



THE NEW SCHOOL LIBRARIES & ARCHIVES

New York Archives Week 2012

Archives and Activism

www.nycarchivists.org

Friday, October 12, 2012

Theresa Lang Community and Student Center

Arnhold Hall

The New School

55 West 13th Street, New York, NY 10011

Program:

8:30am – 9:00am: Registration

9:00am – 9:15am: Welcome

9:15am – 10:00am: **Session 1. Assessing the Relationship between Archives and Activism**

Over the course of the last decade, archival literature has been increasingly focused on issues of social justice and the role of the archives and archivists in activism. The speakers on this panel will investigate this relationship between archival activism and archival practice by presenting the findings of two studies assessing how social activism impacts the work of archivists in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The presenters will examine the ways that archivists are currently integrating activism into their archival practice, as well as the significance of archives as an instrument for social justice. Both panelists will look at the complex relationships, both actual and theoretical, between activism and archival practice, asking questions concerning the incorporation of activism into archival practice.

Moderator – Carrie Hintz, Columbia University

Understanding and Assessing the Social Justice Impact of Archives

David A. Wallace, University of Michigan

Examining Activism in Practice: A Qualitative Study of Archival Activism

Joy Novak, University of California, Los Angeles

10:00am– 11:15am: **Session 2. Mobilizing Documentary Practice: Building Archives and Identity**

This session will present historical and contemporary case studies that investigate how building archives can empower communities and institutions for which they are established. This empowerment can take many forms, from supporting the work of activists to contributing to the formation of an under-represented group's collective identity. The discussion will explore how archivists' activist work can be deliberate or coincidental, an institutionalized effort or a grassroots one. It will also explore how, in some cases, the archivists and records creators are two distinct groups, and in others the boundary between archivists and records creators blurs.

Moderator - Katherine Meyers, The Winthrop Group, Inc.

Collecting and Collectivities

Laura Helton, New York University

Archival Activism in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community

Rich Wandel, The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center
National History Archive

From "Archives" to "Archiving": Meeting the Needs of Citizen Activists

Grace Lile and Yvonne Ng, WITNESS

11:15am – 11:30am: Break

11:30am – 1:00pm: **Session 3. New Content, New Communities: Acquisition and Preservation in Nontraditional Archives**

In this session, panelists will examine the challenges posed by born-digital content created by activists in the milieu of grassroots social movements. This content often exists outside traditional archival repositories, challenging established processes for acquisition, appraisal, description, and access. Equally important are the challenges of preserving the digital legacy of social movements as exemplified by Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and the AIDS Memorial Quilt Digital Experience Project. Flexibility in methods and approaches is necessary when attempting to preserve the legacy of such activist communities. While technology permits utilizing social networks to not only create this body of archival materials, it also enables collaboration between archivists and activists to facilitate the discoverability, usability, and long-term preservation of such digital media.

Moderator - Ben Alexander, Queens College

Planning for the Short and Long Term Stewardship of Occupy Wall Street's Digital Records

Anna Perricci, OWS Archives Working Group

Case Study: Year One with the Activist Archivists
Marie Lascu and Dan Erdman, Activist Archivists

Preservationistas: Online Communities, Activist Preservation, and Born-Digital Archives

Jefferson Bailey, Metropolitan New York Library Council and Thomas Padilla,
University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign

The Cultural Work of Interactive Memorials: Lessons from the AIDS Memorial Quilt Digital Experience Project

Anne Balsamo, The New School for Public Engagement and Chris Tokuhama, University
of Southern California

1:00pm – 2:00pm: Lunch (on your own)

2:00pm -3:30pm: **Session 4. Whose Archives?: Interactions between Archivists and Communities**

Former SAA President Randall Jimerson and many other activist archivists have argued in recent years for archivists to increasingly "protect the rights and interests of all citizens and to [help] preserve vital aspects of [a broader] cultural heritage." In expanding archives to include a more diverse and varied historical record, however, the archivist faces important challenges. Our panelists will explore the archivist/donor/community dynamic through case studies and examples stemming from personal experiences. They will raise essential and critically important questions: What is the responsibility of an archives to the community whose memory it preserves? How can archivists foster a sense of trust and empowerment through their many years of continuous caretaking of a local organization's or individual's historical documents? Whose archives? Who decides? Whose priorities take precedence?

Moderator - Lucinda Manning, Archival Consultant

Ground Truth: Archives, Activism, and the Pursuit of Social Justice at New York's African Burial Ground

Emilyn L. Brown, Schlesinger Library for the History of Women in America

Confronting Borders: Exploring the Challenges of Trust between Special Collections Archives and Activist Communities

Kelly McAnaney and Kim Schwenk, Mandeville Special Collections Library,
University of California, San Diego

Caveat Donator: The Threat to Activists from Archives

Christine George, Charles B. Sears Law Library, SUNY Buffalo

The Willowbrook State School: Navigating the Shoals of Scandal and the Emotional Needs of Stakeholders

James A. Kaser, Archives and Special Collections, The College of Staten Island/CUNY

3:30pm – 3:45pm: Break

3:45pm – 5:00pm: **Session 5. Archives as a Site of Activism**

This session will examine three very different ways that archives themselves may be perceived as sites of activism. The Interference Archive will detail its efforts to “transform traditional archival practices and information management systems” so as to preserve and present the output of social justice movements in ways that will spur further activism. Law professor Douglas Cox will raise a “friendly flag of caution,” warning that, however incongruous it may seem, an archivist may be most effective as an activist by taking a stance of professional neutrality, or risk losing the trust of bodies whose records are essential to building accurate accounts of events. Archivist Susan Woodland will address the many “quietly activist decisions” she makes in the course of her daily work that reveal politically relevant aspects of institutional history.

Moderator - Wendy Scheir, The New School

“Neutrality” as Archival Activism in the Age of Wikileaks

Douglas Cox, City University of New York School of Law

Archiving Social Movement Culture: Reflections on the Interference Archive

Molly Fair and Kevin Caplicki, Interference Archive

Under the Radar Archives Activism

Susan Woodland, American Jewish Historical Society

5:00pm – 6:00pm: Reception

This symposium is dedicated to the memory of archivist and historian
Michael Nash (1946-2012).

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MetLife and the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation and with the co-operation of the New School
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Symposium Planning Committee: Nicola Baroncini, Rachel Chatalbash, Tania Franco, Carrie
Hintz, Leigh Hurwitz, Katherine Meyers, Dennis Riley, Wendy Scheir, and Jenny Swadosh

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