

# Introduction

Robert P. Spindler

I have been very fortunate to have two wonderful teachers in my archival career. My first, Megan Sniffen-Marinoff, introduced me to the literature, read and criticized my papers, and encouraged me in so many ways. But my second teacher, Gregor Trinkaus-Randall, was my first boss as a professional archivist. He provided a firm but gentle introduction to the realities of archival work that informs and energizes me to this day.

But my assignment today is not to celebrate the impact Gregor has made on me. My task is to help us celebrate the enormous impact he has made on our profession.

Gregor traces his archival lineage back to the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Like so many of our archival luminaries, Gregor studied with F. Gerald Ham and worked at the State Historical Society, receiving his master's in library science and archival administration in 1980. He received training in bench conservation and preservation administration at Yale and began working as an "Archives, Library, Preservation and Security" consultant. He might have kept this expansive title throughout his career because it is emblematic of the broad scope of his intellect, the breadth of his skills, and the depth of his commitment. Gregor not only believes in a big tent of cultural heritage professions, he occupies it every day.

Seven years of library, archives, and preservation work at the Computer Museum, the USS *Constitution* Museum in Boston Harbor, and the Peabody Museum of Salem might have underscored the peculiarities of working in

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museums. But Gregor saw the similarities among museums, archives, and libraries. He imagined the possibilities of finding common ground.

The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners became the platform for Gregor's exploration of that common ground in 1988. Shortly after his employment there, he envisioned a broad survey of conditions in libraries across the state. His job, on paper, was to work with libraries, but Gregor has always had an expansive view of his work and his responsibility.

When I met with him at SAA, we would talk about how difficult it was to keep contact with the county recorders and the city clerks, and how he was helping place data loggers in public libraries on Cape Cod, at a museum at Sturbridge, or perhaps in a municipal office in Waltham. After so many miles logged on his beloved Subarus, the data started coming in. Twenty years later, Gregor is still driving Subarus, and the data are still coming in, forming what may be the deepest and broadest set of environmental monitoring data for cultural institutions anywhere.

But the data were only one pathway to a larger goal of preservation and security for collections and institutional staff across Massachusetts. Gregor's work in establishing a statewide collections survey, an effective emergency assistance program, and weather alert services was groundbreaking in its time. The efforts led to his initiation of and participation in the development of dPlan: The Online Disaster Planning Tool. His advocacy with state and federal emergency management agencies enabled cultural resources to be included in early response and recovery activities, and identified public libraries as critical resources as disaster recovery centers following a regional, presidentially declared disaster.

Gregor's impact has stretched far beyond his home state of Massachusetts. His lengthy list of committee and working group appointments at the state, regional, and national levels cannot be summarized here. His informative and always demonstrative presentations to librarians, archivists, preservation administrators, and museum professionals cannot be sufficiently highlighted here. Gregor is a Distinguished Fellow of the Society of American Archivists, and he is now the recipient of the prestigious George Cunha and Susan Swartzburg Preservation Award from the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services of the American Library Association. But the revolution, Gregor's revolution, will not be televised. Well, it might get on YouTube.

Gregor is a family man with a great sense of humor, and he is a humble servant. You might wonder about the humility after listening to one of his lengthy briefings regarding the recent activities of his accomplished wife, Vickery, and his beautiful children, Jennifer and Christopher. Or you might be concerned about his continuing stories of superhuman efforts in biking, skiing, the National Ski Patrol, Scottish dancing, and refereeing on the soccer field.

But you're really hearing the proud daddy's affirmations of profound love and personal joy, so you have to cut him a little slack, smile, and nod. We should all be so lucky.

Ultimately, Gregor is a teacher. When he directs his considerable energies toward his work, his avocation, or his sport, he engages with it at such a high level of intellect, energy, and commitment that he becomes an informed and effective teacher. Once he has mastered the material, he can't wait to deliver that knowledge and understanding to his colleagues in entertaining, creative, and compelling ways. I am so lucky to have had the chance to learn from him these twenty-five years.

So before he shows me the yellow card, it is truly a great honor and privilege to introduce to you my good friend and mentor, the president of the Society of American Archivists, Gregor Trinkaus-Randall.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Rob Spindler** is university archivist and head of the Department of Archives and Special Collections at Arizona State University Libraries. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in American history from Boston University and the master of science from Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science (concentration in archives management). Spindler is a Distinguished Fellow of the Society of American Archivists and a past chair of its Electronic Publications Working Group and its Archival Information Exchange and Nominating Committees. He is founding project coordinator for Arizona Archives Online and has served on the Arizona State Historical Records Advisory Board since 2000. Spindler is also founding conference cochair for ECURE: Preservation and Access for Digital College and University Resources, an interdisciplinary conference sponsored by ASU from 1999 to 2006.

# The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Archival Profession and Future Challenges

Gregor Trinkaus-Randall

San Diego, California, August 10, 2012

Good afternoon. I am honored, humbled, and honestly a little nervous standing before you today. I would like to thank the membership for giving me the opportunity to serve as your president for the past year. Whether you believe it or not, it has been fun. I have had an opportunity to put forth some initiatives that are dear to my heart, to work with a great and hard-working Council, and to interact with a staff that never ceases to amaze me.

However, before beginning my presidential address, I would like to recognize a few people in the audience without whose expertise and efforts we would not be where we are today. First, I would like to honor the SAA staff. Without their efforts we would not be here. Next, I would like to recognize this year's Council members. We are fortunate to have such a diligent and hardworking group of archivists as Council members to address the issues that affect each of us in our professional lives. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work closely with archivists so dedicated to the good of the society and its members. This certainly has been an "activist" Council. In addition to their own issues, they have met every challenge with which I have presented them. For their tireless effort and commitment, we are all in their debt.

Next, I would like to recognize three groups of archivists: One has had an important role in advancing the profession and the Society, one has set a high standard for me to follow, and one will serve as our leaders in the future. The SAA Fellows have fought our battles, significantly contributed to the profession,

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and led us for a good number of years. Although we recognized past presidents yesterday, I would like to acknowledge the former presidents of SAA who have undertaken the responsibility of leading the society in good times and bad (and ugly?). Finally, I welcome all the students and first-time members/attendees. You are our future leaders. I urge you not to hesitate to tap into the knowledge and experience of the Fellows and other long-time SAA members as you move our profession forward. Your familiarity with new media and electronic records and your undying enthusiasm and energy will stand you in good stead as you take on new and challenging endeavors. I have mentioned to new archivists on several occasions that they need to get involved. I think that there is no better way to make this point than to quote a relatively new archivist and member of SAA. Sasha Griffin recently wrote, "You need to be proactive. Proactive in building your résumé, proactive in making yourself unique from others, proactive in building relationships and networking, proactive in participating within the national organization that will be shaping your profession for your entire career lifespan. In my opinion, those who are not proactive will fall behind those who are making a name for themselves and actively working on their professional reputation." My advice to you is to take this advice to heart and get involved. Thank you, Sasha for writing it so eloquently.

Next, I would like to highlight a few of Council's accomplishments in the past year and a half.

- To recognize the achievements of SAA members, Council approved the creation of three new awards: the Diversity Award, the Archival Innovator Award, and the Emerging Leader Award.
- Council established the Annual Meeting Task Force to examine ALL aspects of the annual meeting and to propose changes when and where necessary.
- Council accomplished the revision of the sections of the Governance Manual dealing with Sections and Roundtables.
- Council initiated a Regional Summit that occurred on Wednesday to open communication channels and opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between SAA and the regional archival organizations as well as among regional archival organizations.
- Council supported several initiatives regarding open government and the need to retain adequate funding for the NHPRC and for the Canadian National Archival Development Program.
- Council members and two Roundtable cochairs revisited the Leadership Orientation and Forum and developed a new format.
- The Membership Committee, with input from some Council members, worked to make the New Member Orientation and Forum a more productive session for all involved.

- Council revised, streamlined, and adopted an updated Advocacy Agenda for the Society.
- Council approved the International Council on Archives' *Universal Declaration on Archives*.
- Council approved the establishment of two new Roundtables: the Military Archives Roundtable and the Students and New Archives Professionals Roundtable (or SNAP).
- Council members have begun examining the results of the member survey, an activity that will take them well into the next year.
- Council appointed John Fleckner as SAA's representative to NHPRC's working group to develop a *Report to the President* in 2012.

These accomplishments are only some of the highlights of Council's work. Given that much discussion occurred via email, I am still amazed that past Councils have been able to accomplish so much in the precomputer and pre-email world. Considering how much business is accomplished via these media today, their achievements are quite remarkable.

Now, let me move on. We are in challenging, evolving, and exciting times for the archival profession. Four years ago, Mark Greene stood before you and talked about the power of archives. The following year Frank Boles spoke on the various components and responsibilities of our positions as archivists. Two years ago, Peter Gottlieb proposed a means of unifying the archival profession. Finally, last year, Helen Tibbo addressed the concerns and issues that we are facing in the digital age. So where will I go? Last summer I talked about "The Road to the Future: Cooperation and Collaboration" and how we, at all levels of the profession, need to work with others to accomplish our goals. Well, where have we gone since then, and what is facing us in the future?

As we all know, we are rapidly moving from an analog to a digital age. As a consequence, many of our long-held beliefs and practices are being challenged as we confront new media and new ways of fulfilling our responsibilities. Unfortunately, all too often we reside comfortably in our own silos, or ivory towers, focusing only on what we are doing within our own institutions or our own small cadres of organizations. We need to break out of these silos and push ourselves into the wide world of information professionals, whether kicking and screaming or willfully, or we risk being left behind. This is not to say that we are not accomplishing some significant things on our own. We are. One only has to look at the Digital Archives Specialist (DAS) curriculum; our work with EAD, EAC-CPF, and DACS; the publications that we have written and published; and numerous other activities to recognize the impact that we have had on archives nationally and internationally. Do, however, note that I said "archives." We need to interact with others such as librarians, museum curators, and IT personnel as well to ensure that users and researchers have access to ALL, and

I emphasize ALL, our holdings. Moreover, activities in these other fields can be applied to archives that we should not have to reinvent.

Let me take a step backward to address some of the concerns and proposals that I put forth at last year's meeting. I asked you to look to your left and to your right and to realize that each and every one of you needs assistance in some form or other as we strive to accomplish our goals as archivists. This may mean assisting someone else in the field, providing guidance to newcomers just out of graduate school or to those new to the profession. It may mean helping those in other professions confronted with archival issues, requesting assistance from archivists with extensive experience, or looking to other professionals to identify areas where they might be able to assist us because of their practices or expertise. It also implies that we can and should look beyond ourselves, our institutions, our organizations, and our borders to see where we can collaborate with other archival and nonarchival organizations to accomplish that which we may not be able to do ourselves or as a means to provide additional services to our members.

During the past year, I initiated a dialogue with the leadership of the American Library Association and the American Association of Museums to identify areas where we might collaborate for our common benefit. From these initial discussions comes the realization that we will need to convene a face-to-face planning session in the near future to move ahead. At the same time, a brief list of topics has been developed for future consideration. These include the possibility of coordinating educational offerings, addressing the concerns of digital preservation, coordinating advocacy efforts, and looking at leadership training, to name just a few. Each of these topics offers ample opportunity for collaboration. Let me give some examples.

- In education, there could be a coordination of topics offered, the advertisement of these offerings to the members of the other organizations via a joint educational calendar, joint offerings and credit, and collaborative effort to identify gaps in offerings to ensure that all necessary topics are fully covered.
- Digital preservation is already a pressing concern too complex for one institution or organization to address completely. It is crucial that research into the ways in which we can ensure the long-term retention of important electronic records, whether born digital or digitized, can be coordinated across disciplines and with interorganizational communication as to research and results. This research, however, often tends to be focused on what can be accomplished for large institutions. It is equally important that we not ignore the needs of smaller institutions that may be generating electronic records or scanned images but do not have the wherewithal or the knowledge to preserve these

records into the future. We must ensure that our efforts address the needs of organizations at all levels and of all sizes in the realm of digital preservation.

- As for advocacy, we have had a tendency to focus on issues that directly affect archives—and for good reason. Concerns regarding open access to records, reduced appropriations for state archives, and funding that directly impacts many of our programs, such as is available from NHPRC and NEH, deserve our attention. However, there are concerns that affect libraries and museums as well as archives, such as funding for NEH and IMLS, as well as NHPRC, that may well impact the availability of funds for other organizations (e.g., libraries and museums) that house manuscript and archival materials. Furthermore, adding our voice on other issues that may only be tangentially applicable to archives could result in greater and broader assistance from other organizations for archival issues in the future. To achieve this, we need to increase communication between state, regional, and national professional organizations, both archival and nonarchival.
- Finally, each organization offers some type of leadership training. Why not coordinate these offerings and collaborate on providing training to professionals in all disciplines where we can also learn from each other?

Current economic and political conditions make the need for enhanced advocacy especially acute. We are seeing an increased number of archival programs and funding agencies under pressure at all levels. We have seen cuts in funding to federal granting agencies and attempts to separate records management programs from state archives, as well as growing tensions between state archives and state information technology departments regarding custody and “curation” of state government born-digital records, just to mention a few. Where does this put us? I strongly believe that we are in a position where we can ill afford to be inactive or complacent. We must continue to advocate for increased funding for NHPRC and for other federal grant-funding organizations and support our neighbors to the north in their battles for the continued existence and viability of the NDAP and CCA when necessary to ensure the retention and long-term availability of our cultural, historical, and governmental patrimony into the future. At the same time, it is crucial that we not work in isolation. We must work with our colleagues in the library, museum, and other information fields to develop a stronger advocacy presence in Washington to push Congress to recognize the important impact that federal funding has on the long-term retention and preservation of our cultural heritage and government records. We must continue to exert pressure on appropriate governmental agencies at all levels to ensure that these entities survive at a funding level



necessary to create and sustain critical archival projects. The value and importance of the services that we provide and the assets that we preserve are fundamental to our society. Records are essential, and we need to ensure their long-term viability.

Concurrently, enhanced communication between all these information organizations, at the state, regional, and national levels, will provide us greater opportunity for reciprocal benefit in regard to the educational offerings of all those involved. Moreover, cooperating in research areas will maximize the results for everyone. There are things that each of us and each organization can learn from the others, and we cannot be afraid to broach the subjects. We are all busy in our own silos, but we need to break out of them and look at the broader picture—beyond our borders. While many of us have training in more than one discipline, we tend to focus in one area. Let us go back to our training and open up the channels of communication to enhance our activities and promote archives and archival procedures where applicable.

As a further step, archival professionals need to open the lines of communication between our organizations at all levels. Individuals throughout our profession are involved in innovative and exciting activities about which few people know. Regional archival organizations have embarked on a number of initiatives on behalf of their members that should be shared among the other organizations. We need both instigators as well as radical collaborators to move us forward. The participants at this year's Regional Summit brought some of these ideas and issues to the fore and have developed a set of recommendations for future collaboration among regional organizations, as well as between SAA and the regionals. Now we need to begin the process of examining these recommendations and taking appropriate action. Collaboration between SAA and the regionals can only move the profession forward. The outcomes of the Regional Summit should assist in beginning that process. At times we get bogged down with our focus on processes, procedures, and introspection. Collaboration is our way of the future. Think of collaborative or community-based approaches to problem solving or project initiation, for example, digital curation or preservation projects. Identify who is facing similar problems, challenges, and needs as well as goals and work with them if possible. In digital projects, it is not only about our own collections. We should be contributing to the larger collections as well as to the corpus as a whole. Remember, in the long run, as organizations our priority must be on meeting the needs of our members/users in whatever way we can. Collaboration with other archivists; institutions, especially those with similar subjects as their focus; and organizations will enable us to serve our users better. Remember, our constituencies are our users. Anything we can do to assist them to achieve their goals benefits not only our community but the information profession as a whole.

This brings me to another point. We have seen a number of user studies in the past. There is one component of these surveys that has only been partially addressed: to determine “how” researchers search. This area will become increasingly important as researchers aim to examine information in all types of media, whether that means primary sources, secondary sources, electronic media, photographs, audiovisual materials, three-dimensional artifacts, or other sources. Furthermore, many researchers probably will not rely on the tried and true methods of contacting a repository to see if it has the records of so-and-so or such-and-such. They are much more apt to go on the Web and Google their topics. If we do not have a presence on the Web with access to information on our holdings, they will not be found. Moreover, we need to ask ourselves a few questions. What are the best ways to make our holdings discoverable? Do we know if there are important library or museum collections that complement our archival holdings? How will we find out? How will the researcher find out? How will researchers discover that these other resources exist without being told so by the staff, who themselves might be unaware that other related collections exist? This is one area in which collaboration is being increasingly explored among libraries, archives, and museums, or LAMs. The idea is to make all these collections available in a single search, in a single online catalog, or at least be linked electronically so that they are discoverable. Yes, researchers can do a Google search, but will that turn up all the pertinent information? Probably not. We not only need to determine how the researchers decide where and how they will search to find the materials on their topics, but we also need to identify any other collections that may complement our holdings. Then we can direct our researchers to them to advance their knowledge, research experience, and results.

In the meantime, the creation of electronic records has become easier and has expanded at all levels of government and business, not to mention in our personal lives. The five-hundred-pound gorilla, digital preservation, is going to impact all archivists whether it is government records at the municipal, county, state, or federal level, organizational records from all departments and levels of an NGO or corporation, or the manuscript papers of individuals created on a personal computer, laptop, or other device. Moreover, as technology evolves, these records will also involve records, photographs, videos, and so on such as those created by people on scene with their iPads, digital cameras, and smart phones. This is already causing problems for archivists in dealing with the “records” and documentation of the Occupy movement, as much of the visual documentation of this protest was created using these new media.

It is crucial that we are aware of the implications that rapid technological changes along with the attendant shift in the mentality of corporations and governments regarding technology will have. These new media are already

changing how we archivists address our holdings. We will need to continue to be on the cutting edge of records creation and curation so that we can be capable of handling the new media as it makes its way through our doors and into our holdings. More succinctly put, we will need to “curate” from its inception and through its life cycle. If we are not prepared, the media will probably still arrive, but we will be unable to appraise, arrange, describe, preserve, or access it because of our lack of technological knowhow. Furthermore, the records may not arrive because they have been written over, deleted, or discarded by people not conscious of the need to document their activities, as per a retention schedule, for example.

So where do we go from here? We need to move out of our silos, to work with others to enhance our collections, to educate ourselves in the new media, to provide increased access to our holdings, and to become active in our communities. All too many of us sit back and become focused on our own work—maybe out of necessity. However, if we continue to do so, we risk being left behind. We need to become leaders and activists in our own right. If you work in a large institution, make sure that you participate on committees and make your voice heard. Without speaking up, the archives will remain static or, worse still, slide into the backwater. If you belong to a state or regional archival organization, volunteer to take on some regional tasks or to serve on a committee. Volunteer to serve on an SAA committee or task force. While there are often fewer openings on these committees than there are volunteers to fill them, it is important to continue to volunteer. Build up your résumé. The profession is evolving, and we need energetic and knowledgeable archivists who are willing to make a contribution to the profession. I would venture to guess that there is no one in this room who has not or who cannot make a difference to the archival world. Moreover, by opening our spheres of activities, we not only benefit ourselves, we benefit others with whom we interact, be they individuals or organizations. We need to be heard! We can be heard! We just have to make up our minds that we are going to be heard. We need to make a difference, and we can do so!

Therefore, I challenge you to go forth, work with your colleagues both in the archival world and in other informational disciplines to make our presence and expertise known. Identify areas where we can collaborate for the greater good of all. We have much to offer on a variety of fronts, and we need to make the wider world aware of our achievements. Too often, it seems, we have a serious image problem: that of archivists in dusty, moldy, backrooms or basements, caring for equally dusty, old, and often irrelevant collections. Well, whom do we have to blame? In many cases, it is ourselves. Let us go forth and challenge that image by making our presence known and advocating vigorously for archives and for our holdings. We can achieve this through cooperation, collaboration, and leadership. It is in our hands! Thank you.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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**Gregor Trinkaus-Randall** received a BA and MA in history and library science/archives administration from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He also attended the training institutes “All-Hazards: Preparedness and Response,” “All Hazards: Recovery and Mitigation,” and “Hurricanes: Preparedness and Response” at FEMA’s Emergency Management Institute in Emmittsburg, Maryland, and “Digital Preservation Management: Short-Term Strategies for Long-Term Problems” at Cornell University. With funding through IMLS National Leadership grants, Trinkaus-Randall and the Northeast Document Conservation Center staff developed *dPlan: an Online Disaster Planning Tool*. He also serves as co-chair of COSTEP Massachusetts (Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness). He works as the preservation specialist at the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC), where he is responsible for implementing the statewide preservation program and MBLC’s Emergency Assistance and Environmental programs, along with maintaining the Massachusetts Special Collections Directory on MBLC’s website. In 2012, he was awarded the George Cunha and Susan Swartzburg Preservation Award from ALCTS PARS, and he received the New England Archivists Distinguished Service Award in 2013.