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# AMERICAN ARCHIVIST

ONLINE SUPPLEMENT



## The American Archivist

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### About the Cover

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**Milestone Marker.** Founded in 1936, the Society of American Archivists celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2011. More than 50 themes for commemorating SAA's diamond jubilee were submitted by members to the "Theme It!" contest sponsored by the 75th Anniversary Task Force in spring 2010. Rick Blondo's cheery and succinct entry—SAA@75: Then, Now . . . WOW!—was ultimately selected by the task force to brand the year-long celebration. Next Year's News, a graphic design firm in Toledo, Ohio, designed the elegant logo. Blondo, a management and program analyst at the National Archives and Records Administration, received a complimentary "anniversary membership" as a reward and can now revel in his entry being one for the archival ages!



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**General Information**

The *American Archivist Online Supplement* (ISSN forthcoming) appears occasionally when circumstances warrant publication of peer-reviewed content that cannot be accommodated in the regular semi-annual issues of the *American Archivist*. The supplement appears online only and access is unrestricted. The *American Archivist* Editor and Editorial Board, in collaboration with the Society of American Archivists, make the decision to publish supplements. Proposals for supplements should be directed to the journal's Editor, Gregory S. Hunter, at [AmericanArchivist@archivists.org](mailto:AmericanArchivist@archivists.org).

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FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

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William E. Landis

# Celebrating, Commemorating, and Experimenting: SAA@75

Capturing Annual Meeting content through a more permanent, freely accessible means than traditional, purchased session recordings has been a long-standing objective of the Society of American Archivists' (SAA) publication infrastructure.<sup>1</sup> The challenges are legion! By long tradition, chairs and presenters for SAA Annual Meeting sessions have broad leeway in deciding how best to organize, prepare, and present their content. SAA has never expected session content to be submitted in advance for a compilation of proceedings or prepared to facilitate post-meeting publication. We might argue that we harm our profession by failing to collate and share in a readily findable, accessible form what is arguably some of the best and most useful content we collectively produce each year. The fact is, though, that our traditions have and will continue to make it challenging to repurpose Annual Meeting session content.

Over the years, editors of the *American Archivist* have appealed to speakers to submit papers for publication, and some Annual Meeting papers have gone through the blind peer review and editorial process for the journal and have appeared in its semi-annual issues. In early years, much of the content in the journal was from Annual Meetings, but a look at the recent issues edited by Mary Jo Pugh—volume 69, number 1 (Spring/Summer 2006) through volume 74, number 2 (Fall/Winter 2011), a total of twelve issues, or six volumes—suggests that not many session contributors now avail themselves of this opportunity. In

<sup>1</sup> Aside from Director of Publishing Teresa Brinati, this includes the *American Archivist* Editor and Editorial Board, the Publications Editor and Publications Board, and a series of task forces and working groups that, over the years, have addressed various aspects of SAA's publications program. Perhaps the vision for the publications program is best expressed in the *Final Report of the Task Force on Electronic Publications* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 10 December 2002), [www.archivists.org/governance/taskforces/tfep-finalreport.pdf](http://www.archivists.org/governance/taskforces/tfep-finalreport.pdf), accessed 1 July 2011.

the roughly 116 articles in these volumes,<sup>3</sup> only five (four percent) appear to have originated from Annual Meeting sessions.<sup>4</sup> These articles ranged from just over one-and-a-half years to three-and-a-half years from session to publication. These statistics further highlight the challenges that session presenters face when attempting to turn one or more generally related fifteen- to twenty-minute conference presentations into an article that will make it through the journal's rigorous editorial process.

Recently SAA has encouraged session speakers to capture and submit electronic versions of their presentations, in formats including text and slides. A survey of the past two Annual Meeting online programs on the SAA website, from which anyone can access files submitted by participants, suggests that relatively few session participants take advantage of the opportunity to share their presentations after delivering them in person in a hotel meeting room.<sup>5</sup> For each of the most recent two annual meetings—2010 in Washington, D.C. (254 participants in 65 conference sessions) and 2011 in Chicago (303 participants in 70 conference sessions)—23% of those presenting submitted some kind of file relating to the content delivered.

For the two Annual Meetings surveyed, the majority of participants submitted either a Portable Document Format (PDF) file or a PowerPoint (PPT) file.<sup>6</sup> Almost all of the PDF files contained the written text of the presentation or a synopsis, but in some cases PDF files represented handouts distributed at the conference session and not the text delivered. Interestingly, during these two years, the percentage of PPT files submitted by participants rose from 34% in

<sup>3</sup> A recent survey of *American Archivist* content concluded that volumes from the most recent two decades contain an average of 19.4 articles per volume, a figure used to calculate this rough approximation of the number of articles in these six volumes. See Paul Conway and William E. Landis, "Open-Access Publishing and the Transformation of the *American Archivist* Online," *American Archivist* 74, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2011), 491.

<sup>4</sup> The five articles include two from a 2005 Annual Meeting session published in volume 69 (Fall/Winter 2006): Christine Weideman, "Accessioning and Processing," pages 274–283 and Donna McCrea, "Getting More for Less: Testing a New Processing Model at the University of Montana," pages 284–290. Michael Rush, Lynn Holdzkom, Prudence Backman, Daniel A. Santamaria, and Andrea Leigh, "Applying DACS to Finding Aids: Case Studies from Three Diverse Institutions," combined session papers from the 2006 annual meeting published in volume. (Spring/Summer 2008): 210–227. Jenn Riley and Kelcy Shepherd, "A Brave New World: Archivists and Shareable Descriptive Metadata," integrated two of three presentations from a 2007 annual meeting session in volume 72 (Spring/Summer 2009): 91–112; and George Mariz, Donna E. McCrea, Larry J. Hackman, Tony Kurtz, and Randall C. Jimerson, "Leadership Skills for Archivists," brought together presentations from a 2007 annual meeting session in volume 74 (Spring/Summer 2011): 102–122.

<sup>5</sup> Content submitted voluntarily by presenters can be accessed using links embedded in the online annual meeting programs from 2008 to the present, available at <http://www2.archivists.org/conference>, accessed 18 December 2011.

<sup>6</sup> The 123 total files submitted and linked from the online program for these two annual meetings included the following file formats: 61 PDF files (more in 2010 than in 2011), 56 PPT files (almost double the number in 2011 than in 2010), 3 Word processed document files (DOC), 1 video file (MP4), 1 ASCII text file (TXT), and 1 Excel spreadsheet (XLS).

2010 to 55% in 2011. The ability to submit presentation files from Annual Meeting sessions is certainly a welcome step in making the meeting's content more broadly available. PPT slides, though, are not generally equal to the as-delivered presentation, and they often simply capture major points or illustrations of points and not the substance and flow of session content. The increasing preponderance of PPT files, if this increase indicates a trend, suggests that in the long run this is not a completely satisfactory way of capturing, distributing, and preserving Annual Meeting session content.

After much discussion over several years on both the *American Archivist* Editorial Board and the Publications Board, I articulated the concept of an occasional series of online-only supplements to the *American Archivist*, which the *American Archivist* Editorial Board enthusiastically endorsed. The board hopes that supplements will leverage the significant SAA investment in the online publication environment that delivers nearly 75 years of *American Archivist* content online.<sup>7</sup> Supplements will appear under the imprimatur of the *American Archivist*, a long-standing source of high-quality content relevant to the archival profession. Unlike articles in the regular semi-annual issues that appear simultaneously online and in print, which are reserved for access by members and subscribers for three years, online content of supplements is freely available from the moment it is placed on the *American Archivist Online* site. Also, unlike the issues constrained by print, the articles in this supplement will appear online asynchronously as they are ready for publication, so the entire supplement will come together on the *American Archivist Online* site over the course of several months.

One important role that this online-only supplement may play in the future is to provide a venue for publishing theme-based content that is increasingly difficult to fit into the print and online regular issues of the journal. The page constraints of the print publication and a steady stream of interesting and timely article submissions means that larger content groupings, such as theme issues or sections, strain an already lengthy editorial review and publication process. If publication of online-only supplements proves to be as streamlined as it promises to be, supplements might be an option for conveying time-sensitive content, such as articles about technology issues, to a broad audience more quickly than is possible in semi-annual issues.

Only time and the creativity of both the *American Archivist* Editorial Board and SAA members will tell if and how online supplements might be useful for the profession. The occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of SAA, though, provided a perfect rationale for an inaugural issue of the *American Archivist Online Supplement*. I am grateful to Mary Jo Pugh, Teresa Brinati, and my fellow members on the *American Archivist* Editorial Board for encouraging the idea of celebrating SAA's

<sup>6</sup> Conway and Landis, see especially 493–501.

diamond anniversary by capturing selected Annual Meeting content as the theme for this inaugural issue.

The 2011 Program Committee assisted the process by articulating a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary session track at the Chicago Annual Meeting, and also by identifying additional sessions during their program deliberations that expressed the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary theme. Participants in this group of sessions provided the corpus of those invited to submit session content for this supplement. Not all who were invited chose to participate, but I am in debt to those energetic individuals whose enthusiasm for their session topics has spilled over into these articles.

The rigorous review of session proposals by the Program Committee served in lieu of traditional blind peer review in assuring the relevance and quality of content in these articles. In addition to the work of session participants and my work as guest editor, members of the current *American Archivist* Editorial Board reviewed, commented on, and improved drafts of these session-based articles prior to their publication. If we've done our jobs well, readers of these articles should feel as through they are listening to these sessions.

One goal in working with this content has been to articulate an alternative model for capturing and sharing in a timely way, and also preserving, content from SAA Annual Meeting sessions. My experience as a member of SAA for nearly twenty years is that the content of Annual Meeting sessions gets better each year. The quality, breadth, and relevance of what my colleagues present in sessions each year keep me coming back year after year. (The 2011 annual meeting was my eighteenth consecutive meeting, a track record of consistency that hardly exists elsewhere in my life!) Capturing it in a more permanent, broadly accessible manner is certainly a lot of work for all involved, but I argue that the effort is worth it. Only time will tell whether this is the case, but I hope that this supplement presents you with the ability to revisit a session you attended in Chicago, drop in on one you didn't get to in the crush of rich content offerings during each session block, enjoy the content of sessions from an annual meeting you were unable to attend, or look over a figurative shoulder as someone with an armchair interest in the profession at some of the stimulating content that makes SAA's Annual Meeting such a compelling yearly event for many American archivists!



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