

srma

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Letter from the President

Jay Trask

*Head of Archives and Special Collections,
University of Northern Colorado*

I am excited to start my term as SRMA president! I want to thank all of the work that our past president and board accomplished. I appreciate all of their efforts on the myriad of tasks that we tackled last year. Last year's board has left us with a strong foundation to continue serving SRMA's members. I am happy to continue serving with folks who remained on the board, and will certainly rely on their experience and wisdom throughout my term. I am also super excited for all of the new folks who have joined the board. I believe it is going to be an amazing year!

The new board has already begun work implementing our 2022-2023 annual plan. Here are a few of the highlights so far.

We are looking forward to a returning to an in-person (with a virtual option) conference. Nora Plant and the rest of the programming group have been working hard planning our next conference scheduled for November 14th at Colorado State University, Fort Collins. The conference is going to focus on the transformations and changes we've all experienced during the last few tumultuous years. The theme of Reconnecting and Re-evaluating is absolutely perfect! Please consider proposing a session! We'd all love to hear about the changed landscape of the archival world!

The membership approved changing

the by-laws to create a new board position. We'll now have a more permanent representative on the Journal of Western Archives board! In the past, the past-president served in that role, which resulted in constant turnover. This new position will add some stability to our representation on the JWA board. The SRMA Board voted to appoint Megan Friedel as our representative. Megan served on the JWA board as the past-president, and now she will be able to continue this important work.

I think one of the most exciting things the board is implementing is the new Archives Fellowship Program. The main purpose of SRMA's program will be to support and recruit students and early career professionals from under-represented and marginalized communities who are interested in or planning a career in the archives profession. An additional goal of this program is to help end unpaid internships by providing paid work experience at an hourly rate appropriate with the high value of archival work and pushing employers toward ethical pay and labor practices. The Colorado Historical Records Advisory Board has generously agreed to help fund the first year of the program. As this opportunity develops, we'll share more information with you all.

Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to serve as the president for 2022-2023.



Wyoming Collaboration to Establish Traveling Archivist Program

Jordan Meyerl

Project Archivist, University of Wyoming

The Wyoming State Archives, the Wyoming State Records Advisory Board, and the University of Wyoming's American Heritage Center are collaborating on a project aimed at establishing a Traveling Archivist Program (TAP) in the state of Wyoming. The main point of this project is to establish a traveling archivist program that will benefit small cultural heritage institutions on how to handle, store, process, and preserve their materials. Here is one link providing information on the [grant](#) and another providing information on the project archivist [position](#) associated with the project.

As part of this project, we are planning to conduct a survey of small cultural heritage institutions in Wyoming to determine their needs. We will be sharing further information about the project via the SRMA newsletter and a blog that will be live soon. We ask that all cultural heritage institutions in Wyoming keep their eyes open for potential communications regarding this project to ensure we are reaching the appropriate audience. We thank you in advance for your cooperation and look forward to working with the myriad of diverse cultural heritage institutions housed in Wyoming!

Journal of Western Archives

The *Journal of Western Archives* is a peer-reviewed, open access journal sponsored by Western regional archival organizations. The journal focuses on contemporary issues and developments in the archival and curatorial fields, particularly as they affect Western archives and manuscript repositories.

Contributing to the Journal

If you are interested in contributing to the journal or serving as a peer reviewer for journal content, please contact the managing editor at jwa.editor@gmail.com. Article submissions may also be made online at the journal website.

JWA

<http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/>

You can reach Jordan with questions at jmeyerl@uwyo.edu.

DEI in Libraries and Archives: Lessons Learned from a Reparative Description Project

Nancy Henke

Reparative archival description is a phrase that wasn't in my vocabulary just a few months ago. In my previous career I spent more than a decade working in higher education,

but I lived in the land of literature and rhetoric, not libraries and archives, and chatted with my fellow teaching faculty about metacognition, never metadata. Now a full-time Library and Information Science student, I recently completed a practicum at Colorado State University's Morgan Library, Digital and Archives Services (DAS) where I spearheaded a reparative metadata project. I am proud to have contributed to this crucial DEI initiative.

[Reparative archival description](#) aims to make the metadata of archives

and digitized collections more inclusive. Like most cultural heritage institutions, Morgan Library's digital collections have many objects that were archived so long ago that the language used to describe them might be racist, sexist, homophobic, or simply outdated and

potentially alienating. Consider, for instance, the many photographs from the past century that describe college women as "girls," or those that use the term "Oriental" to refer to anything Asian, or items that describe people and places as "exotic."

Many librarians and archivists are aware such problems exist within their collections but addressing them is a massive undertaking – one

they know is worth doing but must also happen alongside the many other projects that fill the days of library staff. My practicum helped begin this process at CSU.

The first step in this work is knowing which digitized objects have potentially problematic metadata, and DAS at Morgan Library had this information thanks to the Plains to Peaks Collective (PPC), the Colorado-Wyoming Service Hub of the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA). In Fall 2021 PPC's crawlers checked the language within digitized collections against sources like Hatebase.org to

flag potentially harmful items, resulting in a list of over 8,700 items.

But that list was 8700+ potentially harmful descriptions, and the objects needed reviewed to identify items for further follow-up and revision. Some terms, for instance,

might be used in hateful ways – like the words "fruit" or "slope" – or they might be used to simply describe images in the University Historic Photograph Collection, such as this one which is titled "Western Slope fruit."

As you might imagine, a review of all the nearly 9000 flagged objects would have taken much longer than an academic semester, but I was able to dig through over 1500 objects –



University Historic Photograph Collection, Colorado State University

just less than 20% of the DPLA list – identify those that needed further discussion and revision, summarize my findings in a report, and create a [LibGuide](#) and reading list for those who continue with the work now that my project is over.

Although each library or archive will have its own issues to contend with when reviewing their collections, there were a few trends from my project at Morgan Library that may be useful to consider.

- Of the 1500+ objects I reviewed, I identified only a small number (6.7%) that needed revision or further discussion to determine if revision is necessary. In many ways this was relieving; though some of those flagged items were highly problematic, it is heartening to know that the digital collections aren't rife with alienating, offensive language, and a large majority of the terms are used innocuously. It is vital to remember a few things, though: first, this is true of CSU's collections, but may not necessarily hold for every library or archive. Second, the items I identified for follow-up can only ever represent the judgment and point of view of a single person (me), and ideally a team of multiple people will scan the items I flagged and review other items on the list to ensure a variety of people with varying points of view are assessing the potentially problematic metadata.

- Some of the most highly offensive language is in descriptive metadata not written by a librarian or archivist, but instead was written by the original photographer, writer of an abstract, or writer of a table of contents. [This item](#), for instance, includes a faithful transcription of the original abstract – complete with a highly offensive term for intellectually disabled people. Any

library or archives undertaking a project like this will need to determine a course of action for similar situations, especially considering that the nuances of who wrote which parts of the metadata – a librarian of today vs. photographer of 100+ years ago – are not necessarily clear to those perusing the collection. And even if it is clear who wrote what, is the explanation that "it was the photographer, not us" truly in keeping with the ethos of reparative description, which by definition seeks to repair?

- As with critical cataloging initiatives, the problem at times may be with Library of Congress Subject Headings – some of which are famously outdated or offensive, and over which individual libraries have little control. [This item](#), for instance, demonstrates just this point. Although the title and description of the photo use the phrase "small-clawed otter," the controlled vocabulary for the LCSH subject heading is "[Oriental small-clawed otter](#)."

I'm proud of the work I did with my practicum, and know it has a receptive audience with DAS staff who have already begun making changes and adapting workflows to ensure inclusive metadata here forward. And yet I know that this project, like so many that relate to diversity, equity, and inclusion, will never be completely "done." It is a process of continual reflection, revision, and reassessment.

Nancy Henke earned her MA in Literature from Colorado State University and taught composition and literature there for 13 years. She is now a full-time, online LIS student at the University of Iowa. You can see her work on her [website](#) or connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).

AV Preservation Training using SRMA Professional Development Funds

Cindy Brown

Reference Archivist, Wyoming State Archives

In February 2022, I was honored to receive the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists Professional Development Award. It provided funding to enroll in the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) online training Fundamentals of AV Preservation. Although I have digitized cassette and reel-to-reel tapes for years and performed conservation work in our lab at the Wyoming State Archives (WSA), this workshop provided professional training on both activities. Specifically, six weekly sessions covering the following topics:

- Introduction to AV: Preservation Challenges
- Physical Carriers: Identification, Storage and Handling
- Collection Inventory and

Prioritization

- Reformatting Projects: Planning, Preparation, and Implementation
- Managing Digital Audiovisual Collections
- Emergency Preparedness and Response for AV

The training included presentations, resources and assignments for continued growth and learning. As a supplement, I received a pdf copy of NEDCC Fundamentals of AV Preservation Text Book. NEDCC offers the book for self-study at: <https://www.nedcc.org/av-textbook>. Three work projects were to be completed and submitted to the instructor for feedback. Using the provided templates, I developed a sample inventory of an AV collection, drafted a Statement of Work for contracting with vendors, and created an AV Salvage and Recovery Plan.

For the sample AV inventory, I took this as an opportunity to focus on a project that has been on the WSA wish list for quite some time – digitizing Soundscriber discs which include recordings from past governors, early settlers, etc. Over the years we have discussed looking for funding to digitize them. Working off the original handwritten inventory, I completed the spreadsheet template and created a comprehensive inventory. The Statement of Work assignment added to my understanding of best practices when identifying requirements for

AV digitization. Regarding the disaster plan assignment, Alison Fulmer, the instructor, pointed out that most organizations have a disaster plan drafted, but the specifics regarding their AV materials may be omitted. Additionally, methods for handling AV collections after a disaster vary quite a bit.

One of the most impactful takeaways for me is that digitization is now considered one of the primary strategies for preserving AV material. Clearly, it is important to preserve and conserve the original media as best as possible, but it is critical to create and maintain a digital copy for future and sometimes current accessibility and use. Otherwise, organizations may end up like me with Soundscriber discs which no one can safely play without hiring a vendor to create digital surrogates.

As a result of the coursework, I took steps to increase discoverability for the discs in our Oral History Collections by incorporating the data from the inventory. Soon thereafter, the WSA received a request from an organization for some of the Soundscriber recordings. This served as proof that this additional work and our newly honed skills from the workshop paid off. As an added bonus, the organization offered to pay for the digitization of those recordings.

I truly want to thank the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists for their generosity in paying for the training. I encourage others to look for similar opportunities to develop and learn.

Pueblo City-County Library District gets a facelift

Cecily North

Librarian-Archivist, Pueblo-City County Library District

The Robert Hoag Rawlings Library in Pueblo, Colorado has been in renovations since summer of 2021. As part of this \$10 million renovation, the Local History and Genealogy department is undergoing its own renovation. The department lives on the third floor and shares the floor with the Administration Wing. The renovation includes combining the vault space with more storage space, reconfiguring the public space as well as the staff space.

The planning stages began in early 2021 with discussions involving staff and designers. The biggest challenge and concern was about protecting the collections during this major construction. The department expressed its concerns about the collections but ultimately the decision was to keep the collections where they are and the work will continue around it.

Major preparation began in May 2022. This included cleaning out staff desks and supply closets, but also preparing archival collections. The archives holds several bound copies of the Pueblo Chieftain and these need protection. Jasel Cantu, Genealogy Librarian and Cecily North, Librarian-Archivist, wrapped several bound volumes of the Chieftain in preparation for the move.

Do you have projects or thoughts to share? Consider featuring them in the next issue of the Rocky Mountain Archivist!

Contact willjgregg@gmail.com with submissions.



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Once construction was nearing completion on the first floor, genealogy materials from Special Collections and a few collections moved to the Makerspace on the first floor. Staff desks are located in the Makerspace and temporary desk space on the garden level.

As of this writing, demolition has begun. The vault space is expanding and walls have been torn down. Additionally, the department changed names from “Special Collections and Museum Services” to “Local History and Genealogy”. The plan is that the construction will be complete by the end of 2022. Look for an update in 2023, and hopefully a future SRMA conference in Pueblo!



Repository Profile: Steelworks Center of the West, Pueblo, CO

An interview with Victoria Miller, Curator

Newsletter editor Will Gregg spoke with Victoria Miller in the first of a series of profiles of archives throughout the SRMA membership region.

Q: Can you give us an overview of the archives at the Steelworks Center?

A: Our archives is a corporate archives, created mainly by the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company (CF&I). CF&I was founded in 1872, making 2022 its sesquicentennial. It was a huge company: a large land owner, water user, tax payer,

employer, and certainly the largest steel maker west of the Mississippi River for decades with 22,000 employees at its peak. The company went bankrupt in 1990s and their assets were purchased by a steel company in Oregon which had no need for the archives. The Steelworks Center came to be in 2000 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and took custody of the archives by purchasing the office complex from the new owners and receiving the records as a donation in 2003.

Q: How long have you worked at the Steelworks Center and what is your relationship to the archives?

A: I've been with the Steelworks Center for sixteen and a half years and have worked in the archives for three and a half years. Our archives is tied to our museum and I'm a curator at the museum in addition to being the archivist. I design and produce exhibits using archival materials, process research requests,

work with students, publish books, articles, and give presentations, and serve as collections manager for the three-dimensional collection. I love my job. It's quite challenging but every day is unique and it's very rewarding.

Q: What is the extent of the archives?

A: The archives is a little over 6,000 cubic feet, so it's a pretty good size! We have over 100,000 photographs, 30,000 maps, 15,000 blueprints, 228 motion picture films, and millions of individual documents ranging from personnel files to board of directors' minutes, company newspapers to financial statements, and anything you can think of that a company would produce.

Q: How does the archives tie into the wider collections and mission of the Center?

A: Our mission here is to provide continuing education to the public through the preservation of the archives, artifacts, and historic office complex created by the company. In a way, the archives is the mission. I use the archives to create exhibits. Our three-dimensional collection also enhances the themes we interpret both in exhibition format and in our educational programming.

Q: Is there a particular collection that you find noteworthy?

A: A lot of people love to research the publications, namely the company newspaper. It was published from 1901 to 1974, though they did take a break in the middle. It represents a pretty good chunk of the 20th century and the articles written at that time reflect what was happening in Colorado, in Pueblo, and the United States. For example,

during WWII they wrote articles about employees who left to serve overseas and even printed letters from soldiers to their families back home. Soldiers mention missing their old jobs and mention the names of their friends at work.

Those types of stories tug at your heart strings. Just this morning I saw another article about an employee in the 1960s who was driving around looking for a house to buy in the post-war housing boom. He came across a house on fire, stopped the car, went inside, and rescued a one-year-old baby.

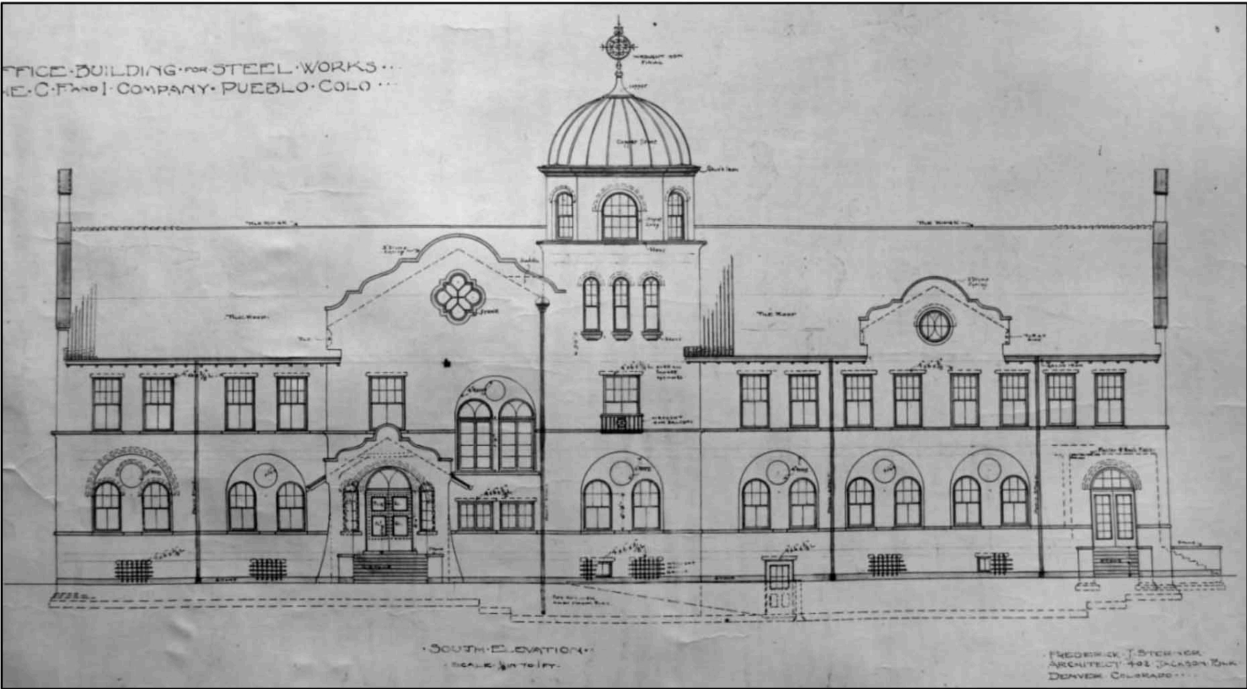
The newspaper was published in five different languages when it came out and reflects the diversity of Pueblo at that time. In a way the point of the publication was to make employees of diverse nationalities feel comfortable, demonstrate what was thought to be the American way of life, and give them some insight into what was happening in their new home.

Q: Given the fact the company had its own newspaper, it sounds like a little city unto itself.

A: It was. When you read stories in the newspapers and listen to oral histories – we collect oral histories to get the workers' point of view – it really was a family. People looked out for each other and helped each other



CF&I Blast January 20th, 1939.



Architectural schematic of the CF&I administration building.



Left: CF&I blast furnace workers circa 1945.

Below: Records in the archives before and after rehousing.



out, and you can really see that in this archive. The steel and mining professions were extremely dangerous and because of the hazards, the fire, the heat, and the noise, so people had to look out for each other.

Q: Who are the primary users of your collections?

A: We get a lot of genealogists who want to know, for example, what Grandpa did when he was at work, what kind of money he earned, what

kind of benefits did he receive and if he was ever promoted – that type of question. We also have a lot of scholars writing dissertations or theses who need information they can only find here. We also have student inquiries, like someone doing a fourth-grade project for their Colorado History class. We get of inquiries from media producers wanting to use our photographs or films. Sometimes we get corporate users such as mining companies wanting to see maps of land that CF&I once owned.

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Q: What challenges come up in managing your collections?

A: My greatest challenge is that we're such a small staff and we wear so many hats. I'm also constantly learning as I go along being fairly new to working in the archives. Money is always a challenge, too.

Q: Do you have any recent projects that you're excited about?

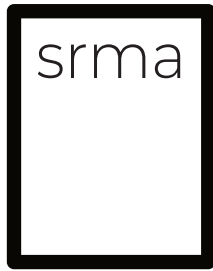
A: Right now we are celebrating the 150th year of steel production in Pueblo. I created a lot of exhibits to go with that celebration. Those are up now and will be on display for two

years. And just last year our buildings became listed on the historic landmark list.

Q: What is your favorite color of archival box?

A: One of my favorite record groups is our photo collection. The archivist who rehoused those chose dark grey and personally I like it. Especially the ones with the metal edge.

Interested in having your archives featured in the next issue? Write to the newsletter editor at willjgregg@gmail.com.



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Need to renew your membership? Contact David Fasman at

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