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What is the Professional Archivist's Role in the Evolving Archival Space?, Society of Georgia Archivists Annual Meeting Keynote Address, 2014

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ArchivesNext

What is the Professional Archivist's Role in the Evolving Archival Space?[1]
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On October 2, I was honored to be the keynote speaker at the joint conference of the Archives & Records Association of New Zealand and the Association of Australian Archivists in Christchurch. About a month later, I was also honored to be the plenary speaker at the annual meeting of the Society of Georgia Archivists in Athens. As I said in my preliminary remarks to both talks, a keynote or plenary speaker should talk about something big, and I took the invitation to come to New Zealand as an opportunity to tackle the biggest thing I could think of: the future of archives. Or at least the future of the archivist in the future of archives. I went PowerPoint-free for this, so posted below is the text of the talk I gave at both conferences, with notes added. (This is actually the text from the talk in Georgia, so it has been adjusted for a U.S. audience.)

Lately in the online places I frequent there has been quite a bit of discussion about questions like "what is an archives?" and "what is an archivist?" and I've participated in those discussions, usually as part of exchanges with people involved in digital humanities projects, who tend to use the word "archives" quite liberally.[2] As many of you may have seen, at the 2014 meeting of the Society of American Archivists, the newly formed Committee on Public Awareness set up a table covered with a piece of paper on which people were asked to write their answers to the question "What is an archivist?" This is similar to SAA's previous efforts to come up with short pithy descriptions of our work such as the contest to come up with the best elevator speech—the winner of which used only 28 words.

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[1] This also appeared on ArchivesNext: http://www.archivesnext.com/?p=3829.

[2] See, for example my contributions to the *Journal of Digital Humanities* "Archives in Context and as Context" (http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/1-2/archives-in-context-and-as-context-by-kate-theimer/) and "A Distinction Worth Exploring: 'Archives' and 'Digital Historical Representations'" (http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/3-2/a-distinction-worth-exploring-archives-and-digital-historical-representations/).

But, while I understand and respect what SAA is trying to achieve with activities like these, the larger question of professional identity is more complicated than any simple definition can convey. There are many possible ways of defining an archivist and an archives. Lots of people who may merit the title of archivist—or think they should—aren't part of our professional organizations. The archival ecosystem has always been a complicated one, and today is more diverse than ever. So rather than trying to draw borders through definitions, I think it's more useful to consider not what an archivist is, but what an archivist should be. And specifically, what an archivist should be in order to build ourselves a more relevant and thriving profession.

And to do so, we need to consider the relationship between professional archivists and what I'm calling "the archival space." And that archival space has changed radically, as has everything else, because of the web. If you think about modeling the interactions between archives and others in pre-Internet days and then compare it to the challenges we face today, the difference is clear. During the meeting of the Archives and Records Association of the UK & Ireland a few months ago someone tweeted "The idly curious individual sitting on a train in Utah now has to be factored in to your plans" and added the hashtag "sarcasm."[3] Well, you know what, yeah, you do need to think about that person and others like them. Because another way of thinking about the evolving archival space is that what that really means is "the world we live in now."

The world of archives---that is, professionally staffed collections of records and manuscripts in various formats—are just one part, and perhaps a small part, of an archival space that permeates the lives of most people, including the idly curious individual sitting on a train in Utah. And while what I'm calling archival space permeates their lives, "archives" per se almost certainly do not, at least not in ways that they recognize.

In this talk I will first review some of the more relevant characteristics of the evolving archival space, then talk a bit about why I'm discussing this in the context of professional archivists, and then review how I think these two worlds should intersect, and

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[3] https://twitter.com/ISBNx/status/505291115013361664

outline a recommended role for professional archivists in this evolving archival space.

So, what are the most prominent aspects of the world we live in now, as they relate to archives? And I'll try not to belabor these points, as I assume we're all familiar with the world today.

First, the web gives us unprecedented access to content. People access historical—or at least "old" media content on the web easily and in volume. And they can do it on desktops, laptops, or phones, from virtually anywhere in the world. We have gone from an environment in which access to archival content was difficult and therefore limited to those who had the resources and motivation to access it, to a world in which access is taken for granted—at least for those with access to the web.

And not only can people access historical content, they want to. Cultural heritage organizations have seen positive results from sharing digitized and born-digital documents, images, audio, and video. Twitter provides evidence of the public's appetite for archival content. The Twitter account HistoryInPics has over 2 million followers, and HistoricalPics has over 1.7 million. So it's no wonder that many archivists seem to hear a constant drumbeat to "digitize all the things!" And, of course, access to that digital content is provided via an unprecedented number of channels. So it's not only that there's more archival content out there, but what constitutes "out there" is not just the institution's own website, but also the full range of social media sites, as well as sharing, reposting, and so on people can do from their own accounts and sites.

This also demonstrates that archival content is coming from a diverse range of providers, not just cultural heritage organizations. We have people, organizations and companies digitizing their historical collections and sharing them. And there are countless examples of materials in cultural heritage collections being digitized by citizen historians, scholars, non-profit organizations, and for-profit organizations and then shared in ways that may or may not involve the custodians of those collections.

Archives, in a professional sense, are just one source of content among many in the crowded archival space.[4]

　　This explosion of content has often been accompanied by an erasing of context. When people look at and enjoy archival content, how often are they aware of where it came from? How it was captured? What came before it and after it? People don't necessarily care about context, and in many cases, why should they? I think we've all experienced that people want what they want and they don't care where it came from. Both the popular Twitter accounts I mentioned – HistoricalPics and HistoryInPics – don't give any citations or credits for the images they share (or at least don't do so consistently), and as the numbers show, people don't seem to mind. The U.S. National Archives provides similar material on Twitter via the Today's Document account, which of course, provides full context for its images. Today's Document has only about 17,000 followers on Twitter (although they do better on Tumblr.)[5] Perhaps it's just that the account's name mentions documents rather than pictures that accounts for the disparity, but again, the lack of context in the more popular accounts isn't discouraging followers. And, as archivists and historians, we know that in many cases context does matter—as does authenticity and reliability.

　　What is also erased in viewing archival content online is, of course, the context of the physical archives. In many ways accessing materials online is a huge benefit to both users and the archives, but as in most online experiences there are aspects of the physical experience that are not replicated. Viewing the physical materials provides information---for example, smell, as famously recounted in the book *The Social Life of Information*, which describes a medical historian smelling each document carefully to see if it had the telltale scent of vinegar, which meant that it had been disinfected against the spread of cholera. "By sniffing for the

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[4] I discussed this issue by comparing the "old" and "new" business models for archives in the talk "The Future of Archives is Participatory: Archives as Platform, or A New Mission for Archives" posted on the blog back in April: http://www.archivesnext.com/?p=3700.

[5] As noted, they are more popular on Tumblr, with over 177,000 followers and numerous accolades. They've also got a Today's Document available as an iPhone app, so there are many different outlets for the content.

faint traces of vinegar that survived 250 years and noting the date and source of the letters, [the historian] was able to chart the progress of cholera outbreaks."[6] But, smells aside, working with physical collections can often give a researcher a greater sense of volume, as well as identifying information not included in digitization, such as information on the back of a document, or annotations in different colors. There is also the intangible sense of connection or excitement that many researchers feel when handling original materials, of course. And for many researchers visits to the archives also mean establishing a productive relationship with the archivist, who can serve as an advisor and almost a research partner, at times. This level of one-on-service is no longer possible in some archives due to cuts in staffing, but it is still a hallmark of many of our repositories. In the physical world, the archivist often can help put materials in context for the researcher, but this is less likely in the online world.

Another characteristic of the world we live in now, is that people can and do document their own lives more than ever. Whether it be via the running diary-like function of Facebook status updates and Instagram feeds, or the scrapbook like functions of Pinterest boards or the Facebook timeline, people are creating vast personal archives, whether they think about it that way or not. While there are historical precedents for the modern trend of taking "selfies" everyone one goes, most people in the past didn't have the technological ease—or peer pressure—to take quite so many pictures of themselves and their lives. While long lovely letters may be increasingly a thing of the past, we now have videos, blog posts, Twitter feeds, and so on. And, I think that along with this rise of somewhat ephemeral self-documentation, we have also seen an increase in people wanting to collect and preserve documentation of their own communities, however those might be defined. More of these kinds of formal and informal "archives" are popping up than ever before--perhaps because as the pace of change increases, people feel that the past is more fragile than it used to be, or that "the past" is no longer as far away as it used to be.

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[6] John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, *The Social Life of Information*. Harvard Business Press, 202, p. 174.

Related to this self-documentation trend is the rise of maker or remix culture, a world in which people have the impulse and the tools to create products for themselves—sometimes based on pre-existing, often archival materials. A particularly fun example of this is the work of Joshua Heineman, who just out of personal interest began taking digitized stereograph images from the New York Public Library's collections and turning them into animated gifs. "Within a month [of sharing them on his website], there were 70,000 viewers a day pouring over the project, countless links & features, and emails coming in from all over the world."[7] And the library ended up incorporating the Stereograminator, as it's now called, as a part of their website. And this kind of success is far from unique. There is an appetite for the raw materials in archives.

The archival space also now has more demands from scholars for archival material in formats they can easily use for their research—which can mean anything from simple digitization to OCR, tagging, and marking up. At the conference in New Zealand, one of the people who spoke the day before I did, Evelyn Wareham observed, "Data is the new black."[8] Many digital humanities researchers have the capability to transform raw data sets into meaningful results, but often what they want is just that—materials transformed into data they can use.

As I noted, along with this urge to document often comes the urge to collect and "archive," which has been a human impulse for centuries, of course. But again, I think there is more of a sense of self-awareness in some communities, and a realization that they need to capture their own documentation before it disappears. For example, at this summer's SAA meeting I attended a session that discussed several projects aimed at capturing documentation about the early days of the AIDS crisis, inspired by the realization that what is part of personal memory for many in the community is now almost forgotten ancient history for new generations.[9] So

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[7] See the Stereograminator About page: http://stereo.nypl.org/about.

[8] Evelyn Wareham is the Information Manager at Statistics New Zealand and spoke on second panel of the joint ARANZ/ASA conference, "The Value Proposition: Recordkeeping in government ICT strategies."

[9] Session 407, "Documenting the Epidemic: Preserving and Making Accessible HIV/AIDS History,"
http://www2.archivists.org/2014/schedule#.VGQMwfnF80I

what has changed, I suspect, is the shortened timeframe for the urge to document and commemorate, in addition to, as with many things in the digital age, scale and capacity for storage and sharing. In addition, I think there is an increased tendency to call collections of things by the name "archives," which seems to be all the rage lately. (Just as referring to anyone who selects as a curator and any selection activity as curation.)

And so we have all kinds of passionate amateurs, historians, for profit companies, community groups, and organizations assembling collections of original materials and also scanning originals and creating collections of digital surrogates, and calling them archives. The degree to which any of these collections meets the benchmark of what some would call an "archives" is subject to debate, and will vary according to the criteria used. For me, some almost definitely are, and many certainly are not. But what I think, or any archivist thinks is irrelevant. We operate in a landscape in which the word" archive" or "archives" has been adopted to mean virtually any collection of information—usually but not always non-current information.

And it's not a stretch to imagine that as the usage of "archives" broadens, so too will people's impressions of who is an "archivist." Why should that term not apply to anyone who creates or manages a collection that people refer to as an archives? I brought this up in an old blog post some time ago, thinking it was just taking the argument to a ridiculous extreme[10], but I was proven wrong recently, when, in announcing their new interview series called "Ask the Archivist," *Choice* reviews online shared that their first guest in the series would be Ed Ayers—a historian, prominent academic and scholar and creator of the pioneering Valley of the Shadow online resource.[11] A wonderful person, but not an archivist by any measure I know of. But because Valley of the Shadow is considered a digital archive, this prominent

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[10] Ok, I really did think I had written about this, but now I can't find it so maybe I didn't after all. This post comes close and maybe in an earlier draft I had gone to the ridiculous extreme: "The problem with the scholar as 'archivist,' or is there a problem?" (http://www.archivesnext.com/?p=2522).

[11] Here's the announcement: http://www.ala.org/news/press-releases/2014/09/choice-reviews-online-launches-new-ask-archivist-feature and here's the site for the interviews: http://www.choice360.org/ask-archivist/.

publication considered him suitable to kick off their "ask the archivist" series.

So in the evolving archival space, people commonly assume that many different kinds of collections are archives and that people with a wide variety of qualifications and roles may be called archivists.

And, indeed, we have seen many uses of the term "citizen archivist" to refer to people making contributions of varying kinds. In the world of participatory archives, people contribute to descriptions, tag, comment, transcribe, collect, pin, download, print, create, and remix. They can share their findings and products in online forums both supplied by archives, and completely outside those boundaries. They can create their own virtual communities and networks around archival content, just as people who share common interests have always found ways to share their enthusiasm.

But our evolving archival space has some downsides as well. With greater use of and access to online information sharing has come a greater public awareness of the need to pay attention to what happens to the information we share. Discussions about government oversight, security breaches, the right to be forgotten, and the security of information stored in the cloud have all made people and organizations aware of the security and records implications of all this new sharing and communication. Making digitized and born-digital records available online means that information that used to be difficult to access can now be easily captured and shared. The ease with which information can be accessed—legally and illegally— is making people nervous as well as excited, and this is very much part of the new archival space.

As we move to considering the role of the professional archivist in this evolving archival space, it's necessary to consider what it means to be a professional archivist. The distinction between what I consider a professional archivist and others involved in the archival space is a tricky one, and one with which I'm sure many would take issue. But I believe there is value and a specific role for those who, as professionals, share a common body of knowledge, follow established practices, and conform to an ethical code.

Perhaps one reason why, at least here in the US, creating distinctions between professionals and non-professionals is a source of tension is that the creation of a distinct archival professional is a recent development. And, in fact, today in many smaller organizations volunteers or non-professional staff care for and provide access to historical materials. Knowledge of history and an avocational interest in "stuff" are still seen by many as the only qualifications needed to be, in their eyes, an "archivist."

In this regard, their perception may be based on the roots of the profession in the United States. Until the early 20th century—and often into the mid-20th century—archival collections were created and cared for by historians and manuscript enthusiasts, who established collections based on their own perceptions of what constituted "history." The Society of American Archivists was founded in 1936, growing out of a committee of the American Historical Association. The first state archives, Alabama, was created in 1901, and the last—the Vermont State Archives—was not formalized until 2008. The U.S. National Archives was not created until 1934, and did not become an independent agency until 1985. Graduate education programs with a significant archival component were not widely available until the 1980's, as archival education began to shift from history to library science programs. While it is possible to go through a process to earn the title of Certified Archivist, most archivists do not choose to do so. While today for many a Masters of Library Science degree with a specialization in archives, or a masters in archival studies, is the preferred educational preparation, there isn't one clear process for becoming a "real" archivist, with some kind of seal of approval. Even the term "professional" archivist is a loaded one, implying as it does, that one is paid for one's work. After all, I meet the qualifications of a professional, but I am not paid to be archivist by anyone, and many who have no qualifications are, even as I speak, earning paychecks as archivists. So, if you're trying to look for an easy to way to draw a line and say who is and isn't a professional archivist, it's not easy to do.

So why do I bother to raise the issue?

I'm not some kind of archival curmudgeon who wants to chase out all the volunteers, amateurs, historians, librarians, IT people, and digital humanities scholars, and tell them to go play in

somebody else's sandbox. The more people involved in the archival space, the better. The more people collecting, preserving, providing access to, and using materials of historical value, the richer the whole world of archives is. This explosion of interest is a testament to the value of what we do.

So, again, why do I still think it's important to delineate a role for professional archivists in this wonderful wide open archival space?

One reason is that, as I noted earlier, I think professional archivists are defined by the common body of knowledge we share, the established practices we follow, and the ethical codes we espouse. And I believe that these knowledge, practices, and ethics need to be sustained and promoted in the broader archival space.

But, the second reason I think it's important to continue to talk about the role of professional archivists is perhaps, not as idealistic. As some of you who follow the online forums of US archivists may have noted, there have been somewhat heated discussions recently about job prospects for students graduating from our many, many educational programs in archives, as well as the role of volunteers and interns in relation to professionals. Part of this discussion has centered on ensuring that employers understand the importance of hiring people with appropriate credentials for jobs as archivists, and that employers pay professionals a salary that recognizes their expertise and knowledge. This would be challenging even in good economic conditions, but today the impact of the economic down turn has triggered anxiety about the future of this next generation of professional archivists (many of whom are saddled with the burden of paying back the loans they had to take out to finance their graduate education).

And there's an inherent tension between the best interests of the archival profession—which needs to promote our own knowledge and expertise as being something worth recognizing by jobs with professional-level salaries and resources to match---and the best interests of the archival space as a whole—in which we want to recognize the values of all participants and not necessarily

raise some up above others.[12] How can we strike a balance between the competing needs to be inclusive and embrace this new environment while still advocating for the continued importance of our profession? What should our role be in the new expanded archival community? How can we define a role for the professional archivist that's good for the profession and the evolving archival space?

So, how do we do that?

First I'd like to clarify that what I'm describing here is the outward facing aspect of the job of the professional archivist. There are many critical functions of our jobs that I'm not talking about, but that doesn't mean that I think they're not also important. However, in many ways I think our profession has sometimes been too internally focused, or at least too focused on a collections-based narrative. Stressing the primary role of archivists as custodians of physical collections leaves out a great deal of what makes us valuable. We should not be—in my opinion—the invisible plumbers and electricians working behind the scenes in the archival space. We are not just handmaidens to historians.[13] We shouldn't be talking only about what other people do with the archives—we need to make ourselves part of that story.

And so, keeping in mind that the archival space—aka the world we live in now—is one in which most people are creating, sharing, and engaging with content from their own personal archives or from collections supplied by a wide range of sources,

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[12] I'm pretty sure it was Terry Baxter who first articulated this or brought it to my attention, at least that's the way I remember it, and since I am getting old and grizzled (although not as much as Terry), maybe he can remember if he did this just in a private conversation or on his blog or somewhere else. Anyway, it's a pretty good observation, I think, and I don't want to take any credit away from Terry, even if I can't figure out how to cite him properly. If he posts a comment and reminds me, I'll update this note.

[13] I've looked for a citation to explain the origins, or least to document the usage of this phrase, again without much luck. It's referenced in several articles, but always seems to be taken for granted. The consensus is that it originated in Canada and that it was, at the time, used proudly by archivists to describe their work. Terry Cook refers to it as being so used until the 1980's, and he ought to know (Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar, p. 170). Again, anyone who wants to correct my ignorance, please enlighten me!

and that a range of people are creating and caring for archives of some kind, what should our role as professionals be? I have identified three different roles, each with three aspects supporting it.

The first role for the professional archivist is to make our collections more usable.

- We need to contribute to the archival space by giving people what they want. By being good participants in the archival space, and the currency of that space is sharing. So for archivists, that means three things:
- We need to provide access to rich visual resources. People love images. They love to share them and interact with them on social media. They love to do things with them—make them into new creative works, turn them into gifs, pin them onto maps, create comparisons of then and now. Images—both still and in motion—transcend language. People make immediate connections with them. So we need to continue to share digital versions of our visual resources widely and often.
- We need to transform textual materials into usable forms. Computers can't read handwriting, and neither can a lot of people any more. And even those of us who can may not want to take the time to decipher a document if it's not critical to our work. Computers can't do keyword searching on handwritten documents, or documents they can't easily interpret. We need to make sure our textual materials are made accessible to search engines and people, and we need to make sure that the data contained in those documents is ready to be used by scholars, or anyone, who wants to harvest it, crunch it, analyze it, and do with it what they will with it. (Again, "data is the new black.")
- We need to make sure our metadata is shareable and shared. Linked open data, interoperable systems, portals, federations, cooperatives, collaborations, everywhere we look it seems we are being encouraged to "free our collections" or at least to free the metadata about those collections and our digitized versions of them. And with good reason. There are lots of ways people can discover our collections in the archival space, and lots of

opportunities to collaborate with others to expand that discoverability. There are people who can do wondrous things with our metadata, if we give them the chance, and when metadata from many repositories is pooled together it allows for identification of new relationships among records and, of course, helps aid discovery.

So, as custodians of collections and the information about them our first role should be make our collections more usable.

The second role the professional archivist needs to take on within the context of the archival space is to make our archival institutions more valuable. And, once again, I suggest three ways to make that happen.

- We need to make sure our archival institutions are platforms for meaning-making. Everyone in this room knows that archives are more than just storehouses of old stuff. Archives are sites of learning, identity-building, and personal growth. In other talks at conferences and on my blog I've advocated for adopting a new mission for archives. I have articulated that mission as: "To add value to people's lives by increasing their understanding and appreciation of the past."[14] Archival institutions can provide value in the archival space by providing not just raw material, in the form of our collections and metadata, but also information, tools, and sites—physical and virtual—to help people understand the collections we hold, and how they relate to their own lives. Archives should be platforms to help people better understand and appreciate the materials we hold, and put those materials into context. We need to give people the tools and knowledge to engage more meaningfully with the past—and therefore with the present as well.
- We also need to promote the idea that our archival institutions are places of permanence. As I've said, many others in the archival space are creating collections—personal and organizational, materials they themselves are creating, and

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[14] See "The Future of Archives is Participatory: Archives as Platform, or A New Mission for Archives," http://www.archivesnext.com/?p=3700.

collections made up of materials gathered from other sources—
and most of the people creating these collections don't have the
capacity to ensure they're preserved over the long haul. Our
archival institutions are in the business of preserving things
permanently. One valuable function we can provide is to make
sure those in the archival space know that we may be able to
offer a permanent home for their materials.

- And finally, in addition to thinking about permanence, we also
  need to think about fragility and transience. Many archival
  institutions are already actively engaged in what I have referred
  to as "collecting the now."[15] Many citizens of the archival
  space are doing this as well, but I think there's a role for our
  institutions to collect the often ephemeral digital materials that
  document the world around us today. Whether those events are
  of global, national, or local significance, or even materials that
  document the routine daily lives of people in 2014, archival
  institutions shouldn't leave it all to others in the archival space
  to ensure the archival record includes documentation of what's
  going on now.

By adding value to people's lives through increasing their
understanding of the past, offering permanence to collections being
created now, and documenting the world around us, archival
institutions can demonstrate their relevance and importance in the
present, as well as being custodians of the past, and we as
professionals need to make sure our institutions are doing just that.

The third and final role for professional archivists, and
perhaps the one that may prove most challenging for many, is to
promote our own value by sharing knowledge.

- Archivists need to serve as visible sources of expertise within
  the archival space on the areas of our professional knowledge.
  We are not experts in everything related to our records,
  goodness knows, but we are experts in our own field. We know
  about professional practices and standards. We know about

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[15] This references this talk: " 'Now is what matters': My first official appearance
as an "agent provocateur" at the Canadian Archives Summit,"
http://www.archivesnext.com/?p=3668.

preservation. We know about metadata. We know about records management, and the importance of good recordkeeping practices. We should serve as active, not passive, resources for others such as digital humanists and custodians of community, family, and personal archives, and provide information and advice in the archival space in ways that respect the expertise of others while not discounting the value of our own body of knowledge.

- The second aspect of this role may seem similar to the one I just described, but I think it has significant differences. And that is that professional archivists should serve as advocates for our professional body of knowledge and our values. I see a difference between serving as an active resource within the community and taking a more activist role, and serving as a voice for our profession. And by this I mean, essentially getting a place at the table and making ourselves part of the conversations whenever our profession's viewpoint needs to be considered. This includes being active in a range of possible forums, including debates on public policy, development of digital humanities projects, the founding of new collections or organizations, as well as reaching out to the people who will be the future donors to our collections, such as writers and artists, scholars, scientists, and professionals of all kinds, as well as to the general public. Because as we know, in the future all our donations will probably include, or should include, digital materials. We need to make sure these people know their records are valuable and how to best preserve them for their own use, and perhaps the use of future generations. This function as an advocate is one that is uniquely appropriate to the professional archivist in the archival space.

- And lastly, professional archivists should promote our own value by sharing knowledge of the key differences between archives, libraries, museums, and other cultural heritage organizations. For many within and outside the archival space, all organizations that hold books, information, objects, or just "stuff" look alike. Many users don't care where their information comes from, or what its original context was, and sometimes that's probably fine. But I think it's critical to ensure that when it matters, we make it clear to people

(particularly resource allocators) the unique and critical role that archives fulfill in our society and the value of our function as preservers of authenticity, accountability, and context. There is good reason to be excited about many aspects the so-called convergence of galleries, libraries, archives and museums, but I think we need to make sure that doesn't mean we all end up getting lumped into the same pot, each losing the specialized functions we serve.

This, then is my vision for the professional archivist within, really, the world we live in now: that we make our collections more usable, that we make our institutions more valuable, and that we promote our value by sharing our unique professional knowledge.

I'm sure it's the case—and I hope it is—that many of you are already actively engaged in fulfilling some or all of those roles. Certainly if the conference organizers had given me another hour or two I could have provided you with example after example of how archivists are currently doing wonderful work in each of those areas. But for all of those examples, and for those of you in the room, I wonder how often it is the case that this work is recognized as being part of the primary or essential work of the archives, rather than just a bonus, or an add-on, or a nice to have. Or in many cases, something that archivists initiate in their spare time. I hope that as our vision of our role as professionals expands to consider how we interact with the whole archival space—not just our traditional users in traditional ways—that the roles I've talked about are considered part of our essential functions.

In our current environment, in which people second-guess their doctors by self-diagnosing on the web, and some people brush aside the knowledge of climate scientists, no profession can assume its expertise will be recognized and rewarded. Almost every day I see evidence online of the work of professional archivists being confused with or subsumed by a host of other populations in the new archival space. It would be alarmist to suggest that our professional survival is at stake however, as the world of archives has expanded we have an opportunity to expand the influence of our profession within it. And I hope that this is a role we all choose to embrace.

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