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NEA

# NEWSLETTER

NEW ENGLAND ARCHIVISTS



**C O V E R** — Storyteller Daisy Turner (1883–1988), a native of Grafton, Vermont, circa 1984. Photo by Vermont Folklife Center founder Jane C. Beck, who conducted oral history recordings with Turner between 1983 and 1988. Turner’s stories begin with her grandfather’s abduction on the West African coast and enslavement in the United States. She describes her father’s life as an enslaved laborer in Virginia, his self-emancipation, and his experiences during the Civil War. She also details her own long, rich life in Vermont and Boston. These stories are now recounted in *Turner Family Stories: From Enslavement in Virginia to Freedom in Vermont*, a nonfiction comics anthology. For comic panels, turn to page 6 and page 15. *Courtesy of the Vermont Folklife Center Archive.*

**I N S I D E** — Alexandra Bush of the Massachusetts Historical Society discusses interdepartmental collaboration while working from home (page 4); Thomas Lester and Violet Hurst of the Archdiocese of Boston describe the digital mapping tools they developed (page 10); recipients of the Inclusion and Diversity Scholarship share suggestions for more inclusive description practices (page 16); Sally Blanchard-O’Brien reviews Preservica Starter (page 14); we spotlight *Newsletter* editor Vanessa Formato (page 19); NEA President Genna Duplisea envisions “an archival practice of abundance” (page 6); NEA members and local repositories share their latest news (page 7); and the Teaching with Primary Sources and Community Archives Advocates Roundtables provide updates on their activities (page 18).

TAKING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE



# New England Archivists

TAKING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

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**Articles** and **News** of interest to NEA members as well as other archivists and allied professionals should be sent for consideration to <[newsletter@newenglandarchivists.org](mailto:newsletter@newenglandarchivists.org)>.

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# From the Editors

- Katy Sternberger

In this newsletter, we have two feature articles. The first is written by Alexandra Bush of the Massachusetts Historical Society, who shares the challenges and successes of an interdepartmental digitization and calendaring project while working from home (page 4). Next, Thomas Lester and Violet Hurst of the Archdiocese of Boston describe two digital mapping tools they developed using ArcGIS software (page 10).

NEA President Genna Duplisea discusses austerity in the profession and envisions “an archival practice of abundance” (page 6). The Inclusion and Diversity Committee presents the recipients of this year’s Inclusion and Diversity Scholarship, Miranda Villevik and Raananah Sarid-Segal, who describe their efforts to make metadata more inclusive at the GBH Media Library and Archives (page 16).

In addition, Sally Blanchard-O’Brien reviews *Preservica* Starter edition (page 14). We also spotlight *NEA News-*

*letter* editor Vanessa Formato (page 19). As always, NEA members and local repositories share their latest news (page 7), and the Teaching with Primary Sources and Community Archives Advocates Roundtables provide updates on their activities (page 18).

While this issue is the last during my term on the Newsletter Committee, I am pleased to introduce the next News and Notes Editor, Jessica Holden. Reflecting on the last three years, I marvel at the level of volunteerism within New England Archivists. This organization depends solely on those who are willing to serve, and the NEA Executive Board is dedicated and undaunted by obstacles. We have many talented archivists in New England.

In particular, colleagues at both the regional and national levels have told me on several occasions that the *NEA Newsletter* is a valued resource for the profession. The *Newsletter* offers multiple ways for you to get involved with your regional association: serve on the Newsletter Committee, contribute a feature article, review an online resource or tool, write a session report during the fall or spring meeting—and more. Get in touch with the editors at [newsletter@newenglandarchivists.org](mailto:newsletter@newenglandarchivists.org). ■



## REGISTER NOW!

For fall 2021, NEA has partnered with NEDCC to present a meeting focused on preservation. The program includes a premeeting virtual workshop; sessions on disaster planning and preservation toolkits, preservation grants, and preserving nonpaper based items;

[newenglandarchivists.org/Fall-2021](http://newenglandarchivists.org/Fall-2021) | #NEAfall2021

a plenary address by Christine McCarthy, director of the Yale Library’s Center for Preservation & Conservation; and a behind-the-scenes tour of NEDCC labs. **Join us on October 22nd** for this one-day virtual event and become inspired to Save (It) Yourselves!

## ARCHIVAL INSIGHT

Working Together, From a Distance:  
The Robert Treat Paine Legal Notes Project

By Alexandra Bush

Lately many have shared stories of successes and failures encountered in bringing archival work home. The Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS) shared in these experiences after closing its doors to the public and staff in late March 2020. Among others, members of the Library Collections Services (LCS) department faced a challenge—some types of work conform well to remote life, but what could those who work exclusively with physical collections do without building access? This article will describe one effort, led by the MHS Digital Team, to unite LCS around a project early in the pandemic.

Robert Treat Paine (1731–1814) was a Massachusetts lawyer and politician, a member of the First Continental Congress, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Known for his calm and pragmatic nature, he was a constant presence in local courts and bore witness to the birth of the United States legal system. His 1760–1788 courtroom notes, four large folios of hand-bound packets, are bursting with cases representing issues in early United States government as well as references to cases involving underrepresented groups, such as women and enslaved people. Paine's case notes are held at the MHS and make up a small portion of the sprawling collection encompassing his personal and professional life.

While the current collection guide provides detailed information relating to Paine's personal correspondence and several of his prominent legal cases, the legal notes referenced above are listed at the container level only. The high research value of the Paine papers inspired the MHS Publications Department to create a digital edition of portions of Paine's papers in 2018, and a year later they procured funding from a group of private donors to develop a grant proposal to create a digital edition of his legal notes. As part of the work toward the grant proposal, Publications enlisted the help of the Digital Team to create digital images of the legal notes.

After digitizing all four folios of notes, the Digital Team was asked to create a calendar of the legal cases therein—that is, to create an itemized list of cases according to their date, location, and subject. The completion of the months-long digitization process coincided conveniently with the beginning of the pandemic, leaving web delivery and calendaring, both of which could be done remotely. Images of the

legal notes were to be made accessible through the Paine papers' online finding aid, which meant extra work to rearrange and outfit the old XML file with links to the digitized pages. The process of calendaring, usually an early step in documentary editing to aid in transcription, was less familiar. Time trials indicated that calendaring one packet of notes, which ranged from 10 to 80 pages, took about thirty minutes. For the three-person Digital Team, each of whom was splitting their time between several projects, the nearly 3,700 pages of legal notes felt slightly daunting. Paine's notoriously messy handwriting, in its worst form in his rapid courtroom scrawlings, created another source of delay.

The idea to involve other members of LCS began with that messy handwriting. A few instances in which members of the Digital Team asked the LCS's seasoned transcribers for a second opinion on a word or phrase showed that the work went much faster with multiple eyes on the material. In addition, those members of LCS who were asked to help were grateful for an outlet for their skills during those first awkward weeks of the pandemic. Soon, the Paine project team expanded to encompass more than half of the LCS department.

The Digital Team developed a fully online, collaborative space for the project through Google Drive. Drive provided a workaround for internet issues and permitted synchronous work, allowing staff to easily compare what they had done. The project folder included a document with project guidelines, JPEG images of each page of the case notes, and a spreadsheet that held the calendar itself. Each staff member was assigned one folder of images at a time and recorded file name, court location, date, case title and subject, notes, and transcriber initials for each page of

the legal notes. This allowed project assistants to take note of cases that spanned multiple days or started and stopped across folios. It also allowed the Digital Team to map each calendared page to its corresponding image file. The project involved a review process in which a staff member was assigned a previously calendared set of pages and asked to double-check the transcription.

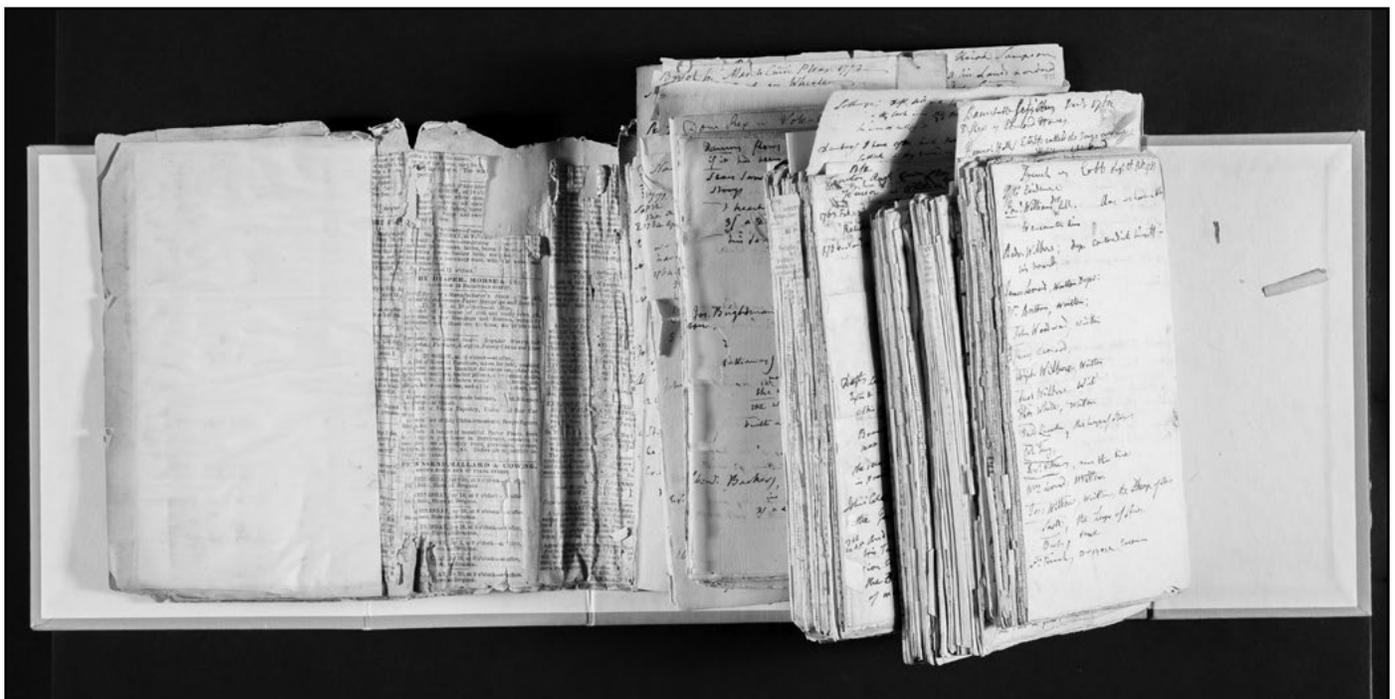
After the workspace was created and the images were uploaded, the collaborative portion of this project lasted about three months—a remarkable accomplishment considering the Digital Team’s initial time estimates. Taking into account unmarked pages and indecipherable handwriting, the Paine project collaborators calendared around 1,335 individual court cases.

As an early-pandemic initiative, the Robert Treat Paine calendaring project encouraged a higher level of collaboration across LCS than is common for departmental projects. It helped to promote comfort with fully online collaboration tools such as Zoom and Google Drive and encouraged staff who may otherwise have felt isolated to collaborate with others. An early highlight was one staff member’s discovery of a reference to a civil case involving Quock Walker, an enslaved man who successfully sued for his freedom. Another staff member remembers feeling excited when she discovered that Paine’s notes regarding *Rex v. Richardson*

referenced the trial of Ebenezer Richardson, whose murder of Christopher Seider contributed to the fervor that caused the Boston Massacre. ■



Alexandra Bush is the digital production specialist on the Massachusetts Historical Society’s Digital Team, a division of the Library Collections Services department. She also serves on the MHS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee. She is a graduate of Smith College and Simmons University.



Two views of a folio containing Robert Treat Paine's legal notes prior to conservation and imaging. *Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.*

# Inside NEA

FROM THE PRESIDENT

- Genna Duplisea



Once read an observation that archival management is about managing loss: some information will be lost to neglect, fire, flood, war, time. The further one looks outside the lens of past archivists' beliefs of what was acceptable to lose, the scarcer information is. The past several years underscored austerity—a logic of sacrifice and doing more with less—as another threat to the historical record.

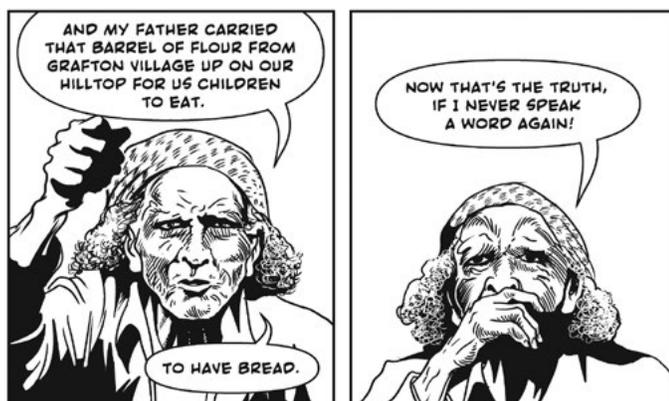
Scarcity and precarity marked the archivist job market long before the pandemic. Because the ineffable value of documentary records, community history, and personal memory (and people trained to manage them) is incalculable in an economic model for a financially lean organization, archives and archivists are too often deemed acceptable to lose or never to support at all. Austerity in archives means backlogs, narrowness of scope, and underrepresentation of stories outside the powerful hegemonies of history.

In “Archives after Austerity,” Caitlin Rizzo points out that “the most obvious solution to austerity becomes giving away capital,” and yet this solution “can only reproduce the same problem over and over again.” Tying the value of archives to a higher financial value does not change the scarcity model ruling it. Rizzo quotes Audre Lorde’s warning that the “master’s

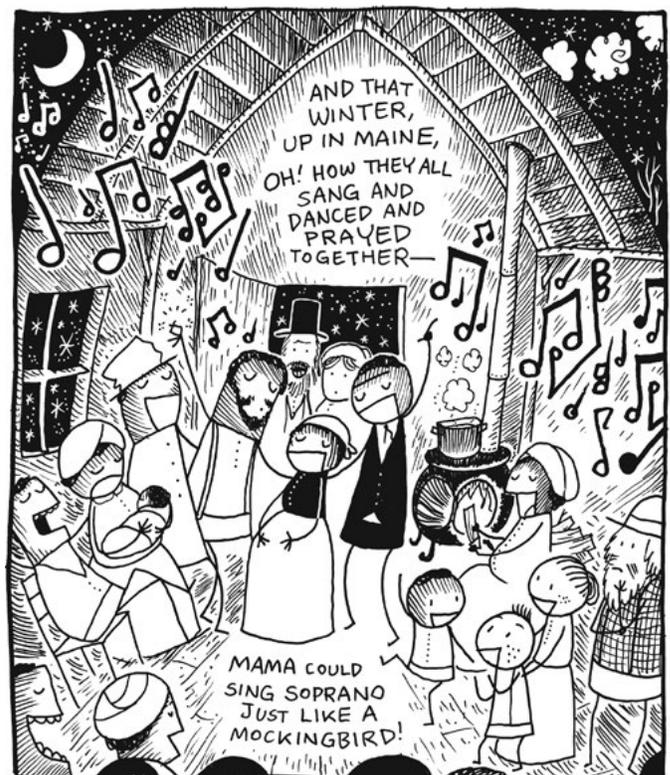
tools would never dismantle the master’s house.” Dorothy Berry relates, in “The House That Archives Built,” her efforts “to unlock ignored Black history from institutional strongholds through whatever means institutional boundaries allow.”<sup>2</sup> These austere boundaries are welded to business practices that produce scarcity in jobs, collections, and memory.

What would an archival practice of abundance look like? Both of these essays, far more complex than I can summarize here, illuminate the roadblocks that scarcity has imposed on archives and ask what alternatives we can build. Let us imagine how we could attend to memory under a paradigm oriented toward an abundance of ideas, history, community, and joy. This work of hoping, dreaming, and planning is vital to a future of collective abundance. ■

1. Caitlin Rizzo, “Archives after Austerity,” *Acid Free* 13 (2021), <<http://laacollective.org/work/archives-after-austerity>>.
2. Dorothy Berry, “The House That Archives Built,” *up//root*, June 22, 2021, <<https://www.uproot.space/features/the-house-archives-built>>.



In this comic panel, Daisy Turner tells a story of her father, Alec. Art by Ezra Veitch from *Turner Family Stories: From Enslavement in Virginia to Freedom in Vermont*. For more information, visit <<https://vtfolklife.org/turner-family-stories>>. Courtesy of the Vermont Folklife Center.



This comic panel depicts a prayer meeting at Merrill's Slate Quarry in Williamsburg, Maine, circa 1870. Art by Marek Bennett from *Turner Family Stories: From Enslavement in Virginia to Freedom in Vermont*. Courtesy of the Vermont Folklife Center.

# News and Notes

## CONNECTICUT

### Jewish Historical Society Receives Grant to Digitize Oral Histories

In May, the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Hartford (JHSGH) received a grant from the Beatrice Auerbach Foundation Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation that will support the digitization of its oral history collection. This funding will cover the costs of digitizing the tapes, creating transcripts, and cataloging the recordings to enable researchers to find topics of interest.

The collection includes more than one thousand interviews conducted with community members over the past fifty years. In the coming year, the digitized recordings will be made available on the JHSGH Omeka portal at <<https://jhsgh.org/omeka-s/s/oral-histories>>. A sampling of the collection is already available there. The interviews will also be made available on statewide repositories, including the Connecticut Digital Archive and Connecticut's Archives Online.

Founded in 1971, the Jewish Historical Society focuses on telling the stories and preserving the history of Greater Hartford's Jewish community. For more information, contact executive director Elizabeth Rose at 860-727-6171 or <[erose@jewishhartford.org](mailto:erose@jewishhartford.org)>.

### Collection of Surrealist Artist Reprocessed at Mattatuck Museum

Kay Sage (1898–1963) was a surrealist artist. In 1939, Sage and her husband, Yves Tanguy, left Paris and purchased a house in Woodbury, Connecticut. After her death in 1963, a large collection of both art and archival material was donated to the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, Connecticut, by her estate. In 2021, the museum finished an extensive renovation, and lone arranger Stephanie Crawford reprocessed the Kay Sage Collection.

Sage's archival collection contains correspondence, notebooks, exhibition catalogs, published volumes of poetry, and photographs of artwork as well as a photocopy of her unpublished autobiography, *China Eggs*, in which Sage has



Photograph of Kay Sage by Alexandra Darrow, circa 1955. M-71. *Courtesy of the Max R. Taurig Library and Archive, Mattatuck Museum.*

a conversation with herself and voices her inner thoughts. The Mattatuck Museum also has a large collection of Sage's artwork and a rare book and surrealist ephemera collection. The finding aid is available at: <[https://archives.library.wcsu.edu/caoSearch/catalog/ctwmhi\\_2021-M071](https://archives.library.wcsu.edu/caoSearch/catalog/ctwmhi_2021-M071)>.

### CoSA, NHPRC Recognize CT SHRAB with Award of Merit

The Connecticut State Historical Records Advisory Board (CT SHRAB) is the 2021 recipient of the SHRAB Award of Merit from the Council of State Archivists (CoSA) and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). State archivist Lizette Pelletier coordinates the CT SHRAB.

The award in part recognizes two innovative programs the CT SHRAB introduced in partnership with Conservation ConneCTion. These programs, the Traveling Archivist Implementation Grant and the Online Digitization Workshop Series, designed before COVID-19, were quickly adapted to meet the challenges presented by the pandemic. The CT SHRAB developed these projects with funding from the NHPRC.

The Traveling Archivist Implementation Grant, a pilot regrant program, was designed to support institutions lacking the financial means and professional staff to implement recommendations from archival assessments provided ear-

lier by the Traveling Archivist Program. In addition, the CT SHRAB produced a five-part digitization online workshop using Google Classroom, which mimicked a live workshop and provided real-time, hands-on remote learning on all stages of digitization.

## M A I N E

### New Podcast Celebrates Franco-American Stories in Maine

The Franco-American Collection at the University of Southern Maine's Lewiston-Auburn College announced a new podcast, *Franco-American Pathways* (*Chemins Franco-Américains*), dedicated to celebrating the history and culture of the Franco-Americans of Maine. The pilot episode launched in May. The podcast incorporates written and audiovisual documents housed at the Franco-American Collection to explore Franco-American culture, history, and identity.

Tune in on the last Thursday of every month as hosts Julia Rhineland, Anna Faherty, and Maureen Perry share new stories and conversations. Find the podcast on Spotify and other players. Follow the show on social media and on the podcast website, available at <<https://francopathwayspod.wordpress.com>>.



In May, the Franco-American Collection at the University of Southern Maine launched the *Franco-American Pathways* podcast, celebrating the history and culture of the Franco-Americans of Maine. *Courtesy of the Franco-American Collection at the University of Southern Maine.*

As the show evolves, the hosts hope to connect with bilingual members of the Franco-American community to realize a dream of having every episode available entirely in French as well as English, especially French as it is spoken by Francos and Canadian-Americans. For questions or more information, contact <[julia.rhineland@maine.edu](mailto:julia.rhineland@maine.edu)>.

### Maine State Archives Digitizes and Transcribes Historical Legislative Journals

The Maine State Archives (MSA) and Maine Law and Legislative Reference Library (LLRL) have completed digitization of the journals of the Maine Legislature, 1820 to 1845. The project was funded by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

Spurred by the bicentennial of Maine's statehood in 2020, the MSA and LLRL aimed to make the unpublished journals from the first years of the legislature accessible to the public. These journals document the development of Maine as a new state, addressing a range of issues from establishing a new relationship with the local Indigenous people to distributing land previously owned by Massachusetts and settling the border with Canada.

In addition to digital imaging, the earliest journals have been transcribed to allow increased access to the contents. The journals are recorded in the MSA catalog and can be viewed and downloaded from the Digital Maine Repository at <[https://digitalmaine.com/arc\\_leg\\_journals](https://digitalmaine.com/arc_leg_journals)>.

For more information, contact Maine State Archivist Katherine McBrien at <[katherine.mcbrrien@maine.gov](mailto:katherine.mcbrrien@maine.gov)> or John Melendez-Barden, director of the LLRL, at <[John.Melendez-Barden@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:John.Melendez-Barden@legislature.maine.gov)>.

## N E W H A M P S H I R E

### Portsmouth Athenaeum's First Set of Historical School Records Available in New NEHGS Database

The Portsmouth Athenaeum and New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) announced the database *Portsmouth, NH: High School Students, 1846-1902*. In partnership with NEHGS and the Portsmouth Public Li-

brary (PPL), the Athenaeum is digitizing and preserving the records of the Portsmouth School Department, dating from 1846 to 1935. The Athenaeum has held the city's historical school records since 1991. Following digitization, the original records will be housed at the PPL.

This new database constitutes the first set of records to be scanned and indexed. It includes eight volumes with more than 2,300 pages of information about high school students and includes more than 50,000 searchable names. The records contain genealogical data, such as birth dates, guardian names, and addresses, as well as details about teachers and curriculum.

The new database is available online via NEHGS at <<https://www.americanancestors.org>>. For more information about the Portsmouth Athenaeum, visit <<https://portsmouthathenaeum.org>>.

Visit NEA online at:

<[www.newenglandarchivists.org](http://www.newenglandarchivists.org)>

## VERMONT

### Vermont Historical Records Program Receives NHPRC Grant for Statewide Initiatives

The Vermont Historical Records Program (VHRP), a program of the Vermont Historical Records Advisory Board based at the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration, was awarded a State Board Programing Grant by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, beginning in July. The grant will fund new statewide initiatives, such as a mobile digitization unit and environmental monitoring program, and will support existing services that include training and site visit assessments.

The VHRP has also completed a statewide survey of the state of historical records in Vermont, which will help inform the services provided to Vermont's historical records repositories. The survey is a follow-up to Vermont's 2008 Connecting to Collections survey, which was based on the national Heritage Health Index survey of 2005. For more information about the VHRP or any of these initiatives, contact <[sos.vhrp@vermont.gov](mailto:sos.vhrp@vermont.gov)>. ■

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After deciding upon a time period, we compiled a spreadsheet with parish names, establishment dates, closing dates (when applicable), and addresses. If addresses no longer exist due to urban renewal, street name changes, or building projects, parishes were instead plotted with geographical coordinates. These spreadsheets were saved as .csv files and uploaded in batches into ArcGIS, which plotted the churches onto a basemap. Parish boundaries were then entered manually, tracing the outline by hand using the area tool in ArcGIS’s map notes feature and added as a layer on top of the basemap.

This new parish boundary map was not only a cleaner and more user-friendly visual representation of our analog maps, but it also allowed access to those outside of the library. Previously, archive staff would have to map each address manually for patrons, entering the address in Google Maps then finding the approximate location on one of the analog maps. Now, users can enter an address, which is automatically plotted on the ArcGIS map and shows the parish in which it falls.

We plan to continue improving this map to include historic photographs of each parish church and links

for users to navigate directly to the sacramental records available online for each parish. We also hope to create additional maps representing the archdiocese at other points in time, possibly incorporating these into one map to show how parishes have changed throughout history, from one parish encompassing all of New England, to about 425 parishes in the eastern third of Massachusetts (circa 1955), to the present where there are about 235 parishes in the same space.

After completing the parish boundary map, we used the same software to start mapping archdiocesan cemeteries, a project still in progress. For many of our Catholic cemeteries, there were either no maps at all or very old representations that required updates. We visited cemeteries and were able to map roads, some of which are not named on a typical street map, and noted landmarks such as entrances, exits, flag poles, mausoleums, monuments, offices, statues, and special sections designated for the burials of clergy, infants, and religious. For each landmark, users can click on the icon representing it to see a photograph taken during our visits. Wherever possible, we also included narrative or iconographical descriptions showing the arrangement of sections, ranges, and grave numbers.

**LUCIDEA**

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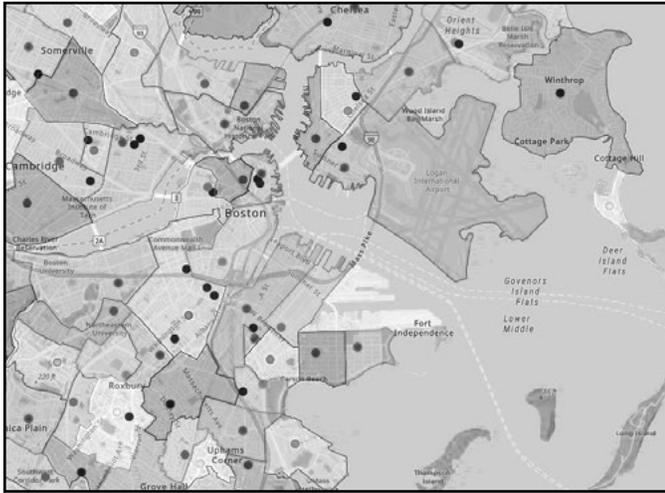
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The new parish boundary map created in ArcGIS was not only a cleaner and more user-friendly visual representation of the analog maps, but it also allowed access to those outside of the library. *Courtesy of the Archdiocese of Boston.*

Our hope is to help visitors find a given plot from its section, row, and grave number as listed in our records. In order to promote the use of these maps, we have worked with the Catholic Cemetery Association of the Archdiocese of Boston to place lawn signs with QR codes linking to the map at cemetery entrances. We are working on incorporating these into permanent signs at each location.

Links to both the parish boundary map tool and cemetery maps can be found at <https://www.bostoncatholic.org/researcher-resources>.

After working on these projects, it is clear that there are myriad ways that an application like ArcGIS could be useful to other organizations. A few examples include use by historical societies to plot early settlements in a town using census records or by university libraries to plot students' hometowns and therefore geographic diversity within the institution. For a more timely example, we have even seen the software used for maps depicting COVID-19 spread and density in a given area.

It is worth noting that there is a substantial amount of data built into ESRI's ArcGIS for the purposes of data visualization or analytics. For example, there are several preset basemaps included in the application, such as street, topographical, and satellite maps. Boundaries and labels for entities such as cities and towns can be added or removed as needed. Also incorporated is data from the US Census so that reports on population density, average income, and

other statistics can be rendered for a specific area represented on the map. ■



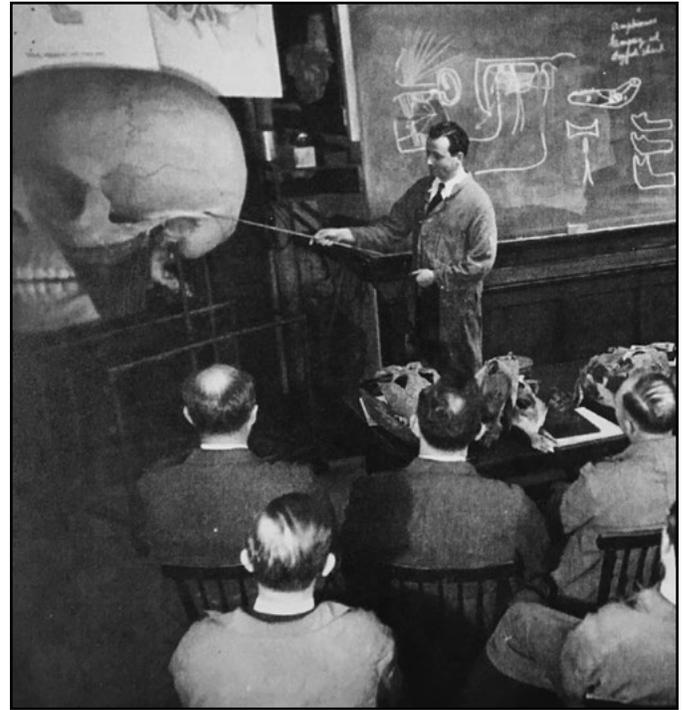
Thomas Lester is the director of the Archive & Library at the Archdiocese of Boston. He oversees all aspects of the archive, library, and records management for archdiocesan administration, parishes, and schools. A graduate of Simmons University (MA History/MS Archives Management), he previously worked at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, and Tufts University School of Medicine.



Violet Hurst is an archivist at the Archdiocese of Boston. One of her major contributions since joining in March 2020 has been inputting data into ArcGIS to make the parish and cemetery map projects possible. She also contributes to the archdiocesan newspaper, provides reference and outreach to patrons, and processes collections. A graduate of Boston College and UMass Boston (MA History, Archives Track), she previously worked at the Dedham Historical Society and New Bedford Public Library.



Professor Lawrence Kupferman teaching a painting class, circa 1930–1960. *Courtesy of the Massachusetts College of Art and Design Archives.*



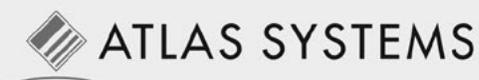
From 1903 to 1939, Dr. Harris Peyton Mosher taught his famed Mosher Course in head and neck anatomy at Harvard Medical School (HMS). These photographs show the postgraduate course in action, complete with a larger-than-life model skull. Although Dr. Mosher, who served as the first chief of otology and laryngology at HMS, was a prolific creator of medical teaching models, the skull shown here was built from papier-mâché and plaster by J. H. Emerton in 1892. The skull can now be found in the Warren Anatomical Museum. *Courtesy of the Abraham Pollen Archives of Massachusetts Eye and Ear.*

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# Reviews

## Preservica Starter

<<https://starter.preservica.com>>

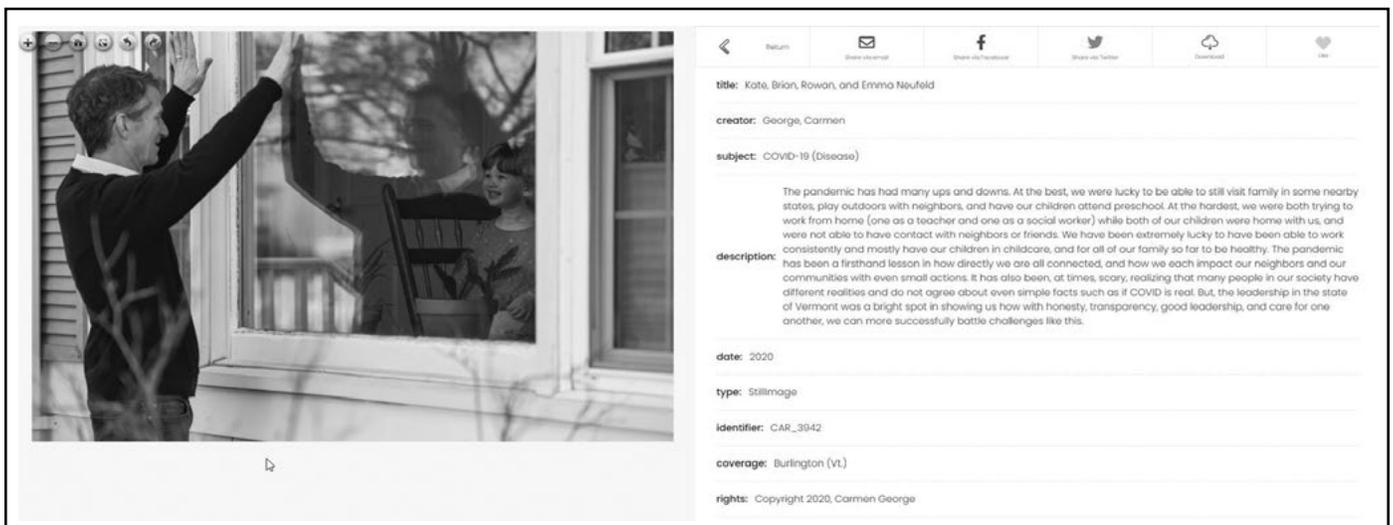
- Reviewed by Sally Blanchard-O'Brien, Roving Archivist for the Vermont Historical Records Program at the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration

In 2020, Preservica launched a free version of their digital preservation platform called Starter edition <<https://starter.preservica.com>>, billed as a way to simplify digital preservation, enabling users to quickly start with preserving their digital assets. Designed in alignment with the Open Archival Information System reference model and the National Digital Stewardship Alliance, Starter has numerous capabilities, including easy hierarchical organization, the use of standard templates for metadata that can be uploaded in bulk, full-text search, reporting, multiple file upload options, cloud storage, built-in playback and rendering, preservation history audit trail, and automated digital preservation. It also includes a built-in public access portal with the ability to manage public access to files and folders. Starter is free, with 5 GB of storage and one user account. If more storage and user accounts are needed, you can upgrade to the higher-level Starter Plus package for a cost, which allows 250 GB of storage, three users, and more robust features, such as bulk metadata editing and site branding.

One of Preservica's goals in the Starter edition was to make the system intuitive for both the system manager and

the public end user. A big piece of this was making digital preservation steps fully automated without the need to manually perform workflows, essentially building off of the digital preservation technology they already do well with a scaled-down interface for easier use. The target audience is broad, intended for any private or public sector institution with digital records to preserve, including government agencies, academic institutions, and nonprofit cultural institutions.

The Vermont Historical Records Program (VHRP) initially used Starter as a beta tester, along with four other institutions around Vermont. We used two COVID-19 documentation photograph collections as our pilot, and the other beta testers used the system for a variety of other uses, including the storage and rendering of complex 3D architectural files, as an online exhibit, and as a dark archive. After several months of testing, the group of beta testers met in January 2021 for a debrief on their experiences with the product and found many benefits in Starter's list of features. The use of MODS and Dublin Core allows for compatibility with the schema that many repositories are already using. Starter's public interface is fairly simple and easy to use, along with the back end for managing the assets, and files can easily be turned on or off for public access. The robust help guides, documentation, and user forum provide assistance. Automated preservation workflows serve as an antidote to the complexity that is often a deterrent to undertaking digital preservation. And through the automated preservation, the system renders any obsolete files that you may be otherwise unable to access.



View of a digital asset in Preservica Starter edition's public access portal for the Vermont Historical Records Program. The image is of Brian and Rowan Neufeld, taken by Burlington, Vermont, photographer Carmen George.

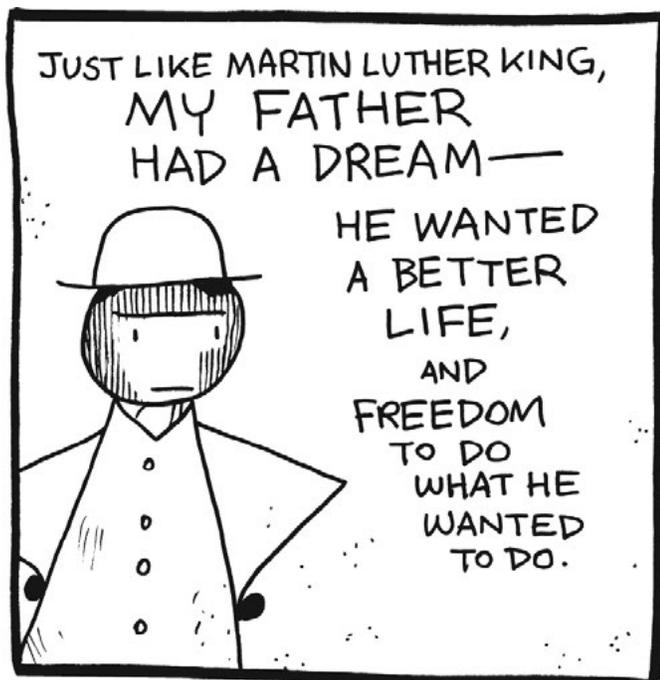
The most obvious benefit might be that Starter is free; however, this comes at a loss of some functionality. Currently, the free version is for a single user only, so it is difficult if you have multiple people on your team who would be ingesting digital assets and descriptive metadata. Additionally, there is very limited storage and no ability to bulk edit metadata. You cannot brand your site or customize your URL without creating a separate shortened link through a URL shortener like Bitly or TinyURL. All of these problems can be solved by upgrading to the paid version, of course, but the \$199 per month price tag can be cost prohibitive for many smaller organizations. One of the biggest problems with Starter is that there is not currently a way to harvest metadata from the platform to either push to or combine with another system. If you are managing a discovery portal that connects to different digital repositories, there may not be a way yet to make your Starter metadata automatically ingestible into that portal.

Overall, Starter is a good introductory system, a basic option that works best for smaller institutions with limited time and resources or who have not previously attempted digital preservation. Different institutions have different wants and needs, and it's hard to be all things to all people; some want a full digital repository, others a dark archive or public exhibit portal. Starter is not really a full version of any of these things,

but it is, as the name suggests, a start. Some other possibilities could be to use it as storage and access for obsolete materials, as storage for materials that are then exhibited more robustly on another platform, or even as a proof of concept for larger projects that need more of a financial investment. As one beta tester put it, "Starter is a great catalyst for conversations." And there's not really anything to lose if you're just trying to get started somewhere. With no cost and your assets and metadata not locked into a contract, it's a way to learn more about digital preservation and to protect your digital assets now while you consider building a more robust program.

It is important to note that this product is a work in progress. The Preservica team is in constant development mode and has addressed some concerns. At the time of the beta tester meeting, bulk metadata uploading was not possible, which was a major problem for many test users, but that functionality was made available to all users earlier this year. (For full disclosure, it should be mentioned that Preservica ultimately offered many of the paid Starter Plus features to all beta testers and user group members). Preservica is listening to concerns throughout development and working with the user base to make improvements, so Starter edition's capabilities are evolving and changing.

You can see the VHRP's instance of Starter edition in action at <<https://bit.ly/vhrpdigitalrepository>>. ■



In this comic panel, Daisy Turner's father, Alec, ponders his future after the end of the Civil War. Art by Marek Bennett from *Turner Family Stories: From Enslavement in Virginia to Freedom in Vermont*. Courtesy of the Vermont Folklife Center.



In this comic panel, Daisy Turner is visited by an apparition of her father, Alec. Art by Lillie Harris from *Turner Family Stories: From Enslavement in Virginia to Freedom in Vermont*. Courtesy of the Vermont Folklife Center.



# From IDEAs to Action

About the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, social justice, and diversity within the archives profession and NEA.

Making Metadata Inclusive to Marginalized Peoples

By Raananah Sarid-Segal and Miranda Villevik

*In this newsletter, the Inclusion and Diversity Committee is happy to showcase the work of Miranda Villevik and Raananah Sarid-Segal, both of the GBH Media Library and Archives, who were the 2021 recipients of the Inclusion and Diversity Scholarship for their session at the virtual spring meeting.*

As calls for social justice became louder and more urgent in 2020 following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, professionals across the United States are increasingly reckoning with their roles within unequal systems and their responsibility to work toward justice in their fields. As a result of the protests and our nation's growing awareness of systemic racism and inequality, GBH, originally known as WGBH, a Boston-based public broadcasting creator and distributor first established in 1951, is attempting to do better. It implemented regular diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) talks; added training on respect and microaggressions; and named its first chief inclusion and equity officer. As archivists, we recognized that an immediate step we could take to improve representation and accessibility to the archives was updating our subject terms list. We aimed to create a list reflective of the world while adequately describing the contents of GBH's collection; fostering specificity and searchability; providing for better representation and equity in our terminology; and using neutral language to avoid casting moral aspersions, especially toward marginalized groups.

Of course, the categorization of people, things, and ideas is impacted by societal assumptions about the subjects being cataloged. For instance, materials about men are often cataloged differently from materials about women as we make assumptions about "male" or "female" activities (as an example, consider Library of Congress Subject Headings "Firefighters" versus "Female Firefighters"). Similar assumptions are made along the lines of race, sexuality, and gender identity. Assumptions about the default tend to skew white, male, cisgender, and heterosexual. Since the

subject terms we use not only help us find items but have an impact on how our users perceive, approach, and understand the materials in our collection, we wanted to focus on making our terms more accessible and equitable. With this in mind, we selected four terms of particular concern: "Race and Ethnicity," "LGBT," "Social Issues," and "Law Enforcement and Crime." While these terms had in the past allowed for discovery of relevant items, we recognized some serious flaws with each of these terms.

**LGBT:** We found that "LGBT" was not reflective of current usage of the acronym (which today tends to be styled as "LGBT+" or "LGBTQ+"). We also felt that as a public institution we would be better served using the term "Queer," which is used by colleges and universities for courses and degrees in Queer studies and Queer theory. Because "Queer" is a reclaimed term, we felt it was important to include context around its usage and ultimately decided to use the term "Queer Affairs" as an umbrella term for the subject. We feel that the term does a better job of covering the spectrum of Queer life, both positive and negative, with the option to use subterms to focus on specific communities therein.

**Law Enforcement and Crime:** We could no longer overlook the polarizing semantics of the term, which puts law enforcement on one side and crime on the other. This dichotomy rings false, especially in a period when it is routinely demonstrated that individuals, especially Black and brown people, are often subject to law enforcement tactics when they have done nothing wrong. Additionally, sometimes it is law enforcement themselves who are the ones committing the crimes. To disentangle the incorrect assumptions underpinning the original term, we decided to use a more neutral term, "Legal System," with subterms to reflect various types of legal system interactions.

**Social Issues:** Within the flat architecture of the original subject terms list, "Social Issues" had been used to describe addiction, racism, sexism, abortion rights, and more.

This rendered it unhelpful when searching since the “Social Issues” subject tag turned up items on a wide variety of topics. To fix this issue, we opted to retain “Social Issues” but also included the option to use subterms, including “Social Issues -- Racism,” “Social Issues -- Misogyny,” and “Social Issues -- Violence,” to encourage greater specificity.

**Race and Ethnicity:** Similar to “Social Issues,” this term was so vague as to be almost pointless. Semantically, everybody has a race and ethnicity, so using such a broad term does not meaningfully differentiate groups. Additionally, it was used across GBH’s archival sites as a catchall to describe people or communities of color. This resulted in a cataloging system in which white people were treated as the default while all people of color were lumped together within the tag, creating a problematic racial line in the term’s usage. To democratize the term, we created a neutral prefix, “Peoples of,” which we then appended to the various regions of the world. The result was tags including “Peoples of South America,” “Peoples of East Asia,” and “Peoples of North Africa.” Grouping people geographically rather than racially better accounts for the various groups living together in a region and avoids relying on a cataloger’s ability to accurately guess a subject’s race. We also created terms for ethnic minorities globally and in the United States, choosing the term “Ethnic Minority” out of the recognition that not all ethnic groups break down upon racial lines.

We had approached the list’s creation aware of the potential failings of our imaginations, so we built change into the project. From the beginning, we set up an easily editable system using our database as a beginning point. This project also allowed us to examine other subject terms, highlighting the need to reevaluate all terms periodically. As we continue modifying the subject terms list, we meet regularly with other GBH archivists to discuss digitized items that are not covered by the existing list of terms and adjudicate ensuing additions or alterations to the list. We also reject the notion of immutable subject terms as limiting and inherently the artifact of Eurocentric and colonialist viewpoints. As culture shifts, terms that were once readily accepted might be deemed harmful to certain groups, while other cultural shifts might require the addition of terms that previously had not existed. Similarly, as language shifts, terms might need to be added or changed to reflect those linguistic nuances. There must also be room in the archive to understand identities that historically have resisted simple categorization, especially those

that are more fluid or exist outside of Eurocentric philosophical schemas.

Ultimately, digital collections are inherently unstable. Those familiar with the care of digital collections should be familiar with the phrase “preservation is migration.” Similarly, cataloging must also be migration. Rather than limiting our understanding of a catalog to a single immutable collection of objective terms, we must recognize the catalog as a living, responsive part of the process, influenced by social pressures and personal perspectives. To this end, creating a system to understand the inherently temporary nature of our work must be integral to archival work. We are not creating records that will be revisited 10,000 years from when we start; we are struggling upstream to try and make our collections meaningful and accessible to populations at every step. Though this is a daunting prospect, it is nonetheless necessary to ensure that our metadata is as usable, inclusive, and accessible as possible. ■



Camp Meigs, encampment of the 44th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, Readville, Massachusetts, June 17, 1863. Used as training camp for Union soldiers during the Civil War, Camp Meigs was located in Readville, which was part of Dedham, Massachusetts, until 1867 and is now part of the Hyde Park section of Boston. The 44th, 54th, and 55th regiments, among others, trained here. On May 18, 1863, a month before this photo was taken, Governor John A. Andrew visited Camp Meigs to present flags to the men of the 54th Regiment and wish them well in their “great and glorious cause.” The 54th and 55th Massachusetts Regiments were African American regiments; the 54th is best known as the regiment led by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and is memorialized on Boston Common.

The 44th Regiment, pictured here, shows a number of soldiers in uniform, some relaxing on the ground, others standing behind them. They could afford to look relaxed; after nine months of service, primarily in the New Bern, North Carolina, area, the 44th had returned to Massachusetts and were mustered out on June 18, 1863, the day after this photograph was taken. Rather than showing soldiers in training, this photograph depicts veterans returning from their service. Photographed by J. W. Black and published by H. B. Nickerson. *Courtesy of the Forbes House Museum, Milton, Massachusetts.*

# NEA Roundtable Updates

## Updates from the Teaching with Primary Sources Roundtable

The Teaching with Primary Sources Roundtable continues to hold its weekly chats (Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.), which are a great opportunity to connect with colleagues across the region, whether you're a current practitioner of teaching with primary sources or just interested in learning more and connecting to this community of practice.

Member Chloe Gerson, co-chair of the Teaching with Primary Sources Committee of SAA's Reference, Access, and Outreach Section, shared that that team just hosted an event, "Assessment Open Discussion," with six presentations from across the United States and one from Canada to a group of ninety-four participants. She also announced that she will be the new co-chair of the NEA Education Committee.

The roundtable is planning events for the fall, including a return of our reading group and a Saturday morning kaffeeklatsch.

To join or learn more about the TPS Roundtable, contact co-chairs Pam Hopkins <[psmhopkins@gmail.com](mailto:psmhopkins@gmail.com)> and Heather Moran <[heather.moran@maine.gov](mailto:heather.moran@maine.gov)>.

## Revitalizing the Community Archives Advocates Roundtable

The Community Archives Advocates Roundtable, created in 2017, works to discover, share, collaborate with, and advocate for community archives projects that exist outside of "traditional" archival collections or institutions in the New England area, while also seeking to educate the NEA membership about the field of community archives and connecting NEA with these important initiatives.

New co-chairs Sally Blanchard-O'Brien and Erin Rhodes are looking to revitalize the roundtable by increasing membership and launching new initiatives, such as a website to share resources, reading groups to learn and understand more about community archives, and showcasing speakers who are involved with community archives projects. We warmly welcome new members to the roundtable to help us reenergize the group and launch these initiatives. If you are interested in becoming involved with the roundtable, contact <[communityarchivists@gmail.com](mailto:communityarchivists@gmail.com)>. ■

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## NEA invites you to start a roundtable!

NEA members are encouraged to start a roundtable—a more informal way to get involved with NEA and the archival community, and to connect with others around your interests and needs as a professional. Roundtables organize workshops or events, develop conference sessions, and work with NEA committees on specific initiatives.

Take your discussion online through social media, a blog, or an email list, or make recommendations to the NEA Executive Board based on the experience of roundtable members.



## NEA Member Spotlight

**Name:**

Vanessa Formato

**Newsletter role:**

Session Reports Editor

**Affiliated institution:**

Massachusetts Eye and Ear

**Job title:**

Archivist

**How did you become interested in the archival field?**

Some of my biggest passions are writing, research, and medical history, and I wanted to make a career change that allowed me to marry all of that together. I remember sitting on the T [subway] on the way home from a talk on Civil War medical photography at Harvard's Center for the History of Medicine and thinking that whatever the people there did, *that's* what I wanted to do. A close friend of mine was in the archives management program at Simmons University at the time, and she helped me clarify that this was a field I wanted to pursue.

**What are some of your focuses and interests in the archival field?**

At Mass Eye and Ear, one of my biggest projects has been working on our large collection of nineteenth- to twentieth-century medical instruments, and I've developed a real love of object collections in the process. There's something really special about how objects help make history come alive for our users. I'm also interested in issues of human tissue ethics in collections, the intersection of archives and death, diversity in the history of medicine, and oral history projects.

**What piqued your interest about NEA?**

I ended up having to defer acceptance to my master's program at Simmons for a year due to personal circumstances, and my aforementioned archivist friend rec-

ommended NEA's mentoring circles as a way to build a professional network and learn about the field in the meantime. I joined my first circle in 2017, and I've participated every year since!

**What is your role on the Newsletter and what are your responsibilities?**

As Session Reports Editor, I'm in charge of recruiting volunteer session reporters to write summaries of NEA's spring and fall meeting sessions. I communicate with the reporters throughout the reporting process to ensure they're meeting deadlines and following our editorial guidelines, and I edit their submissions when they come in.

**What's an interesting fact about you or an unexpected talent or interest?**

In my spare time, I do calligraphy and watercolor painting. My husband and I are also big K-pop fans, and I can tell you more obscure information about a couple bands than you'd probably ever care to know.

**What are your hopes for the archival profession?**

I'd love to see the profession become more inclusive, and I'd love to see it become better understood by nonarchivists. So many amazing archives are open to the public—we're not just here for "serious" researchers!

**What challenges have you observed so far in your career?**

The field's reliance on contingent labor, along with the emphasis on having both an MLIS and practical experience for early-career jobs, are such big barriers to both entry and retention. I'd love to see the field change in ways that make pursuing this work more sustainable and open to people of all walks of life. ■

## Promote your photograph collections!

The *NEA Newsletter* is seeking submissions from repositories in New England for back cover pictorial features in *This Season in New England History*. Submissions should be in digital format at 300 dpi or better, along with a caption detailing the subject of the photograph. Please email submissions to [newsletter@newenglandarchivists.org](mailto:newsletter@newenglandarchivists.org).

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## THIS SEASON IN NEW ENGLAND HISTORY



A photograph from the scrapbook of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, native Doris Moore (1916–1993), which shows the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion standing at attention with the color guard in Birmingham, England, February 1945. The battalion—the only all-Black, all-female unit to deploy overseas during World War II—underwent a military review before Lieutenant General John C. H. Lee, who advocated for racial equality in the United States Army. After the war, Moore went on to become New Hampshire's first Black social worker. Doris Moore Photograph Collection (PS2727). *Courtesy of the Portsmouth Athenaeum.*