FROM THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS DESIGN RECORDS SECTION

Working Toward Best Practices for Design Records

Jessica Quagliaroli and Alison Anderson

We, the cochairs of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) Design Records Section (DRS), write to you with excitement and enthusiasm for this special section of *American Archivist* dedicated to design records. We extend a heartfelt thank-you to Karen Trivette, guest editor, who conceived of this special section and asked us to write an introductory letter.

The mission of the DRS is to support archival professionals working with design records by conducting research, setting best practices, and providing solutions related to the arrangement, description, preservation, conservation, and storage challenges inherent to these specialized materials. We aim to provide an open, engaging, and inclusive forum for discussion, and we encourage all SAA members to reach out to our network of specialists who work at a variety of institutions. These may include architectural firms, design schools, special collections and facilities, and academic and government archives, among others. Designers, architects, and engineers produce a variety of records for myriad reasons in multiple formats, including drawings, sketchbooks, models, photographs, and presentation boards.

Many archivists may hesitate to address design records because they can seem daunting in both size and scope. The good news is that our knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. The DRS seeks to reach out to current and potential members, as well as to stakeholders such as architectural historians, technologists, and those in similar specializations who are also managing visual and complex collections. Though design records may seem a siloed subject area, it shares many of the same issues and challenges as other specialized subject areas, such as aerospace and geospatial engineering, archaeology, and so on. Architectural archivists are not the only ones who struggle with the varied,

complex, and unique challenges posed by design records; all archivists and archival practitioners may one day encounter these types of records.

As the design field has moved toward producing mostly born-digital records using complex proprietary software, the section's original mission to establish best practices for design records has become paramount. To advance the work of our profession, the DRS actively works with members of the community to investigate and set best practices for the appraisal, description, and preservation of born-digital design records. We continue to conduct scholarly research and to discuss and report findings during section meetings and other communications.

As this special section illuminates, sharing our research, experiences, and solutions in scholarly publications supports the work of all design records professionals and extends our visibility to a broader audience. The DRS encourages all archival professionals managing design records to contribute to *American Archivist* outside of this special section. The last issue dedicated to architectural materials was published in 1996, and, while it is still relevant today, much has changed since then. Publishing articles related to design records in *American Archivist* positions this centralized resource to draw on best practices, research, and perspectives from a variety of practitioners and, at the same time, keeps us at the forefront of emerging trends.

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