

A Letter from the Editors

Introducing the *Society of Florida Archivists Journal*

This is the first issue of the *Society of Florida Archivists Journal*. It may be small, but there is no question, it packs a big punch.

As the editors of this journal we can declare honestly and openly that this issue was a long time in the making and that it has only been made possible through the combined efforts of a truly dedicated Editorial Board. We want to recognize this hardworking group of archives professionals for their commitment to the scholarly conversation of our field. They devote themselves to establishing and enacting rigorous peer review criteria and procedures; they engage in many stages of painstaking editorial and formatting work; and they continuously lay the groundwork for a journal that will contribute to our professional practice. A huge and incredibly deserved thank you to Hannah Wiatt Davis, Andrea Malanowski, Jinfang Niu, and Rachel Simmons. They are the explanation for *how* this journal came to be.

Now that we have explained the “how,” we will explain the *why* behind the journal and argue what we feel is at stake with this new enterprise. We hope you will allow us a small soapbox and a little bit of leeway for this brief interlude that elaborates on the topics we feel will move our profession forward in new directions. Our letter concludes with a celebration of the wonderful contributions herein and a call for future submissions from you.

Why does SFA need a journal?

The debut issue of *SFAJ* denotes a groundbreaking moment for the State of Florida’s archives community. A first attempt at creating a peer-reviewed, fully open access journal, *SFAJ* represents a major and purposeful step towards enhanced communication within and among our constituents, and to the world beyond. The *Journal* gives us a formal space to tackle real-world archival problems, theorize together, and discuss changing best practices. It also serves to give further and more expansive recognition to the work that we do as archivists, highlighting our contributions to the educational and cultural arenas in which we work.

A Highly Accessible Professional Literature

It is sometimes easy to forget that the world of scholarly communication is in crisis.¹ The way that scholars publish is in question, and the business-side of scholarly writing—commercial publishers, expensive journals, and print publications—is under fire for very good reasons. The recent documentary “Paywall: The Business of Scholarship” offers an eye-opening exposé on these very matters and pushes the academy to embrace a true open access publishing model.² Since the “fundamental characteristic of scholarly research is that it is created as a public good to facilitate inquiry and knowledge,”³ *SFAJ* is responding to the number one ACRL-recommended strategy for reforming the scholarly communication complex: “development of competitive journals, including the creation of low cost and open access journals, that provide

¹ “Principles and Strategies for the Reform of Scholarly Communication.” The Association of College and Research Libraries, approved by the ACRL Board of Directors on June 24, 2003, available online at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/principlesstrategies>.

² *Paywall: The Business of Scholarship*, directed by Jason Schmitt, 2018, <https://paywallthemovie.com/>.

³ “Principles and Strategies for the Reform of Scholarly Communication,” see “Scholarly Communication Defined.”

direct alternatives to high-priced commercial titles.”⁴ The Editorial Board understands that the *Journal* not only meets an expressed community need, but it is making the case for more accessible professional writing outlets that do not require subscriptions or memberships. Like all scholars, archivists need to think long and hard about where and how they choose to publish and who can access that scholarship; without access, there can be no scholarly conversation.

Helping Archivists Take Action

In a recent issue of the *American Archivist*, the Editor, Christopher (Cal) Lee, defends and defines “The Literature of a Profession,” stating that “to be a profession requires a professional literature, and professionalism involves drawing from (and ideally contributing to) a professional literature ... Articles should contribute something new and valuable ... Articles should help Archivists *take action*.”⁵ The same might be said about the presentations at our SFA Annual Meeting each year, wherein we learn from the insights and experiences of peers and confer with mentors in the spirit of professional development; every year we gain something that we take back to implement in our local environments. Likewise, *SFAJ* is an attempt to add something new, valuable, and actionable to the literature of our chosen profession. It is a way of extending the Annual Meeting conversation into a more formalized and deliberate platform, crystalizing an idea in the scholarly record for anyone to consult or counter, either now or in later years.

A Voice for Advocacy

Finally, but importantly, every profession requires strong and sustained advocacy efforts. A recent (and now infamous) article from the prestigious *Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled “The Delicate Art of Dealing with Your Archivist,”⁶ trivialized and stereotyped our profession in one, not-so-funny, fell swoop. While the swell of backlash from archivists and our allies in reaction to this piece was admirable and needed, it is important to realize that we often face not just a lack of respect for our work, but a complete lack of understanding about what we contribute to our user communities. We need to continue to educate and promote the incredible value of our profession and show off the good work we are engaged in—digital humanities projects, innovative instruction practices, local history exhibitions, and even community activist work. We all know that SFA members and affiliates lead innovative and impressive initiatives, but publishing and practicing have not always gone hand-in-hand. We want *SFAJ* to change that. We view *SFAJ* as an opportunity to put the work of Florida archivists on the map and provide an advocacy mouthpiece for our active and vibrant constituency.

What will you find herein?

You will notice a few key themes running throughout this issue of *SFAJ*—technological innovation, diversity and inclusion practices, and storytelling through the lens of archives. We want to stress that these themes did not just emerge out of the ether, but rather were proposed by *you*, Florida archivists, who are writing about and presenting on issues that affect your daily work and have a real impact on our practice. They are also topics that archives leaders today find absolutely critical to advancing the profession. The Editorial Board seeks to engage in further discussions in these areas in the future, in whatever form or format is most appropriate, and are open to your interpretations of these themes as they relate to your professional context.

Technological Innovation

⁴ “Principles and Strategies for the Reform of Scholarly Communication,” see “Strategies Supported.”

⁵ Christopher A. Lee, “The Literature of a Profession,” *The American Archivist* 81, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018): 4-5.

⁶ Alice Dreger, “The Delicate Art of Dealing with Your Archivist,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 29, 2018, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Delicate-Art-of-Dealing/244070>.

Libraries and archives have always faced the challenge of staying technologically relevant, but is “just keeping up” the bar we should set for ourselves and our organizations? In her closing address as SAA President in July of 2017, Nancy McGovern lamented that “archivists tend to focus more on how to protect our digital content against technological change than on the opportunities that new technologies offer in advancing our practice in new and sometimes unexpected ways.”⁷ McGovern advised that as a profession we must focus on the possible, not just the pragmatic, and commit ourselves to highly responsive attitudes and practices.⁸ Mathew Miguez’s article, “Linked Data for Archivists,” does just that. Miguez argues that archivists have the responsibility, and a unique opportunity, to innovate their descriptive work in a linked data environment to ensure that archival collections are highly discoverable on the web, even if it means deviating from the traditional model of hierarchical description. He calls on us to think, not just about the context of our own collections, but about the entire discovery experience of an online researcher, and suggests the technology of RDF triples as a mechanism for making descriptive connections with resources outside our own institutional boundaries. This contribution is a reminder that in a rapidly evolving technological environment, change and adjustment will always be needed, and we must be agile in our technological approaches if we are to innovate and improve.

Diversity and Inclusion Practices

Diversity is a major tenant in our core values and ethics as archival professionals. The Society of American Archivists’ Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics states: “Archivists collectively seek to document and preserve the record of the broadest possible range of individuals ... [and to this end] they work actively to achieve a diversified and representative membership in the profession.”⁹ In a 2016 keynote address, Chris Taylor challenged archivists to start the work of diversity and inclusion at home in our organizational culture, work practices, and the intercultural competencies of our staff.¹⁰ These issues are tackled head on by Robert Rubero et al. in “Challenges to Creating and Promoting a Diverse Record.” Together, this group of archivists at Florida State University explains how to be intentional about diversity and inclusion across an archival organization, all the way from digitization and description practices, to teaching and research support, and public exhibit designs. Even when faced with a lack of diverse voices in the record itself, these professionals took on major internal initiatives to raise the diversity and inclusion standards of their archive. Their article reinforces Taylor’s critical assertion that the important and foundational work of diversity and inclusion relies on our ability to “get our house in order.”¹¹

Storytelling through the Lens of Archives

As with future issues of SFAJ, this first issue features book reviews of works that utilize or feature archives and/or archivists. The books reviewed herein—*Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley* and *Voices from Mariel*—use plantation records and oral history accounts, respectively, to tell the different but equally traumatic stories of immigration and assimilation to a new life in Florida. While these stories take place in very different contexts and eras, both come to life with the aid of a significant number of archival artifacts and sources. These books are a reminder of the ability and power of archives to tell stories that have yet to be told, adding to our

⁷ Nancy Y. McGovern, “Archives, History, and Technology: Prologue and Possibilities for SAA and the Archival Community,” *The American Archivist* 81, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2018): 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹ “SAA Core Values Statement and Code of Ethics,” The Society of American Archivists, Approved by the SAA Council in May 2011, <https://www2.archivists.org/statements/saa-core-values-statement-and-code-of-ethics>.

¹⁰ Chris Taylor, “Getting Our House in Order: Moving from Diversity to Inclusion” *The American Archivist* 80, no.1 (Spring/Summer 2017): 19-29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

understanding of history and, in many ways, humanizing historical narratives in unparalleled ways. Archivists should not forget their role in this work.

In an early and pivotal issue of *Archival Science*, Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook famously devoted much of their introduction to a beautiful explanation of how archives and archivists play a role in the modern storytelling endeavor:

Through archives, the past is controlled. Certain stories are privileged and others marginalized. And archivists are an integral part of this story-telling. In the design of record-keeping systems, in the appraisal and selection of a tiny fragment of all possible records to enter the archive, in approaches to subsequent and ever-changing description and preservation of the archive, and in its patterns of communication and use, archivists continually reshape, reinterpret, and reinvent the archive. This represents enormous power over memory and identity, over the fundamental way in which society seeks evidence of what its core values have been, where it has come from, and where it is going. Archives are not passive storehouses of old stuff, but active sites where social power is negotiated, contested, confirmed. The power of archives, records, and archivists should no longer remain naturalized [*sic*] or denied, but opened to vital debate and transparent accountability.¹²

This statement represents an important moment in our profession in that it questioned the objectivity of our collections but also elevated our work as curators of the past. It is our hope that current and future contributions to *SFAJ* will honor the storytelling labor we all engage in as archivists and also acknowledge the real difficulty of interpreting and untangling the complexities of the historical record.

What is the future of *SFAJ*?

The launch of this publication serves as an open call to all curatorial scientists, particularly those in Florida, to re-think what it means to manage and discuss archives in the 21st century. This letter is our attempt to prioritize themes that we feel are “live” issues now in our profession, and we are optimistic about the scholarly conversation that will unfold in the following issues of *SFAJ*. Without being too prescriptive, we can simply state here that future contributions may run the gamut of topics, from archival education and career paths, to digital preservation standards and procedures, to community outreach and public programming, and everything in between. All submissions should foster exciting discussions about progressive archival approaches and best practices that can benefit state of Florida practitioners and others beyond our borders. And finally, because scholarly writing always benefits from a full spectrum of perspectives and viewpoints, the Editorial Board welcomes the contributions of not just archivists, but those working in allied professions like librarianship, education, information technology, museum studies, oral history, historical preservation, and genealogy.

This letter serves as our open call to all of you. Archives practitioners – send us case studies, reflective essays, book reviews, and opinion pieces. Records managers, non-archives curators, and librarians – send us your perspectives and experiences and collaborate with us. Technologists – send us usability studies, implementation strategies, and tool reviews. Faculty – send us academic papers and theoretical think pieces, and tell us about your pedagogical approaches. Students – send us fieldwork and practice reports and outstanding papers about

¹² Joan Schwartz and Terry Cook, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2, nos.1-2 (March 2002): 1.

archival theory and practice. And, everyone – mix it up! We want the *Society of Florida Archivists Journal* to be as compelling and creative as you are.

We are excited to receive, read, and review your approaches to contemporary archival theory and practice, and we look forward to working with you to grow the knowledge and innovation of our field.

-Rachel Walton, Editorial Chair
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-Tomaro Taylor, Review Editor
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