



**Chapter Council Presents
Sharing Roundtables
MLA Annual Meeting
San Antonio, TX
Monday, May 16, 2005**

Table 1A: Archives: Traditional & Electronic

Facilitator: Richard Nollan

Recorder: Ursula Ellis

Additional Participants: Kathy Broyles, Dave Piper, Sondra Pfeiffer, Mary Ann Slocomb

Topics discussed and ideas shared:

At the opening of the meeting, Richard provided a handout with key URLs for archival organizations and resources (appended at the end of this report). Next, participants introduced themselves. Sondra and Ursula are very interested in archives, especially electronic aspects, but they currently do not have much regular involvement with their libraries' archival collections. The other three share archival responsibilities with many other duties. Mary Ann recommended a good article, especially for the newly minted hospital archivist:

“You Want Me to Do What? Medical Librarians and the Management of Archival Collections,” *Journal of Hospital Librarianship* 4(4), 2004, pp. 31-50.

Shortages of time and money are major issues. Archives often have little or no budget and frequently lack full-time employees. Some archives are open only by appointment to save staff time. E-mail reference questions can be as time-consuming as those from walk-in patrons. One participant mentioned feeling like a “guerilla worker” when doing archival duties, since there are so many other pressing priorities. Grants can be an excellent source of funding for archival projects, but they usually will not cover salaries for existing staff. However, grants often do pay for temporary contract workers. Volunteers may also be available to help with staffing. Another fundraising idea is to offer naming rights to a donor, to name either the entire archives or a fund for acquisitions.

In general, a bootstrap approach works best for justifying time and money expenditures. Locate sympathetic members of the institution (especially aging members, who may have more appreciation for history) and attract their interest and support. Start with small projects like exhibits, and build on the success of those. Promote the archives by producing a newsletter or writing a regular column in an institutional publication. Design a brochure to distribute. Create a website to reach a broader audience – for example, see the website for Richard's collection: <http://library.utmem.edu/hslbc/history/index.html>. Consider listing your archives in NLM's *Directory of History of Medicine Collections*:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/directory/directoryhome.html>. Oral history can be very rewarding in itself, and also as a promotional tool. For instance, Kathy is creating a DVD using interview tapes from a history of her university.

Archival content was another topic of discussion at the roundtable. Archives can easily become “dumping grounds,” or alternately can miss out on important institutional records, which are not directed to the archive. For those newly responsible for an archive, setting a mission and scope are essential. Generally, an archives’ scope is based on the broader institution, local area, and region, and perhaps any subject specialties in which the collection or institution has strengths. A formal gift policy can then be derived from the mission and scope. Dave pointed out that administrative change in the university or hospital could result in a drastic change in support and in the quantity and quality of records deposited. Some administrators do not care as much about history, but history keeps happening during their tenure. If your institution has a records management program, the staff there can help with acquiring needed records for institutional history. If there is a development office, they too can be useful allies.

The roundtable also considered preservation and organization issues. While digitization is a hot topic now, microfilm remains the standard for preservation. Richard mentioned growing concern about the ubiquity of PDF format for digitized materials. The format may become outdated, and it is proprietary. But digital backup copies offer many advantages: they can be posted online for remote access, can be easily searched, and can be used in place of the original document – making the original less vulnerable to damage or theft. Kathy asked about recommended software for organizing and searching an image collection. Microsoft Access, CONTENTdm, and FileMaker Pro were discussed as options. Dave wondered, in the case of an elaborate archival collection, when it is best to search individual finding aids, and when it is more effective to search the online catalog. Richard said that some OPACs, such as Innovative Interfaces, allow a federated search across multiple finding aids, so that finding aids are integrated with the catalog.

Although digitization is a powerful tool for preservation and organization, Mary Ann brought up the value of a physical archives space in cultivating a sense of “library as place.” Both print and electronic archives are vital in keeping history alive.