortable with on-line research techniques, but a finding aid located in an archives reading room -- after an introductory reference interview and other preparation -- isn’t the same document -- that is, doesn’t have the same meaning to its reader -- as its electronic double stumbled upon in a Google search. To the reference archivist’s old laments about the lack of preparation for use of primary sources is now added the concern that researchers assume “it’s all on the web” -- both information about archives and the documents themselves. In fact, successful research in archives today (and for the foreseeable future) does require sophisticated knowledge and skills in electronic searching. But equally necessary is more traditional
knowledge of records creating practices and skills in inductive reasoning about the nature and location of archival sources (and their management by archivists). The lesson for us is clear: we will continue to be reference archivists/educators, operating both virtually and in person. Jim Danky, a former colleague at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin put it this way:

“Information technology is a labor saving device, not a thinking-saving device.”¹

The divergence between archival reality and user expectation is all the greater when the archives attracts users who in the past would never make their way to the heavily barred door. Unlike graduate students, scholars, public history researchers, and dedicated genealogists, these users don’t “need” archives to meet scholarly or professional standards, but once we have become more inviting, they are delighted to visit us, often virtually rather than physically.

The same information technology, which makes archives more accessible, also drives a growing demand for the use of archives. School students create websites as class projects; a public radio station complements its documentary series on neighborhood histories with on-line photographs; a business executive illustrates a presentation with images from a laptop computer; web newsletter editors enliven their pages with implanted images. Two features of these now familiar uses of archives are noteworthy. First, they are all uses of electronic facsimiles that have very little precedent in the pre-digital era. Of course, archives in the past have produced slides and photographic prints from their holdings, but the cost and time to create them and the rising cost and inconvenience to use them in print publications powerfully limited the demand for reproductions. Desktop digitization, instant file transfer, downloading capabilities, and electronic publication demolish these limitations.

The second feature of these new uses is that they draw very heavily on archival materials with visual rather than textual content. Some archives programs, like the Center for the History
of Physics, have responded to this demand by operating on-line stores to provide electronic and print versions of their photographic collections on-demand. In my own shop, fees for creation and commercial reproduction of documents -- largely images -- support a new part-time customer services reference assistant. Using digital (and express mail) technologies, she can negotiate and fulfill requests that once lingered for weeks in our photographic laboratory or, more often, went unplaced because of these long delays. Additionally, this position compensates, to some degree, for the loss of permanent staff through budget cuts.

The changing roles and relationships between the archives and our users confronts us everyday as we open our email and answer our telephones. Perhaps less obvious are the ways in which professional collaboration has become essential to the pursuit of our mission. Today, the continued development and maintenance of information exchange standards is a foundation of professional practice. Whatever solutions emerge for the long term management of information in electronic form surely will come from further collaborations of archivists, records managers, systems designers and administrators, and the host of others with a stake in information creation and retention.

There are other opportunities for us in the new information age. The abstract concept of a universe of documentation -- a larger body of information that is the context for a specific group of records and for archival choices about those records -- is now far more tangible as our institutional databases and electronic finding aids are linked ever more effectively through the web. The Cultural Materials Initiative, announced three years ago by the Research Libraries Group (RLG), dramatically illustrates this concept. Cultural materials, for this program, are “published and unpublished texts, images of many types, artifacts and other objects.” The Initiative provides electronic access to a significant body of images and descriptions of these
materials in order to stimulate scholarship and learning. The project faces technical challenges in dealing with diverse descriptive levels and standards and diverse digital objects (various types of images, encoded text, and motion files). But it also challenges the century old boundaries between libraries, archives, and museums by asserting a wholeness of the record of the past that we have lost in our scramble to distinguish our professions and their scope.

I want to turn now to the very threatening situations which so many archives face. In New Jersey, in Florida, in Virginia, and at the state historical societies of Wisconsin and Minnesota -- to name only a few -- archives are suffering drastic cuts as the result of diminished public funding. There is a painful irony in the attack on public support for archival institutions just as we have become so much more accessible to so many more citizens. (In a cynical moment one wonders if we should have done better in our older, more secretive ways.) In my personal (and highly partisan) view, I see that archives are only one of many public investments which have been devalued by a combination of right wing political ideologues, dedicated to privatization, and a social ethic which values individual consumption above public benefit.

In seeking to understand this sad state of affairs, I have found useful insights in writings associated with the democracy studies movement. Some of these writers have challenged thepolitically popular, American equation of democracy with an unrestricted market economy. French writer Jacques Attali, in a piece subtitled “The limits of the Market and Democracy,” argues that democracy “depends upon . . . a general appreciation of our common fate.” Similarly, William M. Sullivan argues that democracy requires that its citizens, “share a sense of solidarity and common destiny.” Political scientist Benjamin R. Barber, author of the best selling, *Jihad Versus McWorld*, explicitly distinguishes the roles or functions of markets and
those of democratic politics: “Markets give us private rather than public modes of discourse. . . . Markets advance individualistic rather than social goals. . . . Consumers [in a market economy] speak the elementary rhetoric of ‘me.’ Citizens invent the common language of ‘we.’”2

In the wake of looting and theft of cultural properties in Iraq, public and scholarly attention has turned, for the moment, to the role of cultural institutions in the public life of nations. On April 20th, Princeton University professor Robert Darnton wrote in the Washington Post:

Jefferson was right. National libraries and museums provide the material from which national identities are built...Complex societies have been through so much that their history requires constant reassessment. Destroy the documents, and you will damage the collective memory, the sense of self that derives from the ties that bind a people to their ancestors. Libraries and museums are not temples for ancestor worship, but they are crucial for the task of knowing who you are by knowing who you were. That kind of knowledge must be continuously reworked. Destroy the possibility of replenishing it, and you can strangle a civilization.3

As archivists, we understand that the work we do in preserving the historical record is a vital contribution to the culture of democracy, which in turn underpins our political democracy. The recent response of the Society of American Archivists Council to cuts in state archival programs is unambiguous on this point: “Our democratic system is founded on the openness of our government at all levels to public scrutiny. . . . Without government records, elected officials cannot be held accountable. Without these records, citizens cannot exercise their rights. Failing to maintain this documentation breaks a public trust.”4 Museum consultant and a former Smithsonian colleague, Elaine Gurian, made the point more globally: “Museums, historic sites,
and other institutions of memory...are tangible evidence of the spirit of a civilized society. . . .

Societies build these institutions because they authenticate the social contract.”

Unlike the citizens of Iraq, our institutions of cultural heritage are not threatened by looting and theft. Nor, despite our present economic downturn, are we a third world economy truly too poor to protect the record of our past. Rather, the threat to our archives (and museums and libraries and more) is neglect -- and not merely benign neglect, but malign neglect, neglect based on a rejection of the values of commonweal in favor of private gratification. This is a neglect that denies the responsibility of the present generation to future generations, whether in the protection of its natural environment or its cultural legacy.

In his SAA presidential address, Tom Hickerson reminded us: “Archivists are seen as trusted agents of society, acting on everyone’s behalf in insuring the preservation of those records necessary in protecting the legal rights of each citizen and in preserving the historical record of human achievement, of cultural evolution, and of everyday life. We have a special role in society, and we are respected as ombudsmen acting in the public as well as each individual[’s] interest.” As never before, archives professionals are obligated to make our case for archives in general and for our own programs. Our attention must go beyond “how we do archives work” to “why we are doing it.” Of course, we can use the new information technologies toward this end - on-line exhibits and displays, statements of our acquisitions goals, analyses of the services we provide, and explanations of our larger mission and vision. More often, we must do this work of education and advocacy the old fashioned way -- face to face, one situation at a time, as individual professionals and as representatives of our institutions and of our profession. We cannot be assured of the outcome of our efforts, but we must not forego the struggle.
NOTES

1 James P. Danky, telephone conversation with the author, April 11, 2003


4 SAA Council, “Statement on the Importance of Supporting State Archival Programs,”


Nineteen Years Since the Last Revolution and the Next: More Connectivity, More Technology, and now Generative Artificial Intelligence


By Kate Thornhill, Public Scholarship Librarian at the University of Oregon

Author’s Note: For full disclosure, I used ChatGPT-4 to aid me in copyediting this paper. I used the bot as a proofreader, thesaurus, dictionary, and general aid in my writing, including tone and style. All reflections and ideas are my own, and my drafts and final product were reviewed by American Archivist Reviews Editors and me. I found all citations without the support of generative AI, and I used Zotero to support citation management and formatting while composing the paper in Microsoft Word.

Reviews Editors’ Note: The American Archivist Editorial Board is currently discussing policy for ChatGPT and artificial intelligence (AI) as it pertains to the journal.

To say that the past two decades have been transformative for technological development would be an understatement. Since the Journal of Archival Organization published John Fleckner’s 2004 article, “The Last Revolution and Next,” the archives landscape and our personal lives have been radically reshaped by the rapid development of new technologies and society’s access to them. Innovations including smartphones, web conferencing, advanced scanning equipment, new digital repository applications, streaming services, Google, Bluetooth, and popular social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok have revolutionized various facets of archival functions. These advancements affect everything from the acquisition and processing of archives to controlling and promoting their use, as well as providing archival services and programs. Such accelerated technological advancement has had profound benefits for the archival profession, changing the way we operate as record keepers and educators.
Fleckner offers a vivid metaphor to illustrate this profound transformation. The “old world of archives,” which consisted of “widely dispersed, difficult to find, closed vaults, each with one heavily barred door,” had given way to the “new archives,” a “highly publicized, brightly lit apartment in a great glass high rise building, open day and night, where everyone—not least professional colleagues—can see inside, inspect catalog records and finding aids in depth and at leisure, review policies and professional practices, and reach an archivist at the tap of a keystroke” (p. 11). Yet, as Fleckner recognized, “The new world of archives, which we now inhabit, did not dawn in a single moment. Rather, various pieces came together over two decades” (p. 10). During the pre-internet era, accessing archival materials and finding aids was confined to physical repositories, necessitating in-person visits and manual searches through paper-based resources. And as Fleckner points out, the advent of the internet and web publishing capabilities that blossomed through the 1990s changed the game. These innovations allowed open sharing and revolutionized archives access. Fleckner underscores the emergence of electronic finding aids and digitization as pivotal technological moments that transformed archival collection discovery and electronic shareability. As users increasingly discovered collection guides and digitized historical materials online, they started asking for easier discovery, prompting archivists to reconsider siloed finding aid and digital collection repositories. This shift led to the emergence of consortia, collective action, and federated archival catalogs aimed at enabling more efficient and widespread dissemination of archival information.¹

Fleckner not only highlights the rapid technological changes that archives have experienced in recent years but also spotlights the evolving dynamics between archivists and users in navigating catalogs and finding aids and accessing archival materials, arguing archives’ survival depends on external factors—namely broadening archives’ user base and leveraging it through digital access. With this, Fleckner emphasizes the role of archivists as educators and relationship builders who lead outreach and engagement, teaching society the importance and enduring value of the world’s collective cultural and intellectual heritage. Additionally, archivists facilitate users’ knowledge about the basic history, theory, and best

¹ See, for example, OCLC, “ArchiveGrid,” ArchivesGrid, 2023, https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/. The digital infrastructures required to support these advancements have posed challenges for many institutions, organizations, and groups. Even more so, the limited resources, reliance on external vendors, and need for specialized teams with information science training are still and maybe more important to our future issues; see Jodi Allison-Bunnell, “Finding Aid Aggregation at a Crossroads,” May 20, 2019, https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5sp13112. Addressing these challenges today is the National Finding Aid Network (NAFAN), which strives to overcome the hurdles posed by distributed archival materials and deficiencies in technical and human infrastructures across institutions and solve business and technical needs. See Chela Scott Weber et al., “Summary of Research: Findings from the Building a National Archival Finding Aid Network Project,” OCLC, June 6, 2023, https://www.oclc.org/research/publications/2023/nafan/nafan-summary-research.html. One could say that NAFAN is like the Digital Public Library of America’s federated catalog that started in the early 2010s. See Digital Public Library of America, “Digital Public Library of America,” Digital Public Library of America, 2023, https://dp.la/.
practices relating to physical, digital, and digitized historical and cultural materials. This is not to say that Fleckner believes internal relationship building does not have a place in the struggle to keep archives relevant. On the contrary, Fleckner strongly believes that “Whatever solutions emerge for the long-term management of information in electronic form surely will come from further collaborations of archivists, records managers, systems designers and administrators, and the host of others with a stake in information creation and retention” (p. 13).

Fleckner also addresses a pressing and paradoxical concern: while technological advances have increased accessibility to archives, conservative political ideologies have simultaneously led to diminishing public funding and support for archives. These ideologies prioritize individualism and privatization over collective benefit, a stance that Fleckner finds disconcerting, especially considering the greater reach archives obtained by leveraging the World Wide Web. Delving deeper into this issue, Fleckner emphasizes the profound impact that archives have on American political democracy. He believes archives deprioritization negatively affects and corrodes democratic values.

Two decades after the publication of Fleckner’s article, the pervasive influence of technology on archives is undeniable. The fusion of tech platforms with social advocacy has revolutionized not only pathways for information communication but also the ways we chronicle unfolding history. Capturing moments through digital video, audio, and imagery is now more accessible than ever; anyone with a smartphone, scanner, digital storage, and mechanism to host content online can share information and manage it themselves. Yet, there is still a persistent challenge for US archivists in addition to adapting to new technology: operating within a social milieu that frequently overlooks and under-invests in collective memory repositories, including archives. With this decay, it is crucial to recognize, prioritize, and advocate for archival labor, resources, and training for those who are responsible for managing digital infrastructures, preserving collections, and teaching critical thinking through primary sources. Otherwise, an integral part of our civic life and cultural heritage will inevitably vanish.

Today the archives profession stands at a critical juncture as generative artificial intelligence becomes part of our daily lives. Generative AI’s rapid impact on society reminds me of the 1990s when the internet became mainstream. However, the wider use of AI has led to a deep questioning of what is true and real given how much easier it is to create videos, photos, sounds, and documents that seem credible, authentic, and authoritative. Merely evaluating fake news is no longer enough; we must also adopt an even more critical eye to deduce disinformation. As archivists, we are entrusted with stewarding society’s collective memory, facilitating

---

2 Generative AI refers to a subset of artificial intelligence that specializes in creating new, original content, often based on patterns or structures learned from existing data.
access to primary sources, and teaching people how to enhance their research and evaluation skills with historical materials. Thus, it is archivists’ duty to navigate the ethical complexities and challenges posed by generative AI, while simultaneously harnessing its potential to improve the profession’s work.

As early as 2021, the United Nations highlighted the dire necessity for governing generative AI due to concerns around privacy and monitoring. Their report, titled “Urgent Action Needed over Artificial Intelligence Risks to Human Rights,” identified challenges across health, education, and fundamental rights like mobility and speech. The crux of these worries lies in the unparalleled advantage AI provides to states, enterprises, and individual users, potentially magnifying power imbalances via extensive data monitoring and harvesting. In the US, while the moral quandaries presented by AI span from job losses to ecological repercussions, responses are being formulated from legal, commercial, societal, and pedagogical angles. For instance, the White House’s Office of Science and Technology Policy introduced a draft for an AI Bill of Rights. A federal judge in Washington, DC, decreed that AI-created art isn’t subject to copyright, and numerous experts from both the industry and academia are calling for a halt in AI rollouts.

A testament to its rapid ascent, when American Archivist sought my insights in January 2023, generative AI was relatively unknown to the public. Soon after, I began experimenting with OpenAI’s ChatGPT by adding it into many of my workflows, firmly believing in its revolutionary potential and my desires to engage in critical dialogue about its use and impact on labor, education, writing, and research. Such engagements have intensified my thoughts on the ripple effects of generative AI on public scholarship, library science, and community informatics domain. Every day I find myself introducing it to undergraduate and graduate students learning, teaching, and researching within the public humanities. I recently consulted a graduate student on how to utilize ChatGPT to help them facilitate oral history and website content translations showcased on the Casa y Comunidad public humanities initiative. Outside of university, this graduate student is a professional English and Spanish translator and shared that using ChatGPT left them with more time for content reviews and analysis instead of translating from scratch. Professionally, ChatGPT has given me the ability to write technical instructions faster and create better step-by-step technology guides for mapping data visualizations with ArcGIS Online than guides I have found online. Two specific examples to highlight include formatting closed caption files using Web VTT’s

---

encoding requirements and creating a geospatial flow map visualizing enplanement data for the Hurricane María Story (tentative title before launch) authored by Joel A. Blanco-Rivera.\textsuperscript{9} In both cases, what took the computer less than two minutes to write or research would have taken me at least thirty to sixty minutes. Instead, I spent five to ten minutes reviewing and minimally correcting the bot’s accurate instructions. Beyond aiding in technical and academic writing, this tool proves invaluable in supporting students and researchers—be it through troubleshooting code, transforming data from Markdown to HTML or XML to JSON, or copyediting communications.

Regardless of these benefits, I cannot overlook the potential trade-offs associated with AI adoption, including concerns about the preservation of our dignity, security, privacy, education, environment, labor, health, and cultures. AI products like OpenAI’s GPT-4 raise transparency issues concerning the hardware, training models, and architecture of their algorithms. Companies that make AI products often attribute this lack of disclosure to competitive markets and safety considerations, but this raises the question of whether we can trust companies that give individuals worldwide, with high-speed internet access, the ability to partake in a global experiment that will profoundly impact our world.\textsuperscript{10} I wonder what Fleckner would think about generative AI and how it could transform archives. In ChatGPT, there is a tool that has essentially gone unchecked and is already heavily influencing the way information professionals work. For example, how many of you have already received bogus user requests for items in archival collections that don’t exist?

Archivists are still experimenting with generative AI, and distrust in this type of AI is valid because of the secrecy surrounding algorithms and datasets, and the implications that its adoption could have on our future. Returning to Fleckner, archives serve a role in upholding public trust because records are supposed to be authentic, secure, and safeguarded. As generative AI continues to advance, what will this mean for our users who want more data mining capabilities with APIs? I question whether archives can meet this projected user need considering the lack of funding, technology, policy, and people we have available.

As the line between humans and machines becomes more blurred, we are ushered into an age of introspection and innovation, and we must tread with curiosity and caution. How do we reconcile the swift advancements of generative AI with the core tenets of archival authenticity and trustworthiness? While adopting generative AI

\textsuperscript{9} Joel Blanco-Rivera, “The Hurricane María Project,” The Hurricane María Project, 2023, https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7123dd41f83c4a578b2b49aa4fd797ff.

\textsuperscript{10} The difference between GPT-3.5 and GPT-4 is that GPT-4 can comprehend and produce various dialects and react to emotions conveyed in the text, leading to more precise and cohesive answers. It can also synthesize information from multiple sources and can produce stories with steady narratives and has the ability for complex problem solving. Eric Griffin, “GPT-4 vs. ChatGPT-3.5: What’s the Difference? | PCMag,” GPT-4 vs. ChatGPT-3.5: What’s the Difference?, March 16, 2023, https://www.pcmag.com/news/the-new-chatgpt-what-you-get-with-gpt-4-vs-gpt-35.
could augment our professional capabilities, making us more efficient and responsive to evolving archives users and archival labor demands, it simultaneously requires vigilant oversight to ensure its alignment with our core professional values. The convergence of these principles, as evoked by Fleckner, and future technology necessitates a reassessment. Archivists must strike a delicate balance, ensuring that the tools we embrace do not overshadow the responsibility we bear nor the capabilities we are given as funding and positions are lost. We may increasingly find ourselves in situations like many archives today: unable to sustain technology infrastructures on their own, paying large invoices to vendors to keep platforms running, or gridlocked into deals they cannot get out of for years, all to meet user demands.

Fleckner accurately underscored the vital role of archivists in education. Yet, he didn’t explore how archivists might guide individuals in crafting and utilizing primary sources via digital avenues to strength democracy. Additionally, he didn’t touch on how web platforms, coupled with digital curation and preservation techniques, can provide avenues for individuals to enhance their research skills and foster critical analysis. Current examples include storytelling and collections-oriented platforms like Omeka, CollectionBuilder, ESRI StoryMaps and ArcGIS, and WordPress, which can be used as vehicles to learn about the past, current, and desired future world.11 As a public scholarship librarian at the University of Oregon (UO) Libraries, guiding individuals to use primary sources through digital tools is one of my primary duties. Public scholarship brings academics and the broader public together to share knowledge and encourage conversation about relevant social and political events impacting American and global democratic societies.12 Within this context, I engage research and learning that connects academic scholarship with the public’s interest in situating and comprehending contemporary events. Integral to my role is imparting and sharing information, visual, digital, archival, and data literacies fluencies, all of which is anchored within the ethos of ethical digital stewardship and using primary sources for storytelling. Learning achievements occur when individuals participate in hands-on knowledge production and evaluation by way of digital curation, preservation, and research exploration using interactive technologies. My collaborations with faculty and students also extend to community partners who engage in memory work outside of the academy. Within these spaces, I not only typically aid in the development and implementation of public scholarship projects but also wear the hat of consultant, one adept in open access, data management, community engagement, accessibility, and technology sustainability for sharing creative works. I see myself as an

educator, investigator, and information expert who offers insights enhancing individual experiences within academic spheres and beyond. By concentrating on prevalent popular culture subjects and facets that go beyond the boundaries of higher education, I prioritize and impart skills related to community informatics, coupled with the dissemination of digital stewardship methodologies. An application of this type of sharing involves fostering and maintaining relationships with teachers and researchers who center digital service-learning and building open digital projects associated with the public humanities.

Reflecting upon Fleckner’s insights about the rapid progression of technology and the archivist’s essential educational role, I fulfill this function and take it a step further by making library and archives relevant and authentic to service-learning. I advise and teach scholars how to strategize the creation of long-lasting websites that community members can use in perpetuity, choose appropriate website hosting solutions at institutions or self-hosted solutions like Reclaim Hosting, and discern what community stakeholders and target audiences get from the public dissemination of research while improving how scholars and the public collaborate to make their knowledge ethically available. I also teach how to organize and collate data from ethnographic research studies and community projects and how to analyze digital objects from museums, libraries, and archives. I help people archive digital research collections with institutions or community organizations and collaborate with curators, community members, faculty, and students around the custody, control, and care of objects on their way for storage and access at universities. While doing so, I diligently apply digital preservation and curation theory and practices ensuring digital object longevity and reproducibility, and advocate for ethics around web accessibility, open access, data management, writing for the web, intellectual property rights, attribution and citation, and creditable information resources. Additionally, I steer digital project designs that anticipate technological redundancy and potential data corruption and choose proprietary and open-source minimal computing approaches that attempt to simplify intricate website projects, harnessing best practices in digital curation to strategically handle tech initiatives, especially those with small teams lacking sustained funding.

---

15 For more information about socio-technological challenges that come with sustaining technology, or one-off grant funded digital projects connected to faculty and community driven projects, see Roopika Risam and Alex Gil, “Introduction: The Questions of Minimal Computing,” Digital Humanities Quarterly 016, no. 2 (2022), http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/16/2/000646/000646.html. Minimal computing is a method within the digital humanities that connects to digital curation and digital preservation, but emphasizes questions and provides solutions for doing digital cultural heritage, community informatics, and open scholarship projects.
One of the most rewarding aspects of being a public scholarship librarian is witnessing learners, community members, and academics make authentic connections to their own lives and question the underlying principles and practices of how archival science and computer science influence them.\footnote{Franny Gaede et al., “Afro-Indigenous Women Healers in the Caribbean and Its Diasporas: A Decolonial Digital Humanities Project (Forthcoming),” Digital Humanities Quarterly, 2022; Mattie Burket and Kate Thornhill, “The Environmental Justice Research Repository,” Environmental Justice Research Repository, 2022, \url{https://learn-static.github.io/eng-470/}; Bark, “Bark: Defend and Restore Mt. Hood,” Bark, 2023, \url{https://bark-out.org/}.} I don’t think this feeling or thought is any different from other archivist and librarian experiences, though. Seeing positive change in other humans is beautiful. But now I wonder if it is time for archivists to start having discussion about how our roles will and can change. I question what types of public scholarship projects I will encounter in the future since the evolution and access to generative AI. What will storytelling be like? How about research data collection and production workflows? And how fluent in AI should I be to continue to effectively center archival and socio-technological education with the people I partner and collaborate with, now and in the future?

Like Fleckner, I believe archivists should advocate for the existence of archives through relationships, trust building, and education. In the same light, we can incorporate why archives are important into public scholarship work. This scholarly communication reaches beyond the academy and pairs well with how our society connects with each other through web technologies and publications. Archives play a crucial role in bringing the past, present, and future together by positioning historical and contemporary content within critical narratives about issues relevant to the public. How the coming AI technology revolution plays a part in archival work has yet to be determined, but nonetheless will influence how we preserve and share special collections and archives and how we collaborate and teach people about access, authenticity, power, and stewardship.