Executive Director’s Remarks  
Membership Meeting: August 17, 2018

State of the Association, Fiscal Year 2018

The following report was presented at the Annual Membership (Business) Meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Washington, DC, on Friday, August 17, 2018.

Among the tasks assigned to the SAA Executive Director in the Bylaws is “present at each annual business meeting a report of the activities of the Society.” I am delighted—and feel very fortunate—that this is the 15th time that I will report on the accomplishments of the Society of American Archivists in the past year—and our plans for the coming year.

I’ll hit just the highlights this afternoon. Many details are available via the SAA home page and in the appointed group and staff reports that are posted with each set of Council meeting materials. (Search for “Council reports.”)

SAA’s Strategic Plan, as well as the mission, vision, and core values statements, provide the foundation for our work. Our eyes are always on the four goals addressed in that Plan, as well as on key aspects of operations that support the goals.

Goal 1 is all about advocating for archives and archivists.

Three appointed groups, in addition to the SAA Council and the staff, have this goal in our sights at all times. I’m especially impressed by (and dare I say proud of?) the work of the Committee on Public Policy and the Committee on Public Awareness in the past year.

COPP has the challenging assignment of both identifying and initiating work on archives- and records-related public policy issues AND responding to the Council’s request for drafts of briefs and statements, sometimes (and increasingly) with a very tight turn. The group also serves as one gateway for requests from individual members or groups to consider the need for a statement on an issue. COPP is at the intersection of a lot that is happening in public policy with regard to archives and records management—or mismanagement, as the case may be.

In the past year, COPP has drafted:

- Issue briefs on net neutrality, police mobile camera footage as a public record, and congressional records as public records.

- A letter opposing Gina Haspel’s nomination as CIA director based on her involvement in the destruction of records; a letter to the FCC commissioner urging that agency to preserve network neutrality protections; and a letter to the New York Times expressing concerns about the status of migrant family records.

COPP has advised the President and Executive Committee when we’ve weighed in—both separately and in collaboration with others—on the proposed citizenship question on the 2020 Census, the status of migrant family records, and the White House’s proposed zeroing out of IMLS, NEH, and NHPRC (which we’re delighted didn’t happen!).
One of the great benefits of having existing issue briefs and statements is that we’re able to reissue them as circumstances warrant, as we did with the statement on presidential records to address the White House’s apparent noncompliance with the Federal Records Act.

The Council can, of course, act on its own, as it did in issuing a statement in August on White Supremacists’ actions in Charlottesville, when it objected in November to announcement of the US intention to withdraw from UNESCO, and when we issued a call to action in December to urge Congress to save the historic tax credit and oppose taxes on graduate education.

With Dennis Riley’s outstanding leadership and senior member Kathleen Roe’s great enthusiasm (by “senior” I mean “experienced,” of course), the group has kept public policy issues on the front burner all year. Dennis and Kathleen served on the CoSA/NAGARA/RAAC/SAA planning group for our Archives on the Hill event on Tuesday. Archives on the Hill was an exhilarating experience for our 65 participants. And importantly, it has laid the groundwork for many online resources that we hope you will use in making district visits this fall – and beyond.

The Committee on Public Awareness, under Chris Burns’s very capable leadership, has been cranking all year, too.

The ArchivesAWARE! Blog has become a go-to resource and great idea generator with Nick Pavlik at the helm. From “There’s an Archivist for That” to “Archives + Audiences,” the blog provides interviews and original materials that we encourage you to borrow, steal, or adapt as you develop your own outreach plans. COPA developed an elevator speech template to arm members with an important tool for use in spreading the good word about the value of archives and archivists.

On Tuesday, COPA hosted a full-day workshop on media communications focused on how to navigate new audiences and new media. This workshop is a precursor to our plans to begin offering media training to small cohorts of members. Our ultimate goal is to have a strong network of spokespeople for the profession.

Last July in Portland we worked with Nikki Silva of The Kitchen Sisters to arrange some interviews that helped in the planning for a new NPR and podcast series called The Keepers which will launch in September. Go to Kitchensisters.org to learn more and to share your ideas with Nikki and Davia. They want folks to create The Keepers with them.

And tonight COPA will host “A Finding Aid to My Soul,” a Moth-Radio-Hour-like session at which archivists will tell true stories about being an archivist. We hope to see you there!

We have a third standing group that also does significant advocacy work, both in the United States and internationally. The Intellectual Property Working Group advised the Council in May to sign on to a Library Copyright Alliance letter praising Senator Ron Wyden for introducing the ACCESS to Recordings Act, which would provide full federal copyright protection to sound recordings fixed prior to 1972; they currently receive protection only under state copyright law. And Past President and IPWG member Bill Maher has continued his service as SAA’s intrepid representative to the twice-yearly meetings of the World Intellectual Property Organization’s Standing Committee on Copyright and Related Rights.
In October – which is American Archives Month – I hope that you will take individual responsibility for making something happen in the spirit of the ongoing work of COPP, COPA, and IPWG. That may be:

- Participating in #AskAnArchivist Day on October 3.
- Or visiting your Senator’s or Representative’s district office to talk about the importance of federal funding for archives. (On the SAA website, under Advocacy on the main menu, you’ll find a new advocacy guide that describes how to make a Capitol Hill or district visit or invite your representative to an event in your repository. Please take advantage of these materials created for your use!

And if you, as an individual, are outraged about what’s going on in our world, or if you simply have the desire to share important information about your profession, take the initiative to write an op-ed piece or letter to the editor of your local newspaper—or even a national one!—and end it with a zinger about the value of archives and archivists.

**Goal 2 is about enhancing professional growth.**

Three program areas within SAA—Education, Publications, and Annual Meeting—align with this goal in virtually all their components.

**Education:** We welcomed two new staff members to our Education Department during the year—Director Rana Salzmann on January 2 and Coordinator Taylor Camara on August 1. Rana’s key words for the coming year in Education are “Responsive and Accessible.”

We offered 83 live courses in FY18, serving more than 1,600 attendees. Rana has successfully introduced Bootcamps for both our Digital Archives Specialist and A&D courses that make it possible for individuals to attend a series of in-person courses in one location over several days, thus reducing the need for repeated travel. We held seven live webcasts with 217 registrants. And, effective in April, we moved the DAS exam online to save individuals the expense of traveling to take the exam. Seventy individuals earned their DAS certificate during the year.

In addition:

- Since June we’ve completed new webcasts on Assessment and Certification of Digital Repositories (taught by Sibyl Schaefer) and Encoding Standards Overview (taught by Cory Nimer); and

- We launched three new courses at this conference: Crosswalking Metadata (with Elizabeth Russey Roke); Managing Physical and Digital Architecture, Design, and Construction Records (with Tim Walsh and Aliza Leventhal); and Archives Connect: Developing a K-12 Outreach Initiative (with Jen Hoyer); and

- We have created a free webcast series to offer Helen Wong Smith’s course on Cultural Diversity Competency online, and also offered it live at this conference for just $49.

Looking forward, Rana and the Committee on Education are exploring course offerings on Management; Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and Career Development. She’s also been working with an outside consultant to conduct a marketing study and brand audit of SAA’s professional development offerings.
Periodicals: We had a delightfully seamless transition to Cal Lee’s editorship of *The American Archivist* in January 2018. Cal’s focus has been on strengthening the involvement of Editorial Board members and tweaking the peer review process to ensure timely and instructive reviews. Cal has reappointed Bethany Anderson to serve as Reviews Editor, and Bethany has been a great partner with the Publications Board in supporting the launch of a new podcast – Archives in Context – this fall. The podcast will highlight SAA’s many authors, contributors, and programs. Check it out!

*Archival Outlook* continued its reliable (and award-winning) ways, and we’re especially pleased with the number of contributions from first-time authors this year. *And In the Loop* continues to provide us a means to communicate regularly and frequently.

Book Publishing: SAA’s book publishing program—which is truly a partnership of Publications Editor Chris Prom, the Publications Board, and staff members Teresa Brinati and Abigail Christian—might best be summed up in terms of great expectations for the future. Although we’re very pleased to report that Anthony Cocciolo’s *Moving Image and Sound Collections for Archivists*, published by SAA in July 2017, won SAA’s own Waldo Gifford Leland Award for Superior Writing (I promise it wasn’t an inside job—the book is really well done!), FY18 was a year in which our best-laid plans for several new books weren’t realized. Hence “Great Expectations”! We fully expect to publish four new volumes in our popular Archival Fundamentals Series II this year:

- Advocacy and Awareness for Archivists, by Kathleen Roe;
- Leadership and Management of Archival Programs, edited by David Carmicheal and Peter Gottlieb;
- Providing Reference and Access Services for Archives and Manuscripts, by Cheryl Oestreicher; and
- Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts by Dennis Meissner.

Quite a lineup!

Also in the works for the current fiscal year is *Archival Values: Essays in Honor of Mark Greene*, edited by Mary Caldera and Christine Weideman.

We’re also launching two somewhat outside-the-box projects this year:

- *Creating Family Archives* by Margot Note – our foray into publishing a book for a general public audience; and

The Dictionary Working Group continues its steady work on *Dictionary of Archives Terminology*, having released more than 200 new or revised entries through the Word of the Week email blast, which has more than 1,400 subscribers. We’re looking forward to getting the initial *Dictionary* online in the spring!

Annual Meeting: This is the third major programmatic area that addresses Goal 2 head on. As you may have heard, SAA’s 2017 Annual Meeting in Portland got FY18 off to a great start, as it was the largest West Coast conference in SAA’s history with 2,053 registrants.

Each time we’ve met for a Joint Conference with CoSA and NAGARA here in Washington, we’ve set a new attendance record. And this year is no exception. I’m pleased to report that *ARCHIVES* RECORDS 2018 is now the largest annual meeting in SAA’s history, with 2,671 attendees!
Going forward we have an outstanding Program Committee to work on our 2019 conference in Austin, and I’m pleased to announce that the Council of State Archivists will be joining us for that meeting. Beyond 2019, we have contracted for conferences in Anaheim in 2021, Boston in 2022, and Washington DC (at the Washington Hilton), in 2023.

**Goal 3 reminds us to seek ways to advance the field.**

This November the Council will review recommendations from four task forces that it created in the past year, each with a tight reporting deadline. (Gone are the days of three-year task forces!)

- I’m excited that the Task Force on Research/Data and Evaluation is very likely to recommend formation of a standing committee to take on the important activities of creating and implementing a research agenda for SAA.
- In addition, task forces on Best Practices for Accessibility in Archives, for Internships as a Component of Graduate Archival Education, and for Volunteers in Archives will be recommending revisions to those existing documents based on your feedback and their own knowledge and expertise.
- And in response to a recommendation of the Diverse Sexuality and Gender Section, the Council created a Tragedy Response Initiative Task Force to compile materials for ready accessibility by archivists who are facing a sudden tragedy.

We have paid a lot of attention this year—as in the past—to having conversations and collaborations with allied organizations, from ARL to ALA, AASLH to NCH. I fully expect those collaborations to grow stronger in the coming year.

We’re especially proud of the work of the SAA Foundation in the past year—and make no mistake that a major goal of the Foundation is to advance the profession. With thanks to the 500+ individuals who donated to the Foundation in FY18, it:

- Awarded more than $31,000 in grants from the Strategic Growth Fund to support eight important archives projects;
- Provided more than $37,000 from the National Disaster Recovery Fund for Archives to support institutions in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands in recovering from Hurricanes Maria and Irma;
- Helped 10 individuals to attend this Joint Annual Meeting by providing each with $1,000 in financial support; and
- Continued to fund the Ham and Mosaic Scholarships; the Holmes, Pinkett, and Banks Travel Awards; and SAA’s very active awards program.

**Goal 4 is about meeting members’ needs.**

How do we know what those needs are? We pay attention when you tell us anecdotaly and we periodically ask you directly. Building on its “Barriers to Participation” survey in early 2017, the Membership Committee fielded a brief survey last spring to determine the extent to which members have employer support for their professional development. More than a thousand members responded! In April Tanya conducted a pop-up survey of Mid-Career Professionals to which nearly 700 of you responded. At this conference we conducted four focus groups to learn more about your perspectives on SAA’s professional development programming. The results of these information-gathering activities will help us refine or retool current programs—and perhaps create a new one or several.
We ended Fiscal Year 2018 with 6,014 members, down 104 from June 2017. Our membership numbers and income have remained remarkably stable in the past few years. The elephant in the room, of course, is how to approach future dues structures.

The staff is very excited that, after many years of saving SAA’s net gains in a technology fund, we will be transitioning to a new association management software system over the next six months. The system is called Nimble User—and we’re convinced it’s going to help us be a lot more nimble. And smarter, too! Peter Carlson and Matt Black have done an outstanding job of managing the RFP, selection, and contract negotiation processes, and we can’t wait to get back to the office and get moving on discovery and implementation.

**Recognitions**

As is my tradition, I’d like to tell you a bit—from my perspective—about the five individuals who are retiring from the SAA Council today.

**Amy Cooper Cary:** No one I’ve met at SAA is more committed to this organization and to doing right by its members than our new Fellow, Amy Cooper Cary. Always respectful and tactful, Amy sees possibilities in people, in projects, and in organizations, and she has offered up countless hours of her own time to helping people, completing projects, and ensuring that this organization succeeds. Thank you, Amy.

**Bergis Jules:** This next tribute will be a bit longer than usual.... Bergis, you’ve challenged me to think outside the box ever since we first met in 2010—for which I thank you. Bergis was at the table as a small group conferred about how to expand SAA’s diversity efforts, and he brought to that table Mark Puente, who had experience leading the Association of Research Libraries’ efforts to diversify the library profession. Bergis imagined the possibility of a Mosaic Fellowship program as a collaboration between ARL and SAA. IMLS funded that effort in 2013—and thanks in large measure to Bergis’s imaginings (and Mark’s hard work), 29 young archivists have benefited from our joint program. It is critically important that we keep those 29 archivists engaged with the profession and SAA. The great news is that it’s already happening. A few examples:

- From the 2013-2015 cohort: **Annie Tang** has served on the Mosaic Program Selection Committee since January 2018 and is newly appointed to the 2019 Program Committee.

- From the 2015-2017 cohort: **JoyEllen Freeman** is a 2017 Foundation grant recipient and was just elected to serve a three-year term on the Foundation Board of Directors. **Joyce Gabiola** will serve as 2019 Program Committee co-chair.

- And from the 2016-2018 cohort: **Itza Carbajal** served on the Liberated Archive Forum planning group for the 2017 Annual Meeting and now serves on the Human Rights Archives Section steering committee.

Thank you, Bergis, for your foundational work to do something tangible to help SAA move in the right direction.
**Kris Kiesling:** Kris Kiesling is WISE. She is reasonable and pragmatic, smart and passionate. Kris understands nuance—AND she also always strives to keep things simple, clear, and direct. She has been wonderfully supportive of the SAA staff throughout her SAA career, and I’m so grateful for that. Thank you, Kris.

**Cheryl Stadel-Bevans:** You may know that the treasurer is the only person who serves three years as an officer and on the Executive Committee. That’s a significant commitment, and it’s one that Cheryl took on with eyes wide open—despite being the mother of twin girls. Cheryl’s wide-open eyes are always focused on what’s important, what’s prudent, and what makes sense. I am grateful to her for her service.

**Tanya Zanish-Belcher:** Generous of her time, Tanya works hard to do the right thing by SAA and the SAA Foundation. She’s the greatest list maker ever. And she doesn’t let anyone—especially me—off the hook until she’s checked the task off her Trello list. Tanya gets things—important things—done!

As your staff, we never forget that this is your club. But I want you to know that you have 12 staff who are talented association executives and whose overriding goal is to understand and meet your needs as archives professionals and to ensure the growth and effectiveness of your club.

Our staff members, in order of tenure, are:

- Taylor Camara: 2½ weeks! (Plus her two months as our summer intern.)
- Rachel Valdez: 6 months
- Rana Salzmann: 8 months
- Abigail Christian: 2 ½ years
- Brianne Downing: 2 ½ years
- Felicia Owens: 2 ½ years
- Michael Santiago: 2 ½ years
  (That class of four staff members who joined us in the fall of 2015 is awesome!)
- Peter Carlson: 4 ½ years
- Matt Black: 5 ½ years
- Carlos Salgado: 16 years
- And Teresa Brinati: 30 years!

May I ask the SAA staff who are in the room to please stand and be recognized? I will have a few words to say about our Conference & Logistics partners as well.

But for now, thank you for the privilege of serving as SAA’s executive director, and to the Council for extending my contract for another three years. Thank you!