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**N E A**

# NEWSLETTER

NEW ENGLAND ARCHIVISTS



**C O V E R** — This photograph comes from the Litchfield Historical Society (LHS) and depicts the relocation of the Litchfield Law School building down South Street in Litchfield, Connecticut. Read more about the building in the LHS news announcement on page 8.

**I N S I D E** — This issue focuses on issues of social justice, with Gina Nortonsmith's feature on the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive (page 4) and the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association Northeast Chapter's visit to the Beinecke Library (page 17). Meet the members of NEA's Inclusion and Diversity Committee (page 11) and read session reports from the Fall 2023 Symposium (page 14). Lois Hamill announces her retirement (page 7) and institutions from around the region share their news (page 8).

**TAKING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE**



# New England Archivists

TAKING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

45 Skehan Street • Somerville, MA 02143

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

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The *NEA Newsletter* is published quarterly in January, April, July, and October. The contents of the *Newsletter* may be reproduced in whole or in part provided that credit is given.

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

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## From the Editors

- Sally Blanchard-O'Brien

And just like that, NEA finds itself at the beginning of another new year, but this time with half a century of organizational experience behind it. Coming off our 50th anniversary, we turn to the future through our offerings, our exploration of new ideas and platforms, our commitment to professional goals, and through our upcoming Spring Meeting, "In Pursuit of the Future."

This issue focuses on diversity in the archives, and we're pleased to share an article by one of 2023's Racial Justice Honoraria Fund recipients. Gina Nortonsmith, Archivist for African American History at the Northeastern University Snell Library, writes about her work on the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive (page 4). Jeanie Paul and Janet H. Clarke review their experience during the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association Northeast Chapter's visit to view Asian American and Pacific Islander collections at the Yale Beinecke

Library (page 17). Meet the new and returning members of the Inclusion and Diversity Committee and hear about their plans for the coming year (page 11).

We are also pleased to present session reports from NEA's virtual Fall Symposium, held this past October (page 14), which featured discussions around NEA's past and future, the ethics and care of community history, and Gracen M. Brilmyer's 2022 article "Toward a Crip Provenance: Centering Disability in Archives through its Absence." Find news and announcements from colleagues around the region (page 8). We look forward to the return of the Inside NEA column in future issues after the transition to a new president in 2024!

Please remember that this publication is member-driven, so we need you! Send us your news, accomplishments, stories, ideas, or just reach out to us at [newsletter@new-englandarchivists.org](mailto:newsletter@new-englandarchivists.org). We want to hear from you! From all of us at the Newsletter, we wish you a happy new year and hope to see you in Providence this March. ■



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## ARCHIVAL INSIGHT

## Making the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive

By Gina Nortonsmith, Northeastern University

Like many project archivists hired to complete a specific project, I began my work on the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive thinking that my work would be fairly straightforward with its boundaries set and deliverables enumerated. I'm happy to say that the work, and the professional experience, exceeded my expectations. I am extremely proud to have been a part of what we have created with Northeastern University School of Law and Northeastern University's Snell Library.

The Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive (BNDA, [CRRJArchive.org](http://CRRJArchive.org)) is named after Margaret Burnham, Distinguished University Professor of Law at Northeastern and founding director of CRRJ; and research partner Melissa Nobles, Chancellor, and professor of political science at MIT. CRRJ is a clinic at NU School of Law, and the archive is "*...one of the most comprehensive digital records of racial homicides collected to date, and home to more than 1,000 case files. It is an invaluable resource for examining the extensive scale of killings in the Jim Crow South, from 1930 to 1954, offering users the opportunity to learn how violence affected people's lives, defined legal rights and shaped politics during the Jim Crow era*" (*Who We Are | The Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project*, 2023). Version 1 of the archive, released in September 2022, contains twelve thousand records evidencing one thousand cases of anti-Black homicides which took place in eleven of the southern Jim Crow states. The next version, scheduled for release in 2024, will add incidents from six border states.

When lawyers work on a matter for a client, it is for an individual case with records organized to support that singular investigation. My task was to compile the individual case records into an aggregated archival collection representing all of the cases, allowing incidents to be understood and studied as a phenomenon of violence and legal indifference which plagued – and continues to plague – the United States of America. But this collection representing the work of CRRJ would also carry its ethos to maintain the dignity and respect for the victims and their families. Teams in both the law school and library were committed to this path.

We were guided by the many scholars whose work in this area describes a way forward in archives and data

collection which honors the people represented. This archive is a collection of records related to people whose deaths were most often chronicled with indifference by the justice system (Drake, 2019). We had a responsibility to represent the victims as whole people whose lives existed outside of and beyond the circumstances of their deaths (Caswell & Cifor, 2016). Records CRRJ collected weren't limited to the "official records" concerning the incident, but included advocacy and organizing in individual cases and against extra judicial killings as a terroristic practice (Foreman, 2023). In our presentation of the data pulled from the records, we wanted users to see the facets as they applied to a real person, not an abstract notion (*#unsilencedpast with Professors Marisa Parham and Kim Gallon*, 2020). We wanted to build an archive which illuminated CRRJ's work and that led us to put the victim and their story foremost in arrangement, description, and access.

One way to honor our commitment to the victims is to discuss the archive through their stories, using their names and locating them in the time and place of their deaths. We worked with CRRJ to identify the correct name of each victim and used that authenticated name in our record titles rather than what was on any "official record." We used that name in the record titles, with other names included as alternatives. Three hundred victims in the archive have more than one alternate name or spelling of their name.

It would be impossible to create an archival collection which reflects the work of CRRJ and their approach without first understanding what they do, how they operate, what they collect, and the significance of each type of record.

To investigate homicides where anti-Black animus is suspected, CRRJ investigators search for incident-

related investigative records at federal agencies such as the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation and from local entities such as police, coroners, and court records. Just as importantly, CRRJ collects records of advocacy groups detailing the push for justice.

The files contain letters from family and community members advocating for justice because the local government was failing them, even in cases where there were many witnesses, as there were in the 1947 killing of Mr. Woodrow Wilson in North Carolina (*Woodrow Wilson | The Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive*, n.d.). Mr. Will Brown wrote to the NAACP in 1947 about the sham trial held on the killing of his wife, Alice, in Arkansas in 1947 stating, “I am not satisfied with what they done.” (*Alice Brown | The Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive*, n.d.). Mrs. Ethel Davis wrote to Eleanor Roosevelt, asking for justice for her son, Willie Lee Davis, an active member of the military during WWII, who was shot dead in 1943 by a civilian police officer in Georgia. Mrs. Davis wrote that she, “was willing for her only two boys to die for our country but not be killed by a man he is fighting for.” Mrs. Davis, who had been asked by her community to make a radio address in support of the United States and war effort enlistment concluded, “So if this is the way we are treated [by those] that we are fighting for we [are] treated like dogs.” (*Killing of Willie Lee Davis in Georgia in 1943 | The Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive*, n.d.).

These records are the evidence which allows the acts of violence and terrorism – and the failures of the justice system to enforce real consequences on the perpetrators – to be situated in time and place and therefore integrated into the historical record (Burnham, 2022).

Providing specific information about the evidence contained in the collection’s records meant going beyond the usual descriptive elements. Our Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS) and locally controlled vocabularies included LCNAF authorities for entities which produced the records to aid in identifying and locating who was involved in the incident (*Metadata Object Description Schema*, n.d.). We also used an expansive set of local genre fields to reflect information from the records those entities produced which are not usually included in archival description. This supported our item-level description of records in five of the thirteen record types:

death certificates, Department of Justice and FBI records, newspaper articles, advocacy group records, as well as portraits of the victims.

After reviewing the record collection, we next needed to know what information from the records to highlight. I worked with Professor Burnham, Chancellor Nobles, and CRRJ Associate Director Rose Zoltek-Jick to create a data dictionary of the concepts they felt most important in this collection of legal and personal records. Our initial data dictionary of over 180 terms included information on the victim as a person, their family, as well as local advocacy and contemporary restorative justice efforts to support the family. The current version of the archive contains about 55 of those facets.

Data dictionary elements about the victim include age, the type of work they performed, and military service status. Elements about the incident include type of location and perpetrator group type, with the largest group concerning both criminal and civil legal processes in the aftermath. These elements allow users to learn that incidents grew out of a variety of causes, such as underlying economic disputes. Examples include the 1947 murder of successful businessman, Mr. Henry “Peg” Gilbert, in Georgia; the 1944 Mississippi killing of Rev. Issac Simmons, who controlled 278 family-owned acres thought to include lucrative mineral deposits; and the 1953 murder of Mrs. Della McDuffie, who with her husband owned a café in Alabama (*Henry Gilbert | The Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive*, n.d.; *Isaac Simmons | The Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive*, n.d.; *Killing of Della McDuffie in Alabama in 1953 | The Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive*, n.d.). Some arose from outright challenges to Jim Crow, as did the 1947 murder of Mr. Elbert Williams in Tennessee for his continued pursuit of his voting rights and the many murders which took place on public transportation for objecting to segregated seating, including the murders of Mr. Timothy Hood in Alabama in 1946 and Army Pvt. Booker T. Spicely in North Carolina in 1944 (*Elbert Williams | The Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive*, n.d.; *Killing of Booker T. Spicely in North Carolina in 1944 | The Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive*, n.d.; *Killing of Timothy Hood in Alabama in 1946 | The Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive*, n.d.).

At times, working with records which detail targeted and often casual violence is difficult (Caswell & Robinson-Sweet, 2023; Wright & Laurent, 2021). Knowing that we

were helping to bring these stories forward once again went a long way toward keeping us moving forward.

The default of the justice system at both the state and federal levels during this period to treat these acts as anything other than domestic terrorism continues to weigh down the cause of justice and freedom that all Americans are promised. With our work building this archive of records and data, we hope we have been true to our aim of respecting the victims. Providing this evidence will allow these stories to be examined and used to further justice for the families and communities impacted and create a better understanding of how we got to this place.

\*Note: Parts of this essay are adapted from a presentation given with my colleagues Raymond Wilkes, III, Amanda Rust, and Drew Facklam at Digital Library Forum DLF 2020 (Wilkes, III et al., 2020). ■



Gina Nortonsmith was Project Archivist for the Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project Burnham-Nobles Digital Archive (BNDA) of Northeastern University School of Law until transitioning to the role of African American History Archivist at NU

Library Archives and Special Collections last fall. Prior to becoming an archivist, Gina was a trial lawyer, and worked in higher education as a professor, administrator, and ombudsperson. She has worked on archival projects in the USA and Cuba and has a J.D. and a MILS. Gina is Treasurer of Historic Northampton's Board of Trustees and serves on the Slavery Research Project committee.

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## People

**Lois Hamill**, professor and head of the Special Collections and University Archives department at Northern Kentucky University's Steely Library, has retired. A practicing archivist for twenty-five years, she holds master's degrees in history/archival methods and library and information science and is a Certified Archivist and Digital Archives Specialist. She worked previously at College of the Holy Cross, the Episcopal Divinity School, and the Bedford, Massachusetts Historical Society and Town Clerk's Office. She was active in the New England Archivists serving on many committees and as Treasurer (1993-2007); in the Midwest Archives Conference serving as a newsletter column (co-)editor for six years; served on the Kentucky Council on Archives board (2008-2010); and was a Society of American Archivists member. Hamill is a successful grant writer, presented at the first Global Conference on Digital Memories in Austria and spoke at many other conferences, and is the award-winning author of three books: *Archives for the Lay Person: a Guide to Managing Cultural Collections*, *Archival Arrangement and Description: Analog to Digital*, and *Archives 101*. ■

## IN PURSUIT OF THE FUTURE: LOOKING AHEAD WITH NEA

March 14-16, 2024 | Renaissance Providence Downtown Hotel | Providence, RI

Fresh from an incredible fiftieth-anniversary celebration, NEA invites its members to look ahead and consider what's next for our organization, our field, our world, and ourselves. Engage in passionate discussions, forge new connections, and join us as we boldly imagine the archives of tomorrow by examining the archives of today.

Learn more and stay tuned for our exciting schedule, including information on our plenary speaker, at [newenglandarchivists.org/spring-2024](http://newenglandarchivists.org/spring-2024).



# News and Notes

## CONNECTICUT

### Litchfield Historical Society Completes Processing of its Institutional Records

Processing and description of the institutional records of the Litchfield Historical Society (LHS) was recently completed by Leith Johnson with support from Connecticut Humanities. The records document the Society's transition from a small, volunteer-run historical society to an American Alliance of Museums accredited organization.

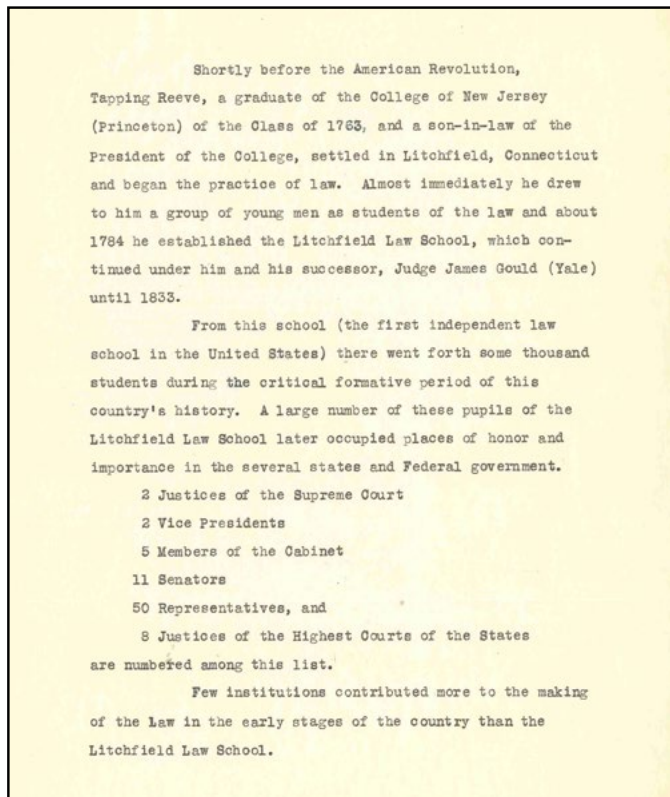
Incorporated in 1856, the Society was an early example of the growing American desire to preserve the material aspects of the past. In 1901, LHS was given a room in the newly constructed Noyes Memorial Building, and by 1968 it was the sole occupant of the structure. The 1910 gift of the Litchfield Law School building and the 1928 purchase of the Tapping Reeve House from Yale College expanded its footprint.

In 1998, LHS reinterpreted the Tapping Reeve house and Litchfield Law School with an exhibit focused on the students at the Law School and the Litchfield Female Academy. The Ledger, an online database of those students, was launched in 2009. In 2018, LHS reimagined the property the Tapping Reeve House sits on, creating an outdoor community space. View the finding aid here: <<https://archives.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org/repositories/2/resources/1335>>.

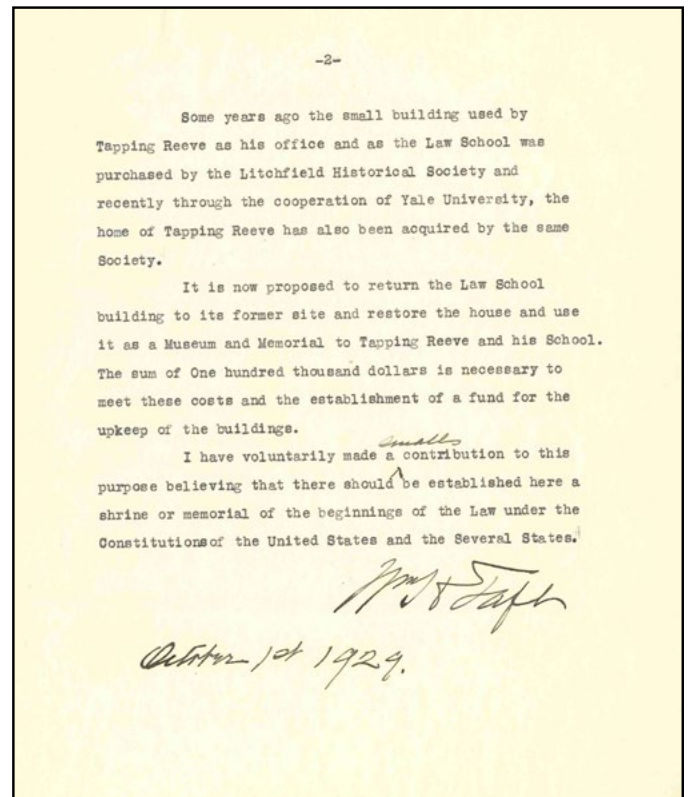
## MASSACHUSETTS

### Digitizing LGBTQ+ Visual History at The History Project

The History Project (THP) is pleased to share that Marco Lanier was awarded the 2023 Visual Resources Association (VRA) Internship Award for digitization work at THP. Marco spent 200 hours in Fall 2023 curating and digitizing visual resources from the Gay Community News Collection.



Page 1 of letter from William H. Taft in support of the restoration of the Tapping Reeve House and Litchfield Law School.



Page 2 of letter from William H. Taft in support of the restoration of the Tapping Reeve House and Litchfield Law School.





Rita Mae Brown, Wilda White, and Bruce Voeller at a Green Mountain Crossroads (now known as Out in the Open) event in Vermont, circa 1975. Gay Community News Collection, GCN.PPL-00.712. Courtesy of The History Project. © John Tobin

Gay Community News (GCN) was an influential Boston-based newspaper that reported on LGBTQ+ life and issues from 1973 to 1999. In honor of the newspaper's semicentennial in 2023, The History Project presented a series of programs featuring GCN contributors in partnership with Massachusetts Historical Society and with the support of the National LGBTQ+ Museum and Northeastern University Library Archives & Special Collections. With VRA support, Marco Lanier augmented these programs by broadening access to visual records from GCN's wide-ranging coverage.

Digitizing and ensuring access to these materials through The History Project's digital collections platform will enhance the impact of The History Project's Gay Community News Collection, and contribute to their public programming, education, and outreach efforts. For more information, contact Marco Lanier at <[lanierm2@simmons.edu](mailto:lanierm2@simmons.edu)>.

### Phillips Library Acquires Furniture Maker's Papers

The Peabody Essex Museum's Phillips Library would like to announce the recent acquisition and processing of the Philip Lowe papers. Lowe (1948-2021) was a furniture maker/wood carver, who graduated from the North Bennet Street School's Cabinet and Furniture Making program in 1974, where he later worked as an instructor. In addition

to teaching, Lowe operated his own furniture making and restoration business, completing work for private clients, including the National Park Service, historic sites, and museums. In 1989, Lowe started the Furniture Institute of Massachusetts, in Beverly, Massachusetts, where he continued his teaching, building, and restoration work.

The collection, which compliments the museum's American Decorative Arts department, includes photographs, workshops on DVDs, 487 woodworking plans, and other materials created by Lowe throughout his career. View the finding aid [here](#), or reach out with questions to Hilary Streifer at <[hilary\\_streifer@pem.org](mailto:hilary_streifer@pem.org)>.



A cart full of unprocessed plans.



Processed and inventoried plans on shelving.

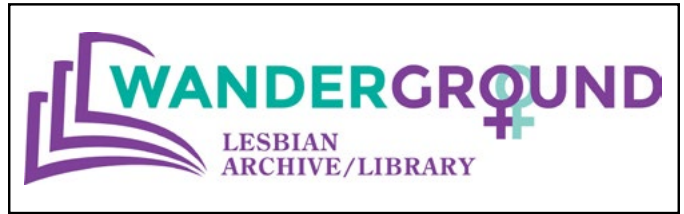
## VERMONT

### Introducing the New Roving Archivist

In the wake of Sally Blanchard-O'Brien's departure to join the team processing Senator Patrick Leahy's papers at the University of Vermont, Megan Johnson-Saylor has joined the Vermont Historical Records Program (VHRP) as Roving Archivist. Megan comes to Vermont from Minnesota, where she most recently worked as the College Archivist at Macalester College. Prior to that role, she held several different positions at Concordia University, Saint Paul, including Digital Scholarship Librarian & University Archivist. Megan provides technical assistance to Vermont's historical records repositories through site visits, follow-up reports, and resource sharing. She will also be involved in several of the VHRP's initiatives to build statewide capacity in support of the staff and volunteers at these organizations. The VHRP, based at the Vermont State Archives & Records Administration, has a staff of two, and receives programmatic support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.



Day two on the job and already roving!



Wanderground's new logo.

## REGIONAL NEWS

### Wanderground Lesbian Archive/Library Continues to Make Forward Strides

We've got a new logo and icon designed by local Rhode Island-based graphic artist, Mary Ann Rossoni at Second Story Graphics <<http://www.secondstorygraphics.com>>.

We have also updated our website <<https://wanderground.org>> with a fresh new look and loaded with interesting content. We thank Barbara Gottlieb (Webster Extraordinaire) at <<http://gottgraphics.com>> for her enthusiasm for this project and creative design suggestions.

Our recently completed Strategic Roadmap will guide our next steps for the coming two years, including efforts to begin a Capital Campaign to find a permanent space. Hopefully we'll meet you at the NEA conference in March in Providence. ■

Visit NEA online at:

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

### Promote your photograph collections!

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



# From IDEAs to Action

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

*By the members of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee*

The Inclusion and Diversity Committee is excited to welcome both our new and returning members! As we begin a new cycle, we are looking forward to awarding more outstanding cultural heritage works of color funding via the Racial Justice Honoraria fund and working on new projects to meet the needs of our members. We asked new and returning members a few questions to introduce themselves and their sense of what lies ahead for the year.

## **Matt Amedeo**

**Pronouns:** he/him

**Position/Term:** Chair (2023-2024)

**Q: What is your background?** Matt is a corporate Archivist who completed his Master's degree in history on the Archives track at UMass Boston in May of 2023. He has experiences in government and corporate archives alike, but has a pointed interest in the corporate world.

**Q: Why did you want to join the IDC?** I joined the IDC to be able to “put my money where my mouth is.” I am an extreme advocate for equity and inclusion and rather than being just a proponent for change, I wanted to take sound action to help address the inequities in the archival world.

**Q: What work are you excited to continue in the year ahead?** I am most excited about seeing the evolution of the Racial Justice Honoraria Fund after we have officially had our first recipients. The feedback from these individuals on how the fund has helped them has been overwhelmingly positive, and I am excited to watch the fund grow!”

## **Susanna Coit**

**Pronouns:** she/her/hers

**Position/Term:** Vice-Chair/Chair Elect (2023-2024)

**Q: What is your background?** I'm currently the Archivist and Research Library Assistant at Perkins School for the

Blind. I got a degree in Afro-American Studies with a minor in Special Education from Smith College (2008) and an MLIS in Archives from Simmons (2016). Before discovering “archives” as a career, I worked as an early childhood teacher and then as a research administrator.

**Q: Why did you want to join the IDC?** I joined the IDC because I want to help create and promote an inclusive environment for archivists in New England (and beyond!). I want to make sure that as many people as possible are able to experience and make use of archives, and working at Perkins School for the Blind has made me aware of the various accessibility needs and barriers for both archivists and users.

**Q: What work are you excited to continue in the year ahead?** As vice-chair/chair elect of the IDC, I look forward to working with other committee members to come up with creative and useful ways to provide the support and resources that NEA members need. I am excited to share and promote the RJHF through existing and new channels to make sure that it becomes a well-known resource.

## **Benny Bauer**

**Position/Term:** Member (2023-2024)

**Q: What is your background?** I earned my MLIS at University of Maryland, College Park, specializing in Archives and Digital Curation. I have worked several contract positions, including one as Archives Technician at the Smithsonian Channel, one on the NEH-funded Historic Maryland Newspapers Project, and one as Digitization Specialist at the National Agricultural Library.

**Q: Why did you want to join the IDC?** I wanted to join the IDC because I want to help shape NEA into a more inclusive and welcoming organization.

**Q: What work are you excited to continue in the year**

**ahead?** I am excited to continue working on projects that help eliminate barriers in the organization and in the field in general, and help make information more accessible. We piloted note taking at the spring conference, and I think it went well enough to continue doing at future events. I hope to get involved in more projects in the year to come.

### Gladys García

**Pronouns:** she/her/hers/ella

**Position/Term:** Member (2023-2025)

**Q: What is your background?** I am an early career Archivist having worked in a variety of information management/metadata librarian consulting roles and have worked with community-based archives. Aside from my archival experience, I have a background in non-profit development and communications work, which has been an asset in informing my archival work working with diverse and sensitive collections.

**Q: Why did you want to join the IDC?** I wanted to join IDC as an opportunity to increase diverse representation and access in the LIS field and to give back to the profession, as so many archivists and librarians have supported me along the way to becoming an archivist and navigating the field.

**Q: What do you hope to accomplish during your service on the IDC?** As a member of the IDC at NEA I am seeking to collaborate and meet with other archival thought leaders in the New England area, support and contribute to the IDC's initiatives for diversity and inclusion, and increase access for NEA programming and events.

### Caro Langenbacher

**Pronouns:** they/them/theirs

**Position/Term:** Member (2023-2025)

**Q: What is your background?** I'm originally from central New Jersey, but I went to college and grad school in New England. I've worked in a number of different academic and museum archives, but some of the most meaningful experiences I've had have come from volunteering at queer community archives, so that informs my work. I can also speak Hebrew and Yiddish and am learning French, and I love to use my language skills whenever I get the chance!

**Q: Why did you want to join the IDC?** I am passionate

about preserving and uplifting the histories of marginalized communities, and about making this field more welcoming and inclusive to more people. Joining the IDC seemed like a great way to pursue that while gaining committee experience.

**Q: What do you hope to accomplish during your service on the IDC?** I hope to help foster and strengthen trans inclusion in NEA. I'd also like to foster conversation about how to effectively and ethically deal with harmful historical materials and harmful archival description in our collections.

### Taylor McNeilly

**Pronouns:** they/them

**Position/Term:** Member (2023-2025)

**Q: What is your background?** My background is almost entirely in academic archives, with roots in a variety of languages and cultures. During grad school, I worked in the Simmons College Archives, and after graduating spent 6 years at the University of Richmond.

**Q: Why did you want to join the IDC?** As someone who belongs to a number of marginalized communities, I want to build a better sense of belonging in archives to support a broader historical record by engaging with underrepresented communities. One way to encourage this is by diversifying the archives profession itself to better reflect the reality of our society.

**Q: What do you hope to accomplish during your service on the IDC?** An increased sense of inclusion and greater diversity within NEA and the New England archives professional community.

### Sarah Shepherd

**Pronouns:** she/her

**Position/Term:** Member (2023-2024)

**Q: What is your background?** Sarah Shepherd works as the archivist at the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library in Lexington, Massachusetts. She holds a M.S. in Library Science and M.A. in History from Simmons University.

**Q: Why did you want to join the IDC?** I joined the IDC to continue to push for diversity, equity, and accessibility in

NEA and our field. I first began to speak up professionally about DEIA issues during my service as an AmeriCorps member in a small rural historical society. The historical society focused almost entirely on the history of wealthy white men in the area. When the new executive director, Nora Venezky, and I came on board, we were determined to build relationships with our local community, re-engaging them with new programs and a modernized museum and archives, and establish the historical society as an institution that tells a larger and more diverse history. Listening and learning from our community partners made me more deeply cognizant of my privilege and responsibility as an archivist to make archives representative and accessible to all. This work challenged me and pushed me to continue to pursue DEIA in my personal life and career.

**Q: What work are you excited to continue in the year ahead?** I'm excited to continue working on many of our projects that we have in store this upcoming year. I particularly enjoy hosting our twice-annual reading circle.

### **Kelli Yakabu**

**Pronouns:** she/they

**Position/Term:** Member (2022-2024)

**Q: What is your background?** I am the digitization archivist at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. I previously worked at the Nantucket Historical Association after receiving my MLIS from the University of Washington (UW) in 2020. I received my BA in English and American Ethnic Studies with a concentration in Asian American studies, also from UW.

**Q: Why did you want to join the IDC?** I joined IDC to help foster a more inclusive, accessible, and welcoming organization. Along with developing resources and programming on activities such as equitable archival access and reparative description work, I also want to highlight and address the issues faced specifically by archival workers of color.

**Q: What work are you excited to continue in the year ahead?** I look forward to working with my colleagues to continue promoting the Racial Justice Honoraria Fund, organizing programs and activities at the Spring Meeting including the reading circle, and developing resources and providing support for both the NEA's Board and its members. ■



This image shows the Litchfield Historical Society's museum gallery room in the Noyes Memorial Building, pre-1968. *Courtesy Litchfield Historical Society.*

## Nominate Someone or Apply for a New England Archivists Award

The New England Archivists offers five awards through nomination and application that honor leadership in the field and provide financial support for projects and professional development. Nominations for the Archival Advocacy Award, which is given to a nominee demonstrating extraordinary support of New England archival programs and records, and the Distinguished Service Award, which is given to a nominee who promotes the objectives of New England Archivists and has made significant archival contributions, are due by March 1.

Applications for the Audio/Visual Professional Development Award, the Richard L. Haas Records Management Award, and the Richard W. Hale Jr. Professional Development Award are due by February 15. These awards offer an opportunity to receive funding to support a project and continue professional development in their archival specialty.

For more details on the five awards  
New England Archivists offers visit:  
<<https://newenglandarchivists.org/awards>>.

# Fall 2023 Symposium Session Reports

## Opening State of NEA

**Session Reporter:** Francesco Buccella

**Presenters:** Caitlin Birch, New England Archivists; Jeanne Lowrey, New England Archivists

The New England Archivists (NEA) current president Caitlin Birch and vice-president Jeanne Lowrey—who is also president-elect—reflected in tandem on the state of the organization. Each speaker touched on past achievements, reported on present happenings, and gave insight into hopes, ideas, and thoughts for the future of NEA.

In the first third of the session, Birch emphasized two major challenges presently facing NEA: (1) a seeming decline in volunteers willing to take on the many roles necessary to run the organization as desired; and (2) the consistently increasing expenses related to holding in-person meetings, especially in terms of associated venue costs. It was noted that the current group of volunteers—which includes members who have been covering multiple vacant roles—have been working successfully on tasks such as the reinvigoration of the mentorship program and planning for the next NEA annual meeting to be held in Providence, Rhode Island, in March 2024. Additionally, the overall fiscal health of the organization is continually assessed by the financial planning committee to prevent any potential pitfalls in that area.

The next portion of the “Opening State of NEA” was led by Lowrey, who as president-elect, focused on future ambitions and strategies for the “NEA of Tomorrow.” Various topics were covered under the umbrella theme of continuing to build on past and present positives, while reexamining organizational priorities in our ever-changing world. Particularly, the Inclusion and Diversity Committee (IDC) was lauded for its programming, reading groups, and the relatively recent establishment of the Racial Justice Honorary Fund (RJHF). The fund compensates people of color for a broad range of professional activities, such as writing articles, organizing workshops, and conducting research in

the field of archives or cultural heritage. Lowrey concluded by urging willing members to get involved with NEA by attending programs, volunteering on committees, and participating in town halls.

In the latter third of the session, questions and comments for the NEA leadership were taken from attendees. Suggestions from audience members included raising presently modest membership rates to aid any potential financial woes, considering joint meetings with other organizations in like-minded fields, and implementing an online repository for recorded sessions. It was acknowledged that these ideas, as well as many other similar ones, have already been in discussion within NEA. However, they are often too logistically difficult to achieve as they require greater volunteership and always come with added layers of complication. Despite any mentioned challenges, attendees were ultimately reassured that the “...future is bright.”

## IDC Reading Circle “Toward a Crip Provenance:” Centering Disability in Archives through its Absence

**Session Reporter:** Kimberly Money Priddy

**Presenters:** Matt Amedeo, Chair of the Inclusion and Diversity Committee and corporate archivist; Sarah Shepherd, Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library and member of the Inclusion and Diversity Committee

This session provided an open and welcoming space to discuss the concepts described in and share ideas inspired by the article, “Toward a Crip Provenance: Centering Disability in Archives through its Absence” by Gracen Brilmyer <<https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol9/iss1/3/>>.

The session began with Amedeo engaging the twenty-two attendees by asking them a series of questions about accessibility in their own archives and/or collections. The results of the poll showed that 64% of participants had had conversations about accessibility in their organization during the past year; 57% stated that their archives are ADA accessible; 75% reported barriers to accessibility for staff and/or patrons; and 73% of participants reported that their collection includes a representation of disability.

The article aims to pose the questions, “How can we search for disability representation when it’s not obviously there,” and “How can we use representation when the examples given are harmful.” Documentation was often created from a harmful perspective, where underrepresented groups were referred to in racist, belittling, and other disrespectful ways. Session attendees pondered how to tie together historical information that is upsetting and harmful, with our modern viewpoints of disability advocacy and support.

Crip provenance rejects the idea of trying to fix and fill in the missing pieces of information. Instead, it says that archivists should embrace the reality that they won’t know the full history, that pieces of information will be missing, and that records have been destroyed. It’s not always possible to know the whole provenance of a document or collection, but through the missing pieces, we can learn additional information. It’s important to consider what the missing information says about the collection and the viewpoint or treatment of different groups at the time the information was created. Brilmeyer was clear in stating that the article’s discussion is a reorientation of thinking, rather than throwing provenance out the window. It’s using the actual information available and putting it into context based on the history and facts surrounding the events, to build a bigger picture.

The discussion then turned to key takeaways from the article, including the importance of thinking more deeply about what the gaps in information mean, as well as acknowledging disturbing and harmful provenances, even if it means stating that we don’t know why or how we have certain information. One attendee stated that a “statement of unknown is better than nothing if information is missing.”

Current archivists can discuss underrepresentation in collections as a whole by making the public aware that the absence of certain people in a collection may be a manufactured absence. Historically, some people were purposely excluded from documentation and records, which is an important key to understanding the context of the collection’s documents.

Visit NEA online at:

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

## Privacy, Description, and Access: Exploring Ethical Care of Community History

**Session reporter:** Shir Bach

**Presenters:** Moderator: Joan Ilacqua, The History Project. Panelists: Sam Valentine, The History Project; Rachel McIntosh, Digital Transgender Archives; Betts Coup, Houghton Library, Harvard; Molly Brown, Northeastern University Archives

This well-attended Friday morning session of the NEA Fall 2023 Virtual Symposium brought together five archivists implementing community-engaged processing and outreach work across New England. Moderator Joan Ilacqua posed questions to the four panelists, including audience questions submitted through Zoom chat. The panelists prepared a Google Doc with resources and links relevant to the session: <<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pB8UG51iJKahc5JO-9Khbc-MWEwUgxNKzVBvz535sFXI>>

Panelists Rachel McIntosh and Betts Coup are involved with reparative description work at their respective archives. In discussion, they emphasized the slow but meaningful character of these efforts. McIntosh shared a link to the Digital Transgender Archive’s Harm Reduction Guide <[https://docs.google.com/document/d/15usOPOUi4EdqOgz2O47xbQBgvYJJlpX3sj6\\_LDOaQuM](https://docs.google.com/document/d/15usOPOUi4EdqOgz2O47xbQBgvYJJlpX3sj6_LDOaQuM)>, which she and others wrote as part of a CLIR grant focused on digitizing trans BIPOC histories. Coup discussed her ongoing efforts, in collaboration with other archivists and librarians at Harvard, to identify and repair harmful language in finding aids across the institution’s repositories—work that involves “an inordinate amount of time in spreadsheets.”

Panelists Sam Valentine and Molly Brown focused on the access side of the equation, describing their efforts to build what Brown terms “transformative rather than transactional” community partnerships. Some of the strategies discussed by these panelists included removing fees for scanning, focusing on providing remote reference, changing the reading room culture to foster connection and conversation, and organizing events that encourage collaborative storytelling through archival materials.

A recurring theme throughout the panel was how to approach feedback from donors, patrons, and colleagues.

Following an audience question on dealing with criticism from students about the pace of reparative work, panelists underlined the need for communication and transparency about the resources available to one's institution. At the Digital Transgender Archive, for example, McIntosh reminds patrons that archival processing is carried out by undergraduate students. Relatedly, Coup described the need to communicate internally with curators about new procedures at Houghton, which resulted in slower initial processing but improved overall access by not relying on insufficient dealer-supplied descriptions.

Panelists emphasized that ethical care of community history requires humility, transparency, and flexibility. In response to a question about protecting privacy, Valentine and Brown agreed that archivists cannot predict and proactively solve every potential ethical issue. Nevertheless, they can build "readiness to respond" by creating flexible and transparent workflows. Coup also commented on the iterative nature of all archival work and especially redescription efforts, which must be ready to respond to the continual evolution of language and community perspectives.

In closing remarks, all panelists echoed Valentine's sentiment that this work is not done in isolation and invited the audience to reach out in the spirit of collaboration.

## Closing Town Hall and Closing Remarks

**Session Reporter:** Patrick Doyle

**Panelists:** Jeanne Lowrey, New England Archivists

The final session of the Fall 2023 symposium served as an extension to the Opening State of NEA session and as an opportunity for members to further discuss the organization's future. NEA president-elect Jeanne Lowrey led discussions using a Google Jamboard to focus the discussion and bring in the perspectives of the approximately 30 NEA members attending. The Jamboard has been saved and can be accessed below: <[https://jamboard.google.com/d/1l9Qv\\_hTr-T22Kx4YLAMitFtPI8-g9k8uY-QQB229CIw](https://jamboard.google.com/d/1l9Qv_hTr-T22Kx4YLAMitFtPI8-g9k8uY-QQB229CIw)>

After an initial discussion prompt on the attendees' favorite foods demonstrated how to use the Jamboard platform (and showed the attendees' proclivities towards cheese), the group moved onto the question: "What about

the NEA of today do you value most?" This question received answers that tended to clump around a couple of themes. Seventeen attendees cited interaction with the NEA community as the aspect of the organization they valued most. An additional eight cited the meetings, resource sharing, and professional development aspects of the organization. A few other responses cited the mentor program and the organization's resilience.

The next question: "What would you like to see from the NEA of tomorrow?" brought a variety of responses. A number of attendees offered ideas centered around fostering greater connections within the community. These included organized visits to archives, networking events, and the creation of less formal online communities, such as through Discord and Mastodon. Other attendees highlighted the importance of NEA-led advocacy within the archives field, particularly as it relates to contingent employment. A final theme focused on organizational sustainability through increases in yearly fees; paid administrators; and a decreased frequency of meetings.

The final section of the meeting had attendees join breakout sessions to discuss the different ideas brought up in the Jamboards. Sessions included: community building; continuing education; future connections; meetings in the future; advocacy; and organizational sustainability. The most attended of the breakout sessions chiefly discussed the shape of future meetings. Attendees tended to agree that the increasing costs warranted a serious discussion on decreasing the number of in-person meetings or the total number of days for meetings. The possibility of smaller institutions hosting in-person events was also brought up as an alternative that allowed for decreased hotel rental costs for the institution. A final discussion brought together the different breakout groups for a final discussion. During this, participants in the advocacy session cited the Contingent Employment Study Task Force's report as an example of the role the institution could take in fostering more equitable pay in the profession. <[https://newenglandarchivists.org/resources/Documents/Inclusion\\_Diversity/Contingent-Employment-2022-report.pdf](https://newenglandarchivists.org/resources/Documents/Inclusion_Diversity/Contingent-Employment-2022-report.pdf)>

As NEA moves into 2024 and beyond, the organization is likely going to need to change and shift. Sessions like this which bring in the community to discuss their priorities for the organization are going to be an important part of ensuring that NEA stays relevant to all its members through these necessary changes. ■



## Reviews

### APALA Northeast Chapter & Friends Visit Beinecke Library at Yale University

Members of the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) Northeast Chapter and Friends visited the Beinecke Library on July 7, 2023. Ten library professionals from four states gathered to visit exhibits, libraries, Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) collections, and met with colleagues on a day-long field trip. The visit was co-organized by APALA members Jeanie Pai, Program Specialist in Digital Imaging Services at the New York Public Library, and Janet Clarke, Associate Dean of Research & User Engagement at Stony Brook University Libraries, along with Sandrine Guérin, Archivist at the Beinecke Library of Yale University. Guérin coordinated meetings with Yale colleagues and the viewing of AAPI collections.

At the Beinecke Library, the group met with Moira Fitzgerald, Program Director of Reference and Research Services, who gave a tour of the building. She explained recent curatorial decisions that emphasize the diverse perspective represented in the collections through exhibition display. Alison Clemens, Access Strategist and member of the Reparative Archival Descriptive Working Group (RAD), later gave an illuminating presentation on reparative descriptive work related to the Japanese American incarceration during World War II. This led the group into a critical conversation on principles in dismantling white supremacy and reparative actions in addressing harmful language in archival description.

Following the presentation, the group had the opportunity to look over some AAPI collections. Among the highlights were the Aiko Takita and Miyeko Takita Papers capturing their experiences during and after the Japanese American incarceration during World War II, the Yonekazu Satoda papers, and one of the Cockrill albums of identification photographs of Chinese men who came through Angel Island for work in the 1870s, which was a poignant experience to see in person. The viewing prompted the group to talk about the importance of community input and cultural knowledge in creating inclusive and accurate archival description to improve discovery and accessibility, as well as the benefits of collaborations across institutions.

For many people, this was the first time coming togeth-

er with APALA members after the pandemic lockdown; a period synonymous with the spike in anti-Asian violence and when community support was crucial. After RAD's "Why Language Matters" public presentation on Japanese American incarceration records last summer, it felt right visiting Beinecke Library together to learn more about their DEIA efforts. Even the collaborative planning process was rewarding, from workshoping the agenda with Guérin, to selecting AAPI special collections for viewing.

Overall, this was a very meaningful, thought-provoking field trip, and the group felt grateful for the opportunity to exchange experiences and perspective, meet colleagues, and learn more about Beinecke Library's work. The Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA), founded in 1980, is committed to addressing the needs of Asian/Pacific American librarians and those who serve Asian/Pacific American communities. If you have any questions or would like more information about this experience, please contact, Jeanie Pai, <[jeaniepai@nypl.org](mailto:jeaniepai@nypl.org)>; or Janet H. Clarke, <[janet.clarke@stonybrook.edu](mailto:janet.clarke@stonybrook.edu)>. ■



Jeanie Pai, Program Specialist, Digital Imaging Services, New York Public Library



Janet H. Clarke, Associate Dean, Research & User Engagement, Stony Brook University Libraries

### It's Your Newsletter: Contribute!

The *NEA Newsletter* always needs news from your archives and other archives in New England, about NEA members, and about upcoming events. We also need people to write reviews, long articles, and session reports for NEA meetings. If you have any ideas for articles, etc., please contact an editor.

**N E A**

**New England Archivists**

TAKING THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

45 Skehan Street  
Somerville, MA 02143

## THIS SEASON IN NEW ENGLAND HISTORY



Women wearing snowshoes vault over sawhorses in an obstacle race during the first Women's Winter Carnival held at the University of Vermont in February 1923. *Courtesy of Silver Special Collections, University of Vermont.*