

# NEWSLETTER

NEW ENGLAND ARCHIVISTS



**C O V E R** — A photograph of Colby Junior (now Colby-Sawyer) College students boarding a Pan American Clipper flight at Logan International Airport. The flight is headed to Bermuda as part of Pan Am’s “College Week” program of special athletic and social activities presented for them by Pan American and Bermuda Tourists. The annual program began before the Second World War and increased in size through the time this photograph was taken on March 24, 1951. The students in the photograph are: Joan Crevier, Joan Zimble, Audrey Rosenberg, Mimie Deyo, Beverly Janson, Mary Smith, Joan Kratz, Mary Mitchell, Barbara Brewer, Phyllis Smith, M. J. Howlett, and Charlotte Cobb. *Courtesy of Colby-Sawyer College.*

**I N S I D E** — Adrien Hilton discusses processing in the age of MPLP (page 4); Donna Albino tells a WWII-era love story through two archival collections (page 16); NEA President Jamie Rice talks about National Archives and Records Administration closures (page 8); NEA members from all six New England states share their latest news (page 9); the second part of an IDC interview with the authors of *Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Resources* (page 14); and an NEA Member Spotlight with Erik Bauer (page 19).

**TAKING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE**



# New England Archivists

TAKING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

45 Skehan Street • Somerville, MA 02143  
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# Table of Contents

**From the Editors** ..... 3

**Archival Insight**

    More Describing, Less Collecting..... 4

**Inside NEA**

    From the President..... 8

**News and Notes**

    Connecticut..... 9

    Maine..... 9

    Massachusetts ..... 10

    New Hampshire ..... 12

    Rhode Island..... 12

    Vermont ..... 18

**Who's Missing from This Table?**

    Interview with creators of *Archives*  
    for *Black Lives in Philadelphia*  
    *Anti-Racist Description Resources*..... 14

**Archival Insight**

    Love and Loss: A WWII Story  
    Told through Two Collections..... 16

**People** ..... 17

**NEA Member Spotlight** ..... 19

**This Season in New England History**..... 20

# From the Editors

- Sally Blanchard-O'Brien

Happy spring, NEA members! Sadly, NEA had to cancel its 2020 annual spring meeting, but the editors hope that the content in this issue can help us all to stay engaged and inspired during a difficult time.

Included in this issue, Adrien Hilton discusses how “More Product, Less Process” is shaping up in the world fifteen years after the Greene and Meissner article (page 4); Donna Albino shares a World War II love story told through two separate archival collections (page 16); NEA President Jamie Rice discusses the potential closure of the National Archives and Records Administration’s Seattle branch and the impact that decisions like these have on our profession (page 8); and the IDC gives us part two of their interview with the creators of *Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Resources* (page 14).

Also in this issue, you can meet fellow NEA member Erik Bauer in the NEA Member Spotlight (page 19), get


updates about colleagues (page 17), and catch up on news from repositories in all six New England states (page 9).

Finally, Betts Coup and I want to take the time on this last *Newsletter* issue of our terms, to sincerely thank everyone we’ve had the chance to work with during our time as editors. We have learned so much from our fellow editors, our NEA members, and our contributors—without whom we could not have a newsletter. It has truly been a pleasure and a privilege to serve in this role, and we warmly welcome our new editors, Charlotte Lellman and Vanessa Formato, to the team. We are certain we are leaving the *Newsletter* in great hands and look forward to seeing what the new committee brings to the *Newsletter* and our organization! ■

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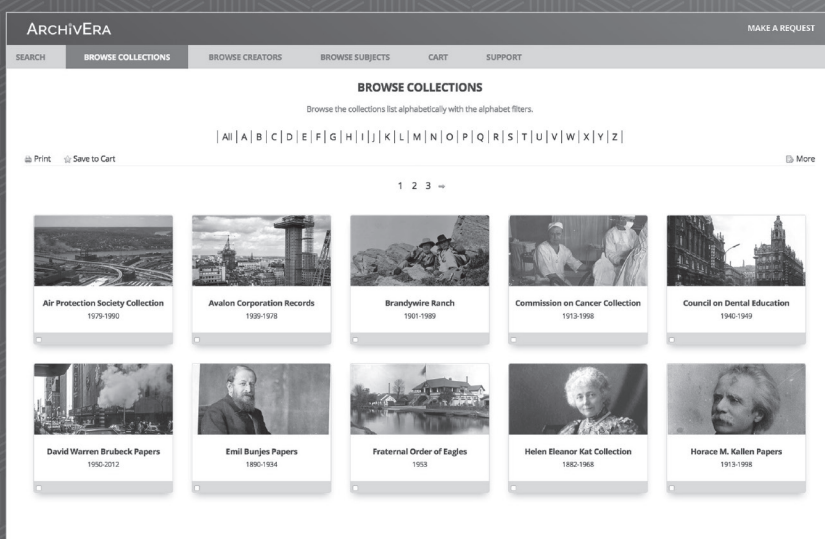


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## ARCHIVAL INSIGHT

## More Describing, Less Collecting

By Adrien Hilton

Everyone has a backlog. They come in all shapes and sizes: big, old, born-digital, audio, and visual. Despite how big or how old, I define a backlog with one measure—lack of discoverability. If a user can't find it, they can't use it. If you, like me, are embedded within technical services, you have a few options if you want to reduce a backlog and provide access to your collections: hire more staff (backward looking and reactive) or change the way you process (forward looking and proactive). In terms of hiring more staff, we can look to the Council on Library and Information Resource's hidden collections program that ran from 2008–2014 and provided access to 4,000 collections.<sup>1</sup> Since 2005 when Greene and Meissner published "More Product, Less Process (MPLP)," great strides have been made with implementing lightweight, tiered, extensible processing frameworks.<sup>2</sup> We've produced a number of exemplary models.<sup>3</sup> But does hiring new staff and changing processing tactics do enough to eliminate backlogs successfully, and permanently?

My career mirrors the life of MPLP; I started my MLS program in 2005. I've worked at three University special collections: the Tamiment Library at NYU, the Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML) at Columbia University, and now at Houghton Library at Harvard. Over time, I've come to see that hiring staff for backlog projects and implementing extensible processing, even when combined, may not be enough for meeting the ethical stewardship requirement of making collections discoverable within a reasonable amount of time. This article addresses the post-MPLP landscape and discusses how communication across the whole of a library organization is needed in order to better allocate resources. I end with a series of questions that will help guide assessment of processing programs.

I see two problems with backlog reduction tactics that rely on hiring more staff and/or changing processing methods. The first is lack of sustainability. It is not enough to solely hire staff to deal with hidden collections. We must also change institutional practices going forward so that we don't continue to grow our backlog. The second problem is sequestering the solution with technical or processing services rather than engaging the whole organization. As Greene and Meissner point out, backlogs aren't just bad for our users, they reflect badly on the whole organization. All departments should assume joint responsibility for reducing backlogs and sustaining an equilibrium between acquisition and processing that allows for zero backlog to continue in perpetuity.

I was hired at the Tamiment on a National Endowment

for the Humanities grant to process a large hidden collection of printed ephemera. This backlog was generated in part because staff would separate ephemera from newly accessioned archival collections. The hope was to one day provide access to this material, in greater detail, through more traditional bibliographic cataloging. But what transpired was a growing box count of unprocessed and undiscoverable ephemera. A half-time project manager and I were brought on to process and provide access to the holdings. We appraised, arranged, and described that backlog with a shovel, generating over forty finding aids for about 600 linear feet in two years (200 linear feet per year per FTE)<sup>4</sup>. I'm told anecdotally that the collections are used and provide a good entry point for undergraduates engaging with primary sources. We eliminated the backlog, but not permanently. The only way to achieve a long-term, sustainable solution was to cease the practice of pulling ephemera out of collections. I'm not sure that as a project archivist I was in the best position to effectively advocate for that change.

At RBML, I was both a processing archivist and then the interim head of processing, overseeing the archival unit for about a year. RBML's model was a combination of hiring more staff and utilizing a graduate internship program to process backlog material. Archivists were flexible in their approach, with minimal processing as the accepted standard and used with many collections. However, RBML brought in large twentieth-century archives including records from human rights organizations with complex restrictions. Each year RBML accessioned anywhere from 1,000 to 2,000 lin-

ear feet. Despite the large staff of permanent and project archivists as well as students and utilization of minimal processing techniques, there was still no way to keep from adding to the backlog.

In 2016, I was hired by Houghton Library as the head of the manuscript section. I oversee manuscript cataloging and archives processing for Houghton but also work collaboratively across Harvard Library on committees and working groups that manage ArchivesSpace and develop and discuss processing practices.

There's a saying at Harvard, "every tub on its own bottom." It doesn't take long to figure out that yes indeed Harvard is complex. Never again will I analyze an environment at the scale that Harvard Library provides. There are twenty-one special collections repositories at Harvard, maybe more. Each has a separate staff and stewards material independently from one another. Like any older organization, procedures grew organically over time to accommodate whatever nuances were present. New procedures were added to that. There are as many systems and practices as there are staff, creating an environment that is complex, both culturally and technologically.

The Joint Processing Guidelines Working Group (JPGWG) was charged by Harvard Library's Special Collections and Archives Council to examine a "change the way you process" approach to Harvard's special collections. The goal was to achieve a greater degree of standardization in practice, which would provide a better experience for our users. In our initial analysis of processing practices, the JPGWG determined that there wasn't a clear consensus on much of anything. Some repositories always refoldered; some never did. Some used processing plans and processing levels; others did only some of the time. Some collections were accessible while unprocessed; others had a hard and fast rule about access. There wasn't even a majority approach. What was apparent was that half the repositories lacked a full-time archivist devoted to processing and that there was a backlog. Interestingly though, the backlog wasn't hidden in the way one might think. As Greene and Meissner outlined, our standard for what constituted "processed" was high. Many of the collections in the backlog had description but that description was present in Word inventories or internal databases. Thus, a lot of our initial work focused on addressing issues like, "what constitutes processed?" And, if our goal of processing is discoverability and usability, "can we move that bar from up there to down

here?" I was figuring out that we didn't have a processing problem so much as a policy problem.

The JPGWG first developed a shared belief and value system in order to address the policy issue. We reached those shared values by creating a series of principles to guide future work. The principles serve as advocacy tools, ensuring we always come back to the same core. They are broad and allow for independence in the details of implementation, which was needed given the variance of practices at Harvard. The first principle gets right to the heart of the backlog conundrum: **Strive to make all collections, even those that are unprocessed, open for research.**<sup>5</sup> Access is no longer contingent on a series of tasks performed indicating a processed or unprocessed status, which as Greene and Meissner articulate, is a moving target. This principle frees us to use a flexible approach for each collection, doing only what's necessary to meet the basic goal of accessibility. This principle reveals that use is the central focus of what we do rather than preserving the collection, and that's a good thing.

The JPGWG published a website with resources for how to ethically steward archival materials and outlined basic requirements for doing so.<sup>6</sup> What I like about the guidelines is how they address the broader ecosystem of archival processing, start with accessioning, and end with assessment and communication. Changing the way you process is just one tool among many.

It's been two years since the guidelines were produced. When you look at implementation across Harvard Library, the repositories that have more staff have been more successful. Recently, the members of the group gave a short presentation to the special collections community about a single implementation idea each of us put in place in order to be more effective stewards of our resources. Several of the cases focused on accessioning and examined what shifting resources to accessioning entailed.

At Houghton Library, we have six (and soon to be eight) staff working on manuscript cataloging and archival processing. We have a robust accessioning workflow and through the Joint Processing Guidelines were able to operationalize both the first principle and the second, "Strive to provide a publicly discoverable collection-level description for each collection within a repository," in a forward-looking way.

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A common hurdle to overcome when implementing an extensible processing approach such as this, especially at an institution with many collecting areas, is expending too many resources on one collection. It is easy to make the case for detailed description. The donor asked for it, the users need it, the collection warrants it. I'm sure all of these are true. But we can't know what our users need if they don't know what we have. By spending valuable resources on any given collection, we lose the ability to provide basic discoverability for all collections.

A collection of material arrives and at the end of accessioning we will have provided basic rehousing, if necessary, and created collection level description in both MARC and ArchivesSpace. No matter what, we do this for everything. Accessioning thus carries the descriptive weight for all incoming materials and sets the foundation for which to base further arrangement and descriptive choices.

We're beginning to think through the amount of material we can give this level of treatment to. The sweet spot between accessibility and usability is when a researcher knows we have the material, it is discoverable, and can use the description to ascertain within a box or two whether the material is worth examining. When we take in too much material or too many items, our description allows for broad discoverability but perhaps not enough detail to allow for usability. I'm interested in finding the balance and with only so many staff able to produce so much, the variable that might need to change is the quantity of incoming collections.

Maybe harmony is only achieved with more describing and less collecting. Of course, this is nothing new to the archival profession. Greene and Meissner open MPLP by stating that appraisal theory tried to root out backlogs, and so are offering a different approach. Greene then published his follow-up article outlining what minimal appraisal involved.<sup>7</sup> Through my own experience, going from project archivist to processing archivist to overseeing processing to looking at processing across repositories, I am better able to understand that sustaining a level of access to all collections over time requires harmony between what you take in and what you can describe in a meaningful way.

What would happen if we just said no to something unless we could provide access to it within a year? It's like what they say with weight loss; you can try any fad diet you want, the bottom line is that in order to lose weight you need to

burn more calories than you take in. If you want to reduce your backlog you have to process more than you take in. But let's say you take in 500 linear feet a year and you process 600, with three full-time archivists. You're only making a 100 linear foot dent in your backlog every year. Let's say your backlog is 1,800 linear feet; with the current staffing model, that would take eighteen years. But if you stopped collecting, you could get it done in three. I'm not advocating for this model but using it to illustrate the basic math.

We've begun to have these conversations at Houghton. In fact, one of our curators turned down a collection in part because of the resources it would take away from processing the backlog. This is the kind of systems-thinking that's necessary to truly address backlogs.

Across Harvard, we're doing a good job of thinking both backward and forward. We're reacting to past practices and addressing backlogs while simultaneously building procedures and institutional policy for the present day. What's next? What happens when we've eliminated our backlog and implemented an extensible framework to provide basic discoverability and access for all incoming materials?

Here are a series of questions we must ask ourselves:

1. How do we measure the effectiveness of our description?
2. Are our basic descriptions that provide discoverability and access good enough?
3. If a collection's description within our basic framework needs more, do we have the infrastructure and staffing in place to respond in a timely and meaningful way?

I'm in the advantageous position of being able to examine these questions. I hope moving forward that our sustainable, extensible frameworks for providing discovery and access consider not just processing time and expertise but collection quantity and descriptive quality. A combination of communication and assessment are necessary to address these questions. We must communicate across departments, working jointly toward a shared outcome. We must communicate with our researchers. We must assess the ecosystem. We need to figure out the math. We need to know how many linear feet are too many, given our current staffing model. Our collecting and our ability to provide meaningful access need to be in harmony. ■

# Inside NEA

FROM THE PRESIDENT

- Jamie Kingman Rice



While I realize the discussion below may be dated or obsolete by the time this article is published, it's an important topic and one that is likely to rise again, if not still ongoing.

Unfortunately for the National Archives, 2020 is shaping up to be a difficult public relations year. Following the high-profile Women's March photograph alteration, a lesser publicized story revealed the potential closing of NARA's Seattle branch. Amid continued discussion surrounding aggressive federal records retention policies, the looming Seattle branch closure speaks to the heart of a broader issue about archival accessibility.

Undoubtably, the National Archives operates on a scale unlike any other. The sheer volume is beyond what many of us will see in multiple lifetimes. However, its charge is vital to the understanding of American history and NARA is responsible for ensuring the preservation *and access* of the nation's record. With that charge comes great responsibility, but also great complexity.

January's media frenzy around the alteration of imagery was deserved, even by NARA's own admission. It's important for the American public to speak up and speak out. Further, the government's records retention policies are crafting the future, and it's vital the American people take notice to ensure there is a difference between archival appraisal and crafting a legacy.

But from a brick-and-mortar perspective, the potential closure of the NARA's Seattle branch speaks to an additional, and less publicized concern facing our nation's history, where a government entity (not the National Archives, regional stakeholders, or the American people) makes decisions about accessibility based on the bottom line.

In late 2019, the Public Buildings Reform Board recommended NARA's Seattle branch close as part of a larger effort to reduce excessive government real-estate holdings and pare down on expenses. However, the recommendation came without specific communication with local communities or tribal nations. Should the closure take place, the records would be transferred to other locations, pushing the region's history further south, or east.

Such a move is not without precedence, including the Alaskan NARA branch closure in 2016, with records transferred to Seattle. But the precedence, when followed, continues to place distance between communities and regional history. Of course, digitization efforts can mitigate some of these concerns, but considering the need for aggressive records retention policies due to overwhelming quantities, it's unlikely digitization efforts can truly satisfy access, especially if NARA's budget is continually threatened.

This article is not meant to be politically charged, or to defend or defame the National Archives, but rather serve as a reminder of our role as archivists to advocate for our profession and also for access—in exhibitions, in person, online, and in the future. If there isn't anywhere to view records, are the records accessible? ■

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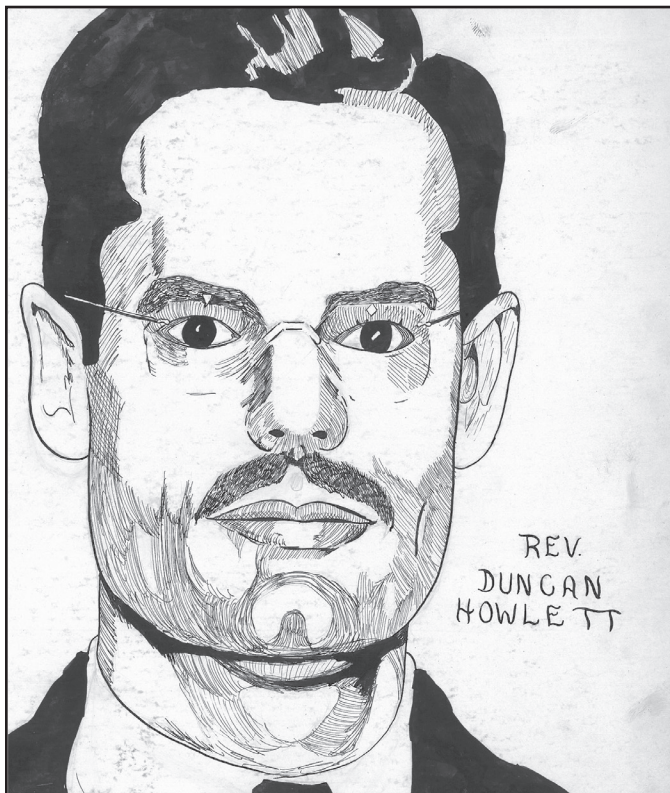


# News and Notes

## CONNECTICUT

### Records of Undergarment Manufacturer Available at the Bridgeport History Center

The Bridgeport History Center at the Bridgeport Public Library announced that it has completed its long-term goal of processing the Records of the Warner Brothers Company, dating from 1866 to 1975. Originally known as the Warner Brothers Corset Company, then the Warner Brothers Company, then Warnaco, measuring over 562 linear feet and totaling 475 boxes, the collection documents the history of the undergarment manufacturer from corsets to the creation of cup sizes for bras to developing Lycra with DuPont, all while representing Bridgeport's role as a major manufacturing center. The extensive marketing materials dominate the collection and offer a stunning visual fashion history. For more information, visit <<https://bportlibrary.org/hc>>.



Portrait of Duncan Howlett, drawn by John Garlington Jr., from the Duncan Howlett papers (coll. 2993) at the Brown Research Library. *Courtesy of Maine Historical Society.*

## MAINE

### Duncan Howlett Papers Available at the Maine Historical Society

The Duncan Howlett papers (coll. 2993) at the Brown Research Library at the Maine Historical Society are processed and available for research. This voluminous collection (51.25 linear feet) is significant in its content, especially regarding the civil rights movement. Duncan Howlett (1906–2003) was a minister, author, and forester. While his only connection to Maine is that he retired there (spending his last thirty-five years in Center Lovell as a tree farmer), most of the collection relates to his time as a Unitarian minister in Boston and Washington, D.C. As a minister at All Souls Church in Washington, D.C., he became heavily involved in the civil rights movement. In addition to his concern with public affairs during the entire range of his ministry, Howlett played an active role in Unitarian denominational affairs, which landed him on the national and international stage.

### New Collection from the Maine State Archives Available on DigitalMaine

The George French Collection at the Maine State Archives is now available on DigitalMaine, the state's service hub for the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). The collection comprises the work of award-winning Maine photographer George French, who was the official photographer for the Maine Development Commission.



George French and family sitting in the kitchen playing music. G547-209413-GP45655, George French Collection. *Courtesy of Maine State Archives.*

Totalling approximately 11,000 negatives, his work focuses on rural and scenic views, capturing life in Maine during the first half of the twentieth century. More than 8,500 of the images have been digitized and are available online, along with French's early photo index, and staff are working to process the remaining negatives by midsummer. The collection can be accessed at <[https://digitalmaine.com/arc\\_george\\_french](https://digitalmaine.com/arc_george_french)>.

Contact the Maine State Archives at 207-287-5790 or <[maine.archives@maine.gov](mailto:maine.archives@maine.gov)>.

## MASSACHUSETTS

### Edward P. Boland Papers Open for Research at John J. Burns Library

John J. Burns Library at Boston College announces the opening of the Edward P. Boland congressional papers. Boland was a U.S. representative from the 2nd District of Massachusetts. A Democrat, Boland served the district for over thirty years, from 1953 to 1989, and only faced one serious reelection challenge in 1968. He was on the Appropriations and Intelligence Committees and involved with the Iran-Contra investigation and NASA.

The papers include correspondence, legislative and committee files, photographs, speeches and remarks, audio and video recordings, clippings, artifacts and ephemera, and public relations materials. View the finding aid at <<https://hdl.handle.net/2345.2/CA1998-003>>. For more information, contact Alison Harris at <[alison.harris@bc.edu](mailto:alison.harris@bc.edu)>.

### Margaret Heckler Papers Open for Research at John J. Burns Library

John J. Burns Library at Boston College announces the opening of the Margaret Heckler congressional papers. Heckler was a U.S. representative from Massachusetts, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and ambassador to Ireland. Her public service career spanned 1962 to 1989. A moderate Republican, Heckler represented the 10th District for sixteen years as a member of the Agriculture, Joint Economic, and Veterans' Affairs Committees. She served as HHS secretary and ambassador under President Ronald Reagan.



Edward Boland and Ted Kennedy at a campaign event in 1968. Box 132, folder 36, Edward P. Boland congressional papers, CA.1998.003. *Courtesy of John J. Burns Library, Boston College.*

The papers include correspondence, legislative files, scheduling files, photographs, speeches, audio and video recordings, clippings, ephemera, and personal materials. View the finding aid at <<https://hdl.handle.net/2345.2/CA1998-004>>. For more information, contact Katie Lamontagne at <[katelyn.lamontagne@bc.edu](mailto:katelyn.lamontagne@bc.edu)>.

### Mary Bowditch Forbes Civil War Collection Available for Research

After receiving a Massachusetts SHRAB grant, the Forbes House Museum in Milton cataloged the Mary Bowditch Forbes Civil War collection. Forbes (1878–1962) developed a great interest in Abraham Lincoln, the Civil War, and the Grand Army of the Republic. The collection contains books, prints, photographs, and artifacts relating to Lincoln and the war.

Highlights include several handwritten notes by Lincoln; a rare draft notice from the 7th Congressional District of Massachusetts, dated just days before the draft riots in New York City in 1863; a Civil War–era ensign flag featuring only thirteen stars; and a letter from Robert Gould Shaw, who commanded the 54th Massachusetts Regiment.

For more information on the Forbes House Museum and its collections, visit <<https://www.forbeshousemuseum.org>>.

## Photography and Corporate Public Relations: The Case of U.S. Steel, 1930–1960

The current exhibition at the Baker Library | Bloomberg Center at Harvard Business School draws from the United States Steel Corporation Photographs collection. Open through October 6, the exhibition highlights one business's efforts to use photography as a means to influence the public.

From 1930 to 1960, the United States Steel Corporation commissioned photographers around the country to document the inner workings of the company and its subsidiaries as part of a national public relations campaign. From the Great Depression to the war years to the postwar boom, photography served as a persuasive tool in PR campaigns focused on promoting goodwill and a favorable attitude about policies concerning the corporation's size, labor practices, and profit margins.

In the current age of converging public relations, marketing, and social media, the collection provides a window into the corporation's innovative use of photography and the emerging field of PR to galvanize public opinion. For more information, visit <<https://www.library.hbs.edu/us-steel>>.



Watercolor of potato plant, approximately 1820. ecb00003. Courtesy of Botany Libraries, Economic Botany Library of Oakes Ames, Harvard University.

## Harvard Botany Libraries Digitizing and Increasing Access to Botanical Illustrations

The Harvard Botany Libraries is working on a multi-year project to describe, conserve, and digitize more than 7,000 original botanical illustrations from over thirty-five collections. The library is more than halfway through the project and recently launched a website to showcase the collections: <<https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/botanical-illustrations>>.

Each collection has a catalog record and finding aid. The finding aids include thumbnails and links to individual images so that users can get a feel for an entire collection. The website provides a different means of access because users can search across all collections and view similar images together.

Following this project will be the digitization of sixty-six volumes of nature-printed books, where actual specimens were used to make the image.

Funding for conservation and digitization was provided by Harvard University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences. For more information, contact <[botref@oeb.harvard.edu](mailto:botref@oeb.harvard.edu)>.

## Harvard University Archives Exhibit Presents Work of Photographer William Rittase

*The Rittase Touch: Photographic Views of Harvard in the 1930s*, on view at the Harvard University Archives through May 6, focuses on the work of photographer William Rittase. A contemporary of photographers Edward Steichen, Margaret Bourke-White, and Walker Evans, Rittase navigated the worlds of artistic, commercial, and documentary photography. His work was featured regularly in *Fortune* magazine as well as modern art exhibitions, and his photographs appear in college and university collections across New England.

In 1932, Rittase brought his esteemed eye to Cambridge, having been commissioned by Harvard to photograph its growing campus. Eleven gelatin silver prints, a digital presentation, and numerous reproductions tell the story of Harvard's growth in the early twentieth century, changes in photographic technology, and the intersection of art and public relations in the 1930s. For more information, visit <<https://bit.ly/rittase>> or contact Ross Mulcare, <[ross\\_mulcare@harvard.edu](mailto:ross_mulcare@harvard.edu)>.

## Suffrage Transcribe-a-thon Held at Northeastern University

To commemorate the centennial of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, the National Parks of Boston and the DH Hub, with Northeastern University's Digital Scholarship Group and the NULab for Texts, Maps, and Networks, hosted a "Suffrage Transcribe-a-thon" on January 28. Suffrage enthusiasts and dedicated transcribers from Northeastern and the community joined forces to help the Library of Congress's transcription campaign, "Suffrage: Women Fight for the Vote," which includes documents from Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Mary Church Terrell, and Anna Dickinson.

After a brief introduction to Boston's role in the suffrage movement, attendees used the crowdsourced transcription platform to start a new transcript or edit a previously transcribed document. This transcribe-a-thon gave participants the opportunity to engage with primary source material while assisting the Library of Congress in its efforts to make its collections more accessible. For more information, visit the National Parks of Boston's website, <<https://www.nps.gov/bost>>, or contact the DH Hub at <[bos.dh.hub@gmail.com](mailto:bos.dh.hub@gmail.com)>.

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

### Historical Archives of the Manchester Diocese Moves to New Location

After years of being housed in the basement of the St. Joseph Cathedral in Manchester, New Hampshire, the historical archives of the Diocese of Manchester has a new home. Books, documents, photos, file cabinets, and shelving have been moved to a nineteenth-century house, now known as the St. Joseph Cathedral Library. Access, storage, lighting, and climate control are all much improved. The move allowed for a logical organization of the historic materials by subject matter. The archives contain documents concerning the first New Hampshire churches in the 1800s and Catholicism in New Hampshire as well as information about priests and bishops throughout New Hampshire history. For more information, contact Dennis Pedley, <[dpedley@rcbm.org](mailto:dpedley@rcbm.org)>.

## Portsmouth Athenaeum Announces Collaborative Project to Provide Access to Genealogical Data

The Portsmouth Athenaeum announced a collaborative project with the Portsmouth Public Library and New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS). In January, NEHGS began scanning and indexing the historic records of the Portsmouth School Department, which the Athenaeum has housed since 1991. The records will be made available online via the NEHGS website, <<https://www.americanancestors.org>>.

Following scanning by NEHGS, the Athenaeum will work with the Portsmouth Public Library to preserve the original records. A grant from the Rosamond Thaxter Foundation, awarded jointly to the Athenaeum and the public library, will fund supplies to house the records.

The Portsmouth School Department records date from 1846 to 1935 and consist of 122 volumes. Of particular historic significance are the school attendance records that provide student names, birth dates, guardian names, and addresses. In addition to genealogical data, records from the collection contain details about teachers and curriculum.

## RHODE ISLAND

### Providence Public Library and Rhode Island Historical Society Awarded NDNP Grant

The Providence Public Library (PPL) and Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS) announced the award of a \$250,000 grant from the National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP), a partnership between the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the Library of Congress. This is the first time that Rhode Island has participated in the program.

The RIHS holds a remarkable collection of Rhode Island newspapers on microfilm; however, this collection, critical to understanding the development of both the state and the nation's rich history, remains unavailable for research in an online format. The PPL will manage the digitization and description process.



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## WHO'S MISSING FROM THIS TABLE?

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

This issue's "Who's Missing from This Table?" is the conclusion of an interview with the creators of *Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia Anti-Racist Description Resources*, available online at <archivesforblacklives.wordpress.com>.

- Alexis A. Antracoli, Interim Assistant University Librarian for Special Collections, Princeton University Library
- Annalise Berdini, Digital Archivist, Princeton University Library
- Kelly Bolding, Project Archivist for Americana Manuscript Collections, Princeton University Library
- Faith Charlton, Lead Processing Archivist for Manuscripts Division Collections, Princeton University Library
- Amanda Ferrara, Public Services Project Archivist, Princeton University Library
- Valencia Johnson, Project Archivist for Student Life, Princeton University Library
- Katy Rawdon, Coordinator of Technical Services, Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries

**You created a GoFundMe to raise funds to properly compensate Black archivists for their work reviewing Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (A4BLiP) Anti-Racist Description Resources. Can you tell us about this process?**

As the very initial drafts of the guidelines began to come together in the summer of 2018, we started to discuss how we could best ensure that we were not inadvertently causing harm since we were a group of mostly white women. The result of those discussions was that we needed to ask Black archivists to review the guidelines to ensure that they were not causing additional harm and were, in fact, assisting other archivists in creating more inclusive description. As a group we also agreed that we needed to pay Black archivists for their time since we were asking for their expertise and labor. The best approach to this seemed to be a social

media campaign via a GoFundMe, but it was more complicated than we initially expected. One of the major logistical questions was where we would deposit the funds and how we would issue compensation to reviewers. We certainly did not want to use one of our personal bank accounts, yet becoming an official 501(c)(3) seemed to be more than we wanted to commit to for this discrete project. As a result of our discussion, we decided to pursue an agreement with an existing archival professional organization and, in the fall of 2018, signed a memorandum of agreement with the Delaware Valley Archivists Group (DVAG) to be our fiscal agent. We then worked with the DVAG treasurer to set up a GoFundMe that would deposit to a DVAG account. After completing the logistical arrangements with DVAG, we wrote copy for the GoFundMe site and promoted the fundraiser via social media. Our goal was to raise \$1,000 and we met it within a week. We then closed the fundraiser and began recruiting reviewers. Once the reviewers completed their work, we notified the DVAG treasurer who issued an honorarium check to each reviewer.

**Can you tell us about the concept of neutrality, particularly in terms of archival description?**

The myth of neutrality in cultural heritage institutions, especially archives, is hard for some professionals to divorce themselves from. The concept of neutrality in archives takes away archivists' agency in making choices and being a layer of interpretation to the collections we are stewarding. At the same time, it gives archivists this superpower to place things in a vacuum and to be "objective"—but really it just means archivists are adhering to the dominant narrative of our white patriarchal society. We see this concept play out in our historical records of whose stories were deemed worthy enough to preserve and what elements of their life we highlighted in our description.

One of the goals of the guidelines is to give archivists the framework to unpack and untether themselves from

this myth of neutrality. Once you acknowledge and accept how your biases, life experiences, and identities affect your work, you can then begin to critically analyze your descriptive choices and hopefully make more informed decisions.

***Have any of you put these practices into action at your places of work? If so, did you experience pushback?***

Temple University is a large urban school in North Philadelphia with a diverse student body and a special collections department open to the general public, and many of our collections document the lives and work of marginalized groups of people. So, we are regularly faced with questions about how best to describe those collections and remediate legacy description in order to avoid harming our community. We wrote our Statement on Potentially Harmful Language in Archival Description and Cataloging <<https://library.temple.edu/policies/14>> in early 2018 to give some context and transparency to those who read it—and to actively encourage people to let us know if they encounter harmful language, which is one of the *A4BLiP Anti-Racist Description Resources* recommendations.

We also added a page to our processing manual regarding harmful language in description, taking much of the wording from the Resources. We actively weigh the pros and cons of preserving creator-supplied description; we include processing notes in finding aids explaining any creator-supplied or legacy description that might be problematic; and we have specific guidelines for “archivist voice” in writing new finding aids. We also require that legacy versions of updated finding aids be maintained. Additionally, I (Katy) completed Name Authority Cooperative Program (NACO) training several years ago, and am able to contribute names from our collections to the Library of Congress Name Authority File (LCNAF). Working on the *A4BLiP* project has made me more aware of whose names I enter and what information I include.

We haven’t experienced pushback either within our department or from library administration, even regarding putting our statement on harmful language on the library website. That was reassuring, and it encourages us to think more proactively about larger steps we can take.

As for Princeton, we’ve been implementing one-off description remediation projects for several years now, as well as conducting some preliminary surveys of our find-

ing aids to see what needs work. In fall 2018, the Archival Description and Processing Team created a three-year strategic plan, which included assessing and remediating legacy description related to marginalized communities. This year, we established an Inclusive Description Working Group that is tasked with coordinating these efforts. Our first step was to create a statement <<https://library.princeton.edu/special-collections/statement-language-archival-description>> for our departmental website, which is modeled on Temple’s statement and just went live very recently. We’re now working on incorporating anti-oppressive description guidelines into our local processing documentation. Part of this documentation will include a living “case studies” document where archivists can briefly summarize how they addressed particular redescription projects and the reasoning behind their choices. The purpose of this will be to provide concrete examples for other processors to refer to, as well as to help us assess and iteratively improve our approach, as needed. We haven’t received pushback so far, but we’ve still got lots of work to do, so ask us again in a year.

***Do you have any advice for archivists hoping to implement your recommendations who anticipate pushback or resistance at their institutions?***

We think it’s important to gather your allies, colleagues, partners, and co-conspirators to work with you on this project. Ensuring that you have support at the ground level can make what may be a difficult road ahead a bit easier. Those colleagues can help you create an official plan to be disseminated by the powers that be. We suggest including evidence-based examples of who would be most affected by a change of description practices, how those who complete the work would be affected, and the types and kinds of other institutions that are doing this work. Use some of the great resources we’ve included in the bibliography, as well as others that you’ve come across, to emphasize the work that is already being done in the profession and to highlight the conversations happening across the field. Lastly, it’s important to remember that institutional racism is just that, institutional. Dismantling institutional racism is a process and one that requires persistence, but we suggest remembering that there is community outside of your institution, available to provide support of both successes and failures. This work is hard and you shouldn’t feel like you have to solve it alone, or resolve it in its entirety. ■

## ARCHIVAL INSIGHT

Love and Loss: A WWII Story Told  
through Two Collections

By Donna Albino

A recent project at the Ghost Army Legacy Project involved selecting letters written by a soldier to his family during World War II and putting them online, illustrated with photographs from his collection. Harold Dahl studied sculpture under Ulric Ellerhusen in 1940-1942, which led to his enlistment in the 603rd Engineer Camouflage Battalion. His letters covered his basic training in the United States, deployment to the European theater, and transition back to the States after the war.

On April 14 and 15, 1945, Harold wrote two letters to his mother and sister, Lucy, to tell them about meeting Nancy: “[I] was one *damn* lucky G.I. to have a lovely *American* nurse all to myself. ... She is a perfectly wonderful person—28 years old & very cute, plenty of brains & wit and honest as they come... she did me the great honor of falling for me as hard and far as a sensible person could in so short a time.” Only a few weeks later, on May 7, Harold thanked his sister for sending a package to Nancy, and also mentions “Tommy Weir took her the painting of Luxembourg which I sent her as a sort of engagement present.” In Harold’s letter the next day, he wrote, “There is something I want to tell you that up to now has merely been hinted at. While we do not plan to do it here in Europe, Nancy Woodell and I are to be married as soon as both our G.I. jobs are done. I know it sounds precipitous and all that, but I can assure you that I have my eyes wide open and know that I could never find a better wife.”

Nancy seemed to be as smitten with Harold as he was with her. In his May 8th letter, Harold quoted a letter that Nancy wrote to him, when he asked her when they would get married: “When?—whenever possible—where?—wherever we are—How soon things can be arranged depends not on us—but the convenience of the government... Darling I love you as completely as my self is able but I intend to stick to my job until it is over. You know as well as I that we must finish this before we start our own lives... Just remember I love you from now until forever.”

Nancy was relocated from Europe to the Pacific soon after their meeting. On July 3, Harold wrote, “Poor Nancy is on the way CBI [China Burma India] direct.” Harold never heard from Nancy again. In August, Harold wrote to his sister and asked her to phone Nancy’s sister to see if she had heard from Nancy. In an undated letter, Harold confessed,

“I certainly wish a letter would come from Nancy—it is 3 months since I heard from her & that, and that’s an awfully long time.” By October, he had given up hope: “Not having heard from Nancy in all this time looks not at all good, so I am going ahead with alternate plans in which the schooling will be at night instead of days.” Harold went on to marry Carolyn Hink in 1949.

Harold never told his children about his whirlwind romance with Nancy. Harold’s daughter wrote in an email, “No one ever mentioned her. Not Dad or his sister, Lucy, that I ever remember. We found out about her from the letters.” The relationship intrigued us, so we searched to see if we could find out what happened to Nancy. We discovered that some of her wartime letters and photographs are in the Women Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. From their biography of Nancy, we discovered that she married in April 1946, and died in 2002.

Their collection contained a letter that mentioned Harold, so the archivist at UNC, Beth Ann Koelsch, sent a copy of the letter Nancy wrote on July 15, 1945, to her mother: “Mommie you know me very well I am not ready as yet to decide who or when I will marry. When I do, I will tell you. I may marry Harold—I may not. There is so much as yet in this world that is undecided. I do not know now what I will want for my tomorrow—Harold is a very fine intelligent young man. In a way I love him but whether that love will last over years of separation I do not know. I wish I could talk to you. I don’t want Harold hurt. If he wants to dream great things for tomorrow then let him. I am a realist I know how time and distance weaken even the strongest ties. He wanted to get married over here. I said that *if* we felt the same after the war was over and we had returned to sanity I would. Harold is very eager and very much in



love. When the war is over, we will see—you see maybe I am being unkind I do not know. War does funny things to people. Harold's job mother is not finished he will spend a little time in the States then go on to the Pacific. There he will live in God knows what conditions. When you are far away from home, the life and comforts you have always had, in a world devoid of beauty, if you are a sensitive person, dreams of a tomorrow assume huge proportion. When reality is too stark it is pleasant and necessary to think of a beautiful tomorrow. Harold found me when he was tired and sick of war's destruction. In me he saw a tomorrow. He loves me with a love I am unworthy of, but would it be kind for me to destroy now that dream when I know that he will need it again. I do not know. Mommie maybe I'm being stupid and cruel I do not know. When the war is over and he returns to the States to his home family friends the things he loves the life he longs for then when we can spend some time knowing each other as we are in civil life he and I will be better able to know if we are truly in love. How can we tell now what is love and what is wishful thinking? How can we know now what tomorrow will be?"

Nancy's letter answered some questions for us as we pondered her silence after their separation. Hopefully we'll be able to piece more of the story together in time.

Harold's letter to his mother and sister on April 15, 1945, bore a cryptic statement: "There was a very good reason for our sudden and immediately searching intimacy which sounds so much like fiction that we will save it and someday Nan or I can tell you about it in person." Their letters have not revealed that reason, but at least with the reunion of their letters on our website, we have clearer insights into this passionate, loving wartime romance. ■



Donna Albino works as an archivist for the Ghost Army Legacy Project, a nonprofit organization that promotes awareness of WWII's artists of deception: a tactical unit of US artist-soldiers that used their theater art skills to create sound effects, fake radio transmissions, and inflatable tanks to fool the Germans on the battlefield. Harold's letters and photographs can be read here: <<http://www.ghostarmylegacyproject.org/dahl-letters.html>>.

## People

**Judith (Judi) Garner**, former director of the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center (JHC) at New England Historic Genealogical Society, passed away on December 21, 2019. A graduate of Wellesley College and Simmons College School of Library and Information Science, Garner began her archival career with the JHC collections at Brandeis University (as the American Jewish Historical Society). Her advocacy and stewardship of the collections saw the archives through two moves—first to Hebrew College, then to NEHGS. In May 2017, she was honored with a medal from the Jewish-American Hall of Fame. Garner was dedicated to the preservation of Boston's Jewish history, the JHC archives, and her staff.

Longtime NEA member **Harley Peirce Holden** passed away on December 15, 2019. He joined the Harvard University Archives staff in 1960, serving as the university archivist from 1971 to 2003. Under his leadership, the archives moved from one desktop computer in 1983 to thirty-four networked stations in 2003. After hiring Harvard's first records manager in 1982, he established a university-wide records management program in 1995. During his tenure, the collections grew from 2,000 to over 50,000 cubic feet of records and papers. He was active in the Society of American Archivists, International Council on Archives, Colonial Society of Massachusetts, and many more.

The History Project (THP), Boston's LGBTQ community archives, appointed **Joan Ilacqua** as its first executive director in January. The position was made possible through a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Ilacqua previously served as co-chair of THP's board of directors and as Harvard Medical School's archivist for diversity and inclusion. She serves on NEA's Inclusion and Diversity Committee. THP is part of the inaugural class of the Mellon Foundation's archives program, which aims to diversify the nation's stores of primary-source evidence by supporting and strengthening community-based archiving practice. For more information, visit <<http://www.historyproject.org>> or email <[info@historyproject.org](mailto:info@historyproject.org)>. ■

Visit NEA online at:

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

From Page 7



Adrien Hilton is the head of the manuscript section at Harvard University's Houghton Library, where she oversees archives processing and manuscript cataloging. Prior to coming to Houghton, Adrien held positions at Columbia University's

Rare Book and Manuscript Library and New York University's Tamiment Library. Adrien is an advisory member of SAA's Technical Subcommittee on Describing Archives: A Content Standard.

#### Footnotes:

1. Banks, Joy. "The Foundations of Discovery A Report on the Assessment of the Impacts of the Cataloging Hidden Collections Program, 2008–2019." Arlington, Virginia: Council on Library and Information Resources, September 2019.
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3. Weideman, Christine. "Accessioning as Processing." *American Archivist* 69, no. 2 (2006): 274-83. Guidelines for Efficient Archival Processing in the University of California Libraries. September 18, 2012, version 3.2. Accessed February 9, 2020, <[https://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/hosc/docs/\\_Efficient\\_Archival\\_Processing\\_Guidelines\\_v3-1.pdf](https://libraries.universityofcalifornia.edu/groups/files/hosc/docs/_Efficient_Archival_Processing_Guidelines_v3-1.pdf)>. Santamaria, Daniel A. *Extensible Processing for Archives and Special Collections: Reducing Processing Backlogs*. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2015.
4. For further details on the process, Altermatt, Rebecca, and Adrien Hilton. "Hidden Collections within Hidden Collections: Providing Access to Printed Ephemera." *American Archivist* 75, no. 1 (2012): 171-94.
5. A full list of the principles can be found here, "Joint Processing Guidelines at Harvard Library," accessed February 10, 2020, <<https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/jointprocessing-guidelines/principles>>.
6. "Joint Processing Guidelines at Harvard Library," accessed February 10, 2020, <<https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/jointprocessingguidelines>>.
7. Greene, Mark A. "MPLP: It's Not Just for Processing Anymore." *American Archivist* 73, no. 1 (2010): 175-203.

From Page 12

This grant funding supports the PPL, in collaboration with the RIHS, to digitize at least 50,000 pages of historic Rhode Island newspapers, which will be made available via the Library of Congress; provide the Library of Congress with preservation copies of microfilm reels; and promote the accessibility of these digital resources to the broader community.

## V E R M O N T

### Hardwick Historical Society Digitizes Newspapers Documenting Local Granite Industry

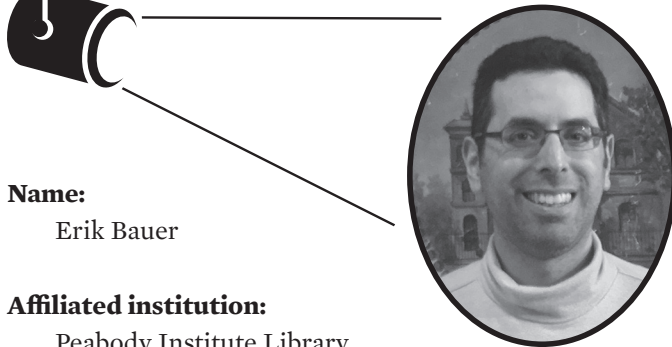
Between 1903 and 1922, the Woodbury Granite Company of Hardwick, Vermont, built six state capitols, nearly 300 banks, and dozens of city halls, post offices, corporate headquarters, and private homes. The firm built Union Station in Washington, D.C.; Cook County Courthouse in Chicago; and the Turk's Head Building in Providence, Rhode Island. Today, few people know that Hardwick was once the "building granite capital of the world." The *Hardwick Gazette* documented the era, but issues prior to 1920 had not been previously microfilmed or digitized.

Last fall, in partnership with the current owners of the *Gazette* and the Vermont State Library (VSL), the Hardwick Historical Society microfilmed and digitized the newspapers from 1890 to 1919 (except 1892–1896, which did not survive). The microfilm will reside at the Vermont State Archives in the state library's microfilm collection, which includes the *Hardwick Gazette* from 1920 to present, and the digital versions will appear in Newspapers.com via the VSL's portal.

### Hardwick Historical Society Renovates Storage Space

The museum, archives, and office of the Hardwick Historical Society are based in the town's 1882 railroad depot, which is divided into three sections. The westernmost section had become a chaotic room containing old construction materials, large donations to the collection, and archival supplies. With support of a generous bequest and other donations, that section of the building was renovated into a secure, climate-controlled storage space, including a well-insulated room within the existing room. ■

## NEA Member Spotlight



**Name:**

Erik Bauer

**Affiliated institution:**

Peabody Institute Library  
& Haverhill Public Library

**Job title or career stage:**

Archivist & Archives Manager

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

I discovered the archival field almost by accident. After completing a master's degree in humanities, I had an interest in museums, but decided to get an MA in history at Salem State University. During an internship at the Nahant Historical Society, I enjoyed working on an inventory of selectman correspondence. From there, I took advantage of every workshop, webinar, book, and article I could find to educate myself about the archival field. I am now working towards my MLIS with an archives concentration through the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

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

As a lone arranger, I do a bit of everything. I enjoy processing letters and journals because it is interesting to read them and to understand what the person was like. At the same time, I like putting together exhibits and doing outreach to let the public know about the materials we have in our collection.

### 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>.

**What piqued your interest about New England Archivists?**

Professional development especially the workshops, is a big reason why I became interested in NEA. I have learned a great deal from the workshops, as well as attending the meetings and learning from others.

**What's an interesting fact about you or an unexpected talent or interest? Alternatively, what would you do on your ideal day off?**

I have been a bass player for almost thirty years and I enjoy playing jazz, blues, and rock. I also have a general love of music and enjoy discovering new music and genres. I do have a soft spot for bad Christmas music. And when I have a moment, I like to read biographies and historical fiction.

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

I hope that we find new and interesting ways to engage with the general public. There is a public perception that archivists only work with old and fragile material. While that may be true to some extent, there is a vast amount of digital material and records from the present that need to be preserved. My hope is that we, as archivists, continue to engage with the public and help them find answers in the materials we collect and preserve.

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

The biggest challenge that I have seen is advocating for archives in public libraries. I have great support at my institution, but public libraries need support from the profession to help preserve and protect their collections when hiring an archivist is not possible. ■



The National Parks of Boston and the DH Hub hosted a "Suffrage Transcribe-a-thon" in January at Northeastern University. *Courtesy of National Parks of Boston, NPS/Pollock.*

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## THIS SEASON IN NEW ENGLAND HISTORY



### **City swing set in Roxbury, 1962.**

Girls play on a makeshift swing set up on the corner of Regent and Alpine Streets, Roxbury, Massachusetts, 1962. This image comes from the Freedom House, Inc. records. *Courtesy of Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections.*