

## **DEMYSTIFYING ARCHIVIST SPEAK: UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE OF ARCHIVAL PRACTICE**

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**TRICIA PEONE:** All right. Good afternoon. My name is Tricia Peone, and I'm the Project Director for New England's Hidden Histories here at the CLA. Welcome to today's virtual workshop with the CLA's archivists, Zachary Bodnar and Billy McCarthy, on "Demystifying Archivist Speak."

To begin, I want to acknowledge that the Congregational Library & Archives resides in what is now known as Boston, which is in the Place of the Blue Hills, the homeland of the Massachusetts people, whose relationships and connections to the land continued to this day and into the future.

For those joining us for the first time, the Congregational Library & Archives is an independent research library. Established in 1853, CLA's mission is to foster a deeper understanding of the spiritual, intellectual, cultural, and civic dimensions of the Congregational story and its ongoing relevance in the 21st century.

We do this through free access to our research library of 225,000 books, pamphlets, periodicals and manuscripts, and our digital archive with more than 100,000 images, many drawn from our New England's Hidden Histories project.

Throughout the year, we offer educational programs and research fellowships for students, scholars, churches, and anyone interested in Congregationalism's influence on the American story. Please check our website, [congregationallibrary.org](http://congregationallibrary.org) to learn more about what we do and for information about forthcoming events.

So today's program is part of the Church Stewardship Initiative at the Congregational Library & Archives, which is committed to supporting churches struggling to engage in effective records management.

From reference requests to in-person feedback, the archivists at the CLA have long recognized the desire among churches to better understand how to steward church records and maintain the memories and mission of their church community.

They also recognize the challenge of not knowing where to begin. We've hosted two programs in this series, both of which can be found on the library's YouTube page. Today's presentation comes from feedback to the surveys that were sent out following those programs.

So now it is my pleasure to introduce our speakers today.

Zachary Bodnar graduated with a Masters of Library and Information Science from Simmons University with a concentration in Archives Management in 2018. Prior to his work at the CLA, Zachary worked at the Bellamy Faraday House and Garden Archive, the Vassar College Special Collections, the Harvard Law School Library, and the Harvard Botany Libraries.

Zachary joined the CLA as an archives assistant in 2017, helping to prepare materials for digitization through the New England's Hidden Histories Project. In 2018, he took the title of archivist. His professional interests include metadata collection and management, digital archiving, audio/video preservation, and archives management.

And we'll also hear today from Billy McCarthy, who graduated with a Masters of Library and Information Science degree from Simmons University, also, with a concentration in Archival Management. Billy started working at the CLA through a graduate internship and was hired full time as an archivist in 2018.

His work includes processing some of the oldest and most complex collections housed in the archives, and he also manages reference requests and serves as the archival collections manager. Some of his professional interests include increasing access, collection management, processing of complex materials, and facilitating research.

So I'm going to turn it over now to Billy, and bring up our presentation.

**BILLY MCCARTHY:** We are very excited to have our third Church Stewardship Initiative program today on "Demystifying Archivist Speak."

While reviewing our previous programs, it was pretty clear to us that we kind of needed to take a step back and focus our attention on sort of discussing archival terminology. The goal today is just to make you more knowledgeable on how archivists talk about the work that we, and by extension yourselves, do.

Like how many people are sort of quick to seek medical advice from old Dr. Google, we wanted you to hear terms discussed and described by professionals as opposed to sort of, just sort of scouring the web for potentially bad or just incorrect advice.

A huge shout out to the Society of American Archivists' "Dictionary of Archives Terminology." This is a really fantastic resource, and we both really encourage you to explore maybe terms today, other terms that might be relevant when you can.

So Zachary and I are gonna explore a bit deeper into some of these terms with our own interpretations and comments. And these slides, plus an accompanying Word document will be made available afterwards. The vocabulary used in archiving is vast, so there's really no

way we can discuss every term that's gonna be relevant to you and your community's needs. But chances are the SAA's dictionary has an entry for the relevant word you're thinking of.

But do feel free to ask us about additional terms, clarification on terms from today, and we can review them in the Q&A section. Even if we don't get time to answer, we can definitely circle back at a later date.

And as always, you are welcome to reach out to us directly with any questions you have. And our emails are gonna be shown at a few times during today's talk.

And finally, don't feel like you need to walk away knowing every definition, word for word. The point here today is just to get you familiar with words that's going to help you be better with church stewardship.

With that said, I'm now gonna go ahead and pass it over to Zach to get us started.

**ZACHARY BODNAR:** Thank you so much, Billy.

So let's begin with our very first term today: **accession**.

An accession is what we call the whole of a donation, or even a purchase in the rare situation where an archive outright purchases materials. An accession is only complete once everything has been physically, or digitally in the case of digital records, transferred to the archive, and once all the paperwork has been signed.

At the archive, we make what is known as an accession record, which records everything related to the transfer of the documents to the archive: who transferred the documents, what they are, some basic information about the collection, about the physical materials in that collection. That all goes into that accession record.

While an accession does refer to the physical materials, it is most defined by the action and process of transferring materials.

We have what is even called an accession workflow that covers this entire process here at the CLA.

**Appraisal** is our next term.

Now, this is a term that means something very, very different in our field than it does outside of the field. Outside of the field of archiving, appraisal is typically related to the act of giving an object some sort of monetary value. Arts and antique appraisal probably are the things that come to mind first.

Archivists, however, are quite literally not allowed by our own code of ethics to assign monetary values to pretty much anything. Valuations are just something we don't deal with.

Appraisal, in the archival context then, is more of a process by which archivists determine whether materials should become a permanent part of the archive based on the somewhat nebulous term, that you'll see in the definition here, of "archival value," which is itself usually determined both by various guidelines, such as an institution's collection policies and various standards that build or builds part of the bedrock of archival theory.

Appraisal and assessment, as it's sometimes also called, can happen during basically any step of the whole archival workflow. It typically happens before materials arrive as an accession. It typically happens during the accession workflow, and it typically happens too when you are in the middle of processing a collection.

Now let's shift gears towards **arrangement**.

Arrangement is one of the core archival processes that happens during what we call processing.

Arrangement covers both intellectual organization and physical organization. The end results of this process are the inventory lists that you'll find in a finding aid and also the neat physical storage of physical materials in archival boxes.

Fun fact, though, physical and intellectual arrangements, while two coins... two sides of the same coin, do not need to mirror one another at all. And in many cases it's far better that they don't mirror one another.

While intellectually you might organize materials in a collection by date order, a fairly common practice in the archives, physically, it often makes sense to organize materials, for example, so that legal-size materials are kept together and are separated from the letter-sized materials.

The end result being that while two items might be listed one after the other in the inventory list based on their date, they might be stored in completely different boxes if one is a legal-sized volume and the other is a folder of letter-sized correspondence.

Because these two terms are so closely related, we felt the need to cover them at the same time here.

While both **born digital and digitized items** exist wholly as ones and zeroes on a hard drive somewhere, born digital items were, well, born digital. These are digital objects which have only ever existed as ones and zeros, such as the digital photograph taken on your phone, the Word document that you use to note down some notes at a meeting, or even your emails.

Digitized materials on the other hand, existed as some sort of physical media before becoming digital.

It's important to note that the act of actually digitizing, to digitize materials, is not, generally speaking, a preservation action. It is an accessibility action.

The digitized object does not become a replacement for the original, but rather a new derivative form of the original that is typically more accessible via an online interface.

**Cataloging** is a term that you run a little bit more into on the library side of our profession. But it's one we archivists run across enough that we've bought it worth mentioning here.

Cataloging is basically the library equivalent to what we do on the archive side that we call processing. And the end result is the catalog record, a good example from our own catalog in this slide.

At the CLA, we curate catalog records derived from our finding aids for every archival collection, so that when people search our online catalog, they may find archival and print materials alike.

Cataloging is incredibly important, not only to provide access via browsing of our catalog, but because cataloging creates links between objects via metadata.

Metadata as a term we'll cover a little bit later, but, creator and subject terms, many of the blue terms that you're seeing in this link here, or in this picture here, become linked by different things having those same creators, authors, subject terms. And this can help to link objects which otherwise while browsing might not seem linked to begin with.

And now we arrive at collection, another foundational term for us in the archives.

**Collection** is a term we apply to a set of related archival materials. Typically, a collection is defined by who created the materials.

For example, in the case of a church's records or your church's records, that's the church itself.

For us here, we have the records of many churches and each of those collections, you'll see in the title, always has that creator in it: First Church, Cambridge, as the example here.

There are niche examples where the creator of a collection didn't actually create the materials in the collection. This is... the typical example for this is a collection gathered by a collector of some kind, and we call that an intentional collection.

It's important to note that a collection and an accession are not necessarily synonyms. While an accession can be a whole collection, a collection might be made of multiple accessions.

We've talked about collections, so now it seems fair to talk about collection management.

**Collection management** is basically one of the many possible archival sub-professions that exist. At large institutions, you might have a dedicated collections manager, which is often a high-level admin and a manager position as they will be leading teams of archivists and setting policy.

At smaller institutions, the collection manager position is more often just one of the many job hats that the archivist or archivists will don from time to time.

As I've kind of alluded to already, collections management is a role in charge of the workflows and policies that keep the archive running.

They're kind of the one in charge of maintaining workflows, setting policies, setting prioritization, and just in general creating and implementing these workflows so that the archive can run.

So let's talk about **creators** now.

A really easy way to think about creators is to think of the term as basically synonymous to author.

However, we use the word creator instead of author because creator is a more generic, more broader term. And indeed we try to think as broadly as possible when it comes to creators in the archive.

The creator can be an author, but they might also be a collector, or a composer, or a transcriber, or even a digitization tech.

We think broadly about creator because we want to be able to best capture information about the collection at the collection level, the folder level, or item level, so that the contents therein are as accessible as possible to the widest range of researchers and users.

So right off the bat, I want to say that **custodial history** is basically synonymous with another term that will be covered later: provenance.

Both terms deal with the establishment of custodial control over a set of archival materials. The terms can pretty much be used interchangeably, but because on the face of it, they seem like completely different terms: provenance, custodial history. They're very different looking, at least when you first run across them.

We wanted to cover both of them. While the terms are technically interchangeable, at least within the archival context, provenance as a term, as a term can be used more broadly in a different, couple of different other fields.

I do tend to see custodial history applied more to corporate records, meaning records created by a collective entity such as a business, a club, or a church, than to personal papers.

All right. We have another of the foundational terms for archivists: description.

**Description** is another of the primary processes that fall under the activity of, well, processing. Where arrangement is concerned with physical and intellectual organization of a collection, description is concerned with the information related to that collection.

Description really is the act of collecting and documenting this information.

Description covers all sorts of information about the collection, from administrative information about collections such as access and use policies that cover the use of the collection, or information about how the collection was acquired, to descriptive information, such as descriptions of the contents within the collection or information about the history of the collection's primary creator.

All of this information together creates the descriptive portion of the finding aid.

Preservation is one of the key services that archivists provide, and so it follows that disaster planning is a part of what archivists have to do.

**Disaster planning** isn't just about planning for disasters and how to recover from them, but also includes planning for how to prevent, mitigate, and prepare for disasters.

Disaster planning can basically be broken up into four phases.

Mitigation and prevention is about creating policies that decrease the likelihood of a disaster ever happening.

Preparation is about creating policies that prepare you, or an institution, to be able to handle a disaster should it arise.

Response policies are in place when a disaster strikes and help to ensure speedy and organized responses.

And finally, your recovery policies are in place to plan for recovery and to move an organization or archive back towards normalcy.

Disaster plans are often exhaustive, and they can be difficult to maintain. But they are crucial policy documents, and they can be key to minimizing damage to a collection in the unfortunate situation if a disaster were to ever strike.

Next is a term that archivists can use a lot but maybe isn't the best understood.

**Ephemera** refers to materials often printed on the paper, though not necessarily, that were created for specific, one-time purposes. Often they are expected to be discarded after their use.

Ephemera covers things like the ticket that you held to get into the concert hall, or programs, or the program or playbill, or other types of small paper handouts.

Identifying ephemera in one's collections, or in the kinds of collections that you might be collecting if you're an archival institution, is important because ephemera is often called out pretty specifically in institutional collection policies. In a lot of institutions, ephemera, generally speaking, isn't collected or certain types of ephemera aren't collected, which is why we want to make sure we pointed this out here.

For church archives, we definitely remember... or recommend, rather, having policies in place to identify ephemera and determine how they are to be collected, or if they are even to be collected.

You can make different kinds of categories of ephemera, but overall, that's sort of the definition of ephemera.

A **facsimile** is an accurate reproduction of another object.

Facsimiles can take many forms, such as the one pictured, which is, which is a published facsimile of a previously published work.

Facsimiles can have quite a few uses in libraries, archives, and museums, and galleries, such as published facsimiles that can be used to provide access to earlier works without having to actually own an older work. They can also be used in displays or exhibits where the original might not be suited for display or use.

Depending on their use, facsimiles can be created for preservation purposes or access purposes.

In digitization, there are guidelines—Federal government of the United States has its own guidelines for this—that define digital facsimiles and their suitability to represent and/or replace the original object.

Generally speaking, a facsimile is never really intended to be a replacement for the original. More often than not, they were either a form of access or a form of preservation so that the original isn't more hurt over time.

But in the case of disaster, facsimiles can, depending on how they were created and what guidelines there are that exist for the different types of facsimiles that exist, they can be used as a replacement of the original.

Okay. And that brings us to about the halfway point of our presentation, and I am very happy now to give my voice a little bit of a rest and pass the program back to Billy to take you through the second half of our journey through archivist speak.

**BILLY:** All right.

So, a **finding aid**. A very foundational piece of what we do here.

So, a finding aid is a description that typically consists of contextual and structural information about an archive resource.

Essentially, it's just, kind of think of it as a fancy inventory list, you know, adding on to it a plethora of additional information like what you see on both the left and the right here. Some of the common ones can include a biographical note or a historical note, the scope and contents of what's actually in the collection, how we acquired the collection, you know, accruals to the collection, and the like.

Here at the CLA, we produce our finding aids using a program called Archive Space. But there is really no need for anyone here to go that route because while we work with multiple, multiple collections, you're really only gonna be working with one.

Depending on the size and complexity of your collection, you could just, you can easily make an Excel sheet that's an inventory list and then write up some of this additional information on a Word document. You could even use the Word document for both. It's just sort of whatever works for you.

**Manuscript.** Yes. So when we're using that word, you know, we're referring to a handwritten or unpublished document.

This can be a pretty open concept, and there, you know, some examples include letters, diaries, notebooks, speeches, lectures, drafts of books, photographs, drawings, financial records, maps, even more.

Chances are, you're most familiar with this, with the use of manuscript for something like the Illuminated monastery manuscripts, like what you see on the right. But like I just told you, it's a very expansive definition.

Furthermore, when we're calling something a "manuscript collection," that's typically in reference to personal or family papers.

But for your individual church collections, where you're gonna probably encounter a lot of manuscripts would be notes from, like, your previous ministers, such as, like, notes on sermons, notes on certain events, or other topics as need be.

**Metadata.** Okay. So, information about data that promotes discovery, structures data objects, and supports the administration and preservation of records.

Basically metadata is data about data.

If this is the first time hearing about it, it can be a little odd, but it's actually a really simple concept. For example, every file you have on your computer has this thing called the properties menu, which you find by right clicking it.

One example here on the left is the property menus for a PDF document. So as you can see, it includes some really basic information about the file: when it was created, last updated, where to find it, and some more.

On the right, it's the same thing, but for an image file. And using metadata, you can sort of learn about the resolution of an image, the camera used, and a lot more.

**Pagination.** So this is the act of numbering each side of a leaf or page in a manuscript volume. Really easy.

It's just, please number your pages when possible. As an archivist, it can be kind of frustrating when it's not done.

You know, if we drop a folder by accident and pages are scattered, not knowing the order makes it extremely difficult to reassemble correctly.

If it's just a single page, you know, obviously it's fine. You can slide it right back in. But the more that falls out, the harder it is to reassemble.

You know, taking it further, just think of a puzzle. You know, if you lose a single piece, you can find where it goes pretty quickly. But if a quarter of the puzzle falls, you have to spend some time reassembling it.

That said, do not, do not think you need to go immediately, run into the archives and start numbering every page of everything you see. We understand that is wildly impractical.

But going forward, it would really be a best practice to just start numbering your documents whenever you can.

All right. **Records versus papers.**

So collections typically are boiled down into two categories. You have your records, and you have your papers.

Records are typically information or data created or received by an organization in the course of its activities.

Papers are usually records created and originally kept by an individual or a full family.

So with those of you working on, you know, your church's collections, those are records. If you happen to be working on an individual collection, like for yourself, those would be your papers.

So I included an image of two collections. So on the left is a box from our Park Street Church Collection, and the one on the right is from the personal papers of Davida Foy Crabtree.

As you can tell, the boxes are basically the same, and that's because the process is basically the same. The difference is just what are those folders... what material in those folders are being represented.

Here at the CLA, we do distinguish between what is considered a record and what is considered a paper by using collection numbers. You can see them in the top right corner of each image.

One says RG, and that's in reference to records, for Record Group.

And then, on the right, we use MS for the papers, just for manuscript.

**Preservation.** So, this is the professional discipline of protecting materials by minimizing chemical and physical deterioration and damage to minimize the loss of information and to extend the life of cultural property.

For those of you that have joined us for our second event, "How to Store Church Records," which you can view on our YouTube page, some of this, most of this, is gonna be familiar to you.

Basically, preservation involves all the actions taken to stop records from being damaged.

So the most obvious action there is going to be putting your papers in a folder, putting folders in a box.

But this also, for legacy data—so your VHSes, your CDs, even your older flash drives—that data is on a medium that will deteriorate over time to the point of it just being unusable.

So, when you have a plan, you know, you need to have a plan to, sort of take that information out and store it in a different form. And we would refer to that as digital preservation.

There's a good chance you're probably thinking, well, where does conservation come in between that and preservation?

So conservation is the act of repairing or treating something that's already damaged.

So as an example, if you have a portrait for instance, that suffers damage, you hire a trained conservator to do the actual act of repairing. Once the repairing is done, preservation is everything that we would do to then protect it from harm going forward.

So on the screen in the middle here, you know, examples of various boxes for preservation, including a couple on the right for digital medias like VHS, CDs, cassettes, and, you know, vinyl records.

On the right is a container of metal and plastic fasteners that Zachary created out of one of his larger processing projects.

And then, what we call a spatula up top, which we use to more easily remove fasteners.

Much like with what I just said about pagination, I want to be clear here. Don't go back and remove every single staple, every single clip across your entire collection. You know, again, we understand that's pretty impractical.

But going forward, the less of... the less metal and plastic you're using, you know, it's better to put those things in a folder than it is to use a paper clip. You know, you can't do it every time, but try to build the habit of not doing it so much.

All right. **Processing**: preparing archival materials for use.

So, Zachary has pretty much covered a lot of aspects of this, such as accessioning and arrangement. And the best way to think of processing is it's sort of the body that houses all of these other steps within it.

You know, as it says, processing, where you process. You know, it's that overarching term for every step in preparing archival materials for the use by our patrons such as yourselves. You can have really easy processing projects, and then you can have very difficult ones. It just

depends on a variety of factors. You know, here at the CLA, that would be time, the size of a collection, our knowledge of the collection, and of course, money.

That said though, as of today, for those of you engaged in church stewardship, you know, you can now refer to yourselves as your church's archival processor.

All right, **provenance**.

So, information regarding the origins, custody, and ownership of an item or collection.

We've already sort of touched upon this one as well when looking at finding aid, particularly the acquisition information and Zack's mentioned in his section as well.

It's really important for us as archivists to know who has been and who was the owner of a record and who might have had transfers of ownership before it arrives to us

So just basic, a basic example, if a child is donating the collection of a parent, you know, we just want to note that that child was in custody of the records after the parent. And then that custody was transferred to us from the child. And we sort of codify all of that in our gift agreements as well.

Okay. **Respect des fonds**.

So this is the principle of maintaining records according to their origin and in the units in which they were originally acclimated.

Basically, "respect des fonds" can kind of be translated into "respect the order."

This is probably the most confusing term we're gonna go through today... for me as well. But the reason I chose to highlight it is because it's something that comes out of the structure of provenance. And if you do any researching of archival practices online, you are going to find this word. So we figured it made sense to, sort of, at least get you ready, in understanding of what the term means.

So the underlying principle is that the way a collection was maintained is, in and of itself, worth keeping. So if someone, you know, aligned their papers, "ABC," you know, the respect des fonds says they should remain "ABC."

You know, as an example, in this picture to the right, you can see in the back there the sort of beige accordion folders. I know that the person who donated that collection intentionally arranged what's inside that folder. Because I know that, when I take that information out of that accordion folder, it will go into a proper folder maintaining that order in respect of the original creator.

You know, this isn't always gonna be the case. It's very much dependent on the situation. You know, as many people send us things in order, most of the time it's just pure chaos.

But again, it's just a word you're gonna come across, and we just wanted to make sure you heard about it.

All right. **Records management.**

So this is the systematic and administrative control of records throughout their lifecycle to assure efficiency and economy in their creation, use, handling, control, maintenance, and disposition.

In practice, this is all... records management are all of the steps that you take to keep your collection safe and secure. So this includes who has readily available access to the collection, the climate the collection can be in, how it's housed, you know, boxes and folders used, the creation of a finding aid, and in some cases the transfer of that material to another institution.

I would highly suggest, you know, you can read our, you can go through our two previous events, especially our second one, where we dive really deeply into housing, as that would be very helpful.

One thing I do want to specifically call out here though, would be temperature control.

So here at the CLA, our archives are set to about 68 degrees at all times. This falls, sort of right into the optimal temperature control. We recognize that most of you won't have, be in a position to achieve, sort of, that perfect temperature control.

But what you can do is you can avoid having them in precarious situations. Do not place your records in places that have extreme temperatures, so your hot attics and your cold basements. Do everything in your power to have them in an environment that isn't too hot or too cold because if you buy, you know, say you spend a bunch of money on boxes, if you store those boxes in an attic, that's, you know, maintaining 95 degree temperatures, the purchasing of the boxes aren't really gonna be that helpful.

So, try to, try to address that situation, and try to find a location that you can maintain some sort of security, but also temperature control.

Okay, **red rot.**

So, this is the process of leather deterioration, characterized by an orange or sort of reddish powder. I'm gonna guess that most of you who are doing archival work for your churches or otherwise, you've probably already encountered this before, and you may not have even known there was a word for it.

You know, it's a degradation process caused by exposures to high humidities, pollution, and high temperatures. And there's an example of it on the screen. You can see where the binding is, sort of, is deteriorating away.

And in the right corner, you can actually see what it will look like when it's on your hands against the blue background.

You know, when I first started working here as an archivist, I remember distinctly the day it happened. I was looking at a volume. I took my hand away, and I was like, my hand is orange. What happened? But now I've been doing this for six years, and it means nothing to me anymore. I'm just, sort of, used to it and wash my hands afterwards.

If you're new to doing this sort of work, or you just, you're kind of, maybe a little grossed out by it, just buy some medical gloves and just use that while, you know, handling the material.

I will say, I've gotten it in on basically every article of clothing I own. But you probably want to avoid wearing white, just in case. Everything comes out in the wash. You can usually just brush it right off. But for some of you, it might just be better to avoid white.

All right, **retention schedule**.

So, this is a document that identifies and describes an organization's records and provides instructions for the disposition of records throughout their lifecycle.

So maybe contrary to some beliefs, you don't have to keep every single church record you have. And there are many records that are not meant to be kept for a long time.

You know, a retention schedule will lay out how long to keep something, be it forever, as you see in some cases, or for a certain number of years, as in other cases. You have a couple of examples here.

You know, and I know that each individual state might have different rules and regulations. So be sure to check on your own.

You know, while we're on the subject of it, you know, why does this matter so much?

We... I don't... I have infinite amounts of examples, but when collections come to us, you know, we need to scour them for bank account information, checks, Social Security numbers. Very private information can slip through the cracks, and we make sure to comb those records so that doesn't happen.

But, you know, we're human. We can't be perfect. And a retention schedule helps you. And it also helps us, if, eventually, records were to come to us.

So as you move forward, try to start thinking about coming up with the retention schedule, and people that help out in the future will certainly thank you for it.

All right. Our journey has concluded with **vital statistics**.

So, these are public records that document life events such as, you know, births, deaths, marriages, divorces, other kinds of public health events.

Specifically when working with church records, I want expand that definition just a little bit. I would think of those within church records as baptisms, confirmations, marriages, deaths, membership, admissions, and dismissions.

So again, I kind of make the... I sort of open up the term a little bit more. But that's based on the fact that we get so many questions here about genealogical work. And all seven of those categories can be helpful doing genealogical work. As the name sort of implies, it's quite vital.

So, if you are like, where do I start? I don't know what to do?

May I suggest finding your oldest documents first, especially vital statistics.

Like I said, the amount of people we turn away because those records weren't saved is more substantial than I'd like to admit. So by taking and preserving these items now, I promise you they will be helpful to people in the future, even if you're not sure about it.

So we really appreciate you joining us today. I know we went with kind of a brain dump, but, you know, again, we really feel like the information we've discussed today is going to do wonders for you as you go into your own communities and, you know, start to do this work.

I suspect you'll find yourself coming back to this from time... you know, just to clarify and remind yourself of things.

And with that, thank you so much. I'm gonna pass it on back to Tricia for the rest of the event. Thank you.

**TRICIA:** So we've got a few good ones in the chat already.

I'm gonna start with a great question from Laura Foote, who asks, she says, we have limited space, time, and capacity to sort and take care of our archives. How would you recommend prioritizing?

I assume the oldest 18th and 19th century documents are the most important. Does anyone care about committee minutes from the 1960s?

**ZACHARY:** Prioritization is difficult to give a one size fits all answer, just because every situation is going to be different.

However, that said, I would start by thinking, rather in terms of temporality, category.

The reason I say that is that old records are not inherently more archivally valuable than more modern records.

You bring up the example of committee minutes from the 1960s. The 1960s is an era of political turmoil in the United States. In 100 years, those might be incredibly valuable records for someone doing research on how local communities responded to various national political movements.

So, I, I think one of the ways that we as archivists think isn't so much in terms of temporality. Some of that is because we get inert to the idea of "old is valuable" very quickly, just because, after you've handled 300 years worth of records multiple times over, it stops feeling as weird to be like I'm holding a thing that is 100... over 100 years old.

But some of that is also just a case of, we generally think about categories more.

So, if you have to prioritize sections of your archive, think about the types of categories of records that you keep. And if that's how you're thinking, I would say the two most valuable sections of your archive to think about are your administrative records, which covers meeting minutes, records of votes, committee minutes, minutes of executive committee or parish committee, parish records.

And your vital records. These are the things that Billy just talked about. Anything that records membership records, marriages, deaths. Those are huge treasure troves of genealogical information. They are definitely the things that we get asked about most in our reference.

And so those are the two categories that I would focus on if you if you do have to prioritize where you are focusing on at any given point in your archive.

Those were the... are the areas I would start with. And then I would move on to things like building records, financial records, ministerial records, and from there you might, and after that you might go more toward some of the more ephemeral stuff or the more weird stuff like photographs. I guess photographs aren't weird, but in comparison to paper documents, they're a little bit, they have different handling methods.

Or like, digital records or digital media, I should say, like VHSes, or cassettes, or CDs.

**BILLY:** Zack has a perfect answer.

You know, I do want to add... because you bring up a really interesting point about, you know, does anyone care?

When I first started working here, I kind of fell into the, like, yeah, what... why does some of this stuff matter?

But having done this work for years, I have seen every type of document be used for something that I had no concept of it being used for.

The classic example is we had someone using records to track throat distemperment through Massachusetts.

And when, you know, that's just like the biggest example. But you'd be shocked what people can kind of pull out of financial log books or, you know, those committee minutes in the sixties, seventies, eighties... there's so much happening that your community was engaged with that will live in those documents that you might not even think about. So it definitely... try to keep that in mind.

**TRICIA:** Excellent. We've got some great questions in the Q&A and feel free to keep typing more in as we go.

So, the next one I want to ask is, where can people find out more about basic disaster planning for their church's collections?

**ZACHARY:** I do not have a particularly great answer right off the top of my head. If you do... if you go online, you'll see, find, a lot of various resources about disaster planning. A lot of them will probably be focused more towards... businesses than they are gonna be focused towards cultural institutions or places like churches.

One place that we always recommend going to for their resources for anything around preservation and, as a result, also anything around disaster planning is the [Northeast] Document Conservation Center, NEDCC.

They, they have webinars on a whole lot of stuff. But on their website in general, they have a lot of just resources about a whole lot of things as they relate to preservation of cultural heritage materials. So they are always a go to resource for us to look to when we're trying to learn ourselves about anything.

Smithsonian, too, sometimes has good online resources for that kind of thing, although they're usually the second place I would go to after NEDCC.

**TRICIA:** Great.

Another question here from Laura Foote, who says, we have two oil portraits from 1850 of a pastor and his wife. Do you have a place for these? Is there a museum we could donate to? And she knows that their local, Historic Newton, is not interested.

What do we do with paintings of ministers?

**BILLY:** Yes. So, we do not actually collect portraits or a lot of, sort of, physical, you know, 3D objects. We just don't have the space for them.

You know, we keep a set of historical paintings that our organization purchased, and those alone take up most of what we have for available space.

I can't really think of a place that might want them. Not to say there isn't. I'm sure you could find someone.

But, you know, maybe you could spin it around and sort of make it the focus of like a community event. Try to think... try to spin it on its head, and try to make it some way to connect with your local community about the pastor and his wife. Maybe you could turn it into, kind of like a, remember when sort of thing.

But yeah, if you reach out to us separately, we can maybe try to think of some others in your area, but that's about best I can think of right now.

**TRICIA:** All right, another question here from John. Can you tell us more about digital preservation, such as emails?

**BILLY:** Well, since I mentioned it, I can, I can bite the bullet on this one. The reason I wanted... I at least wanted to bring up that it's a thing to be aware of.

Email archiving is, I would refer to it as in its infancy stage.

There are really, I mean, Harvard is the one that's the... that has sort of the most publicly known archive source out there. It's full name is escaping me at the moment, but they're probably the most far along, and that's... keep that in mind. That's Harvard. Harvard has the most far along, and I would still kind of call it infancy.

Email archiving is a gigantic problem that our profession is trying its absolute darndest to figure out.

I would say, as we've sort of mentioned multiple times, we would suggest you focus on preserving what's around you first. Gather your stuff into boxes. Gather them into a location.

Start with your physical material first, and then from there you can focus on getting your VHS tapes, you know, getting that information removed.

You should be able to find resources on there through NEDCC, actually.

But, in general, just keep in mind that we're having trouble with it as a profession. So that should be enough to sort of... not to say ignore it, just, you know, there isn't a perfect solution. Focus your energies and efforts elsewhere.

And when we have... when the profession has more for you, we will certainly highlight it.

**ZACHARY:** To follow up on Billy, just very briefly.

Yeah, Harvard's is called EAS, and it exists since about 2009 and is kind of an internal thing that they are slowly working on and improving, but it's not perfect.

And then the other major one is led up by Stanford, which is ePAD, which is probably... has had a little bit, even more external usage and testing.

But even then, as Billy said, email archiving in general right now is majorly in its infancy. And in a lot of cases, there's not good accessibility for how to do it or pretty much anything like that.

If you do have important emails that do need to be preserved, the best solution currently really and truly is to print out that email on paper and add that to your archive or other active documents as part of your church or organization.

Basically, I think I've said this in previous programs, and I'll probably say this many times in future programs. At this moment in time, if you have something that is born digital that can be printed out and is imperative that it be preserved for the future, print it out.

**TRICIA:** We did get one burning question coming in, which is, big picture, are you encouraging member churches to bring more boxes to you?

**BILLY:** Yeah. So, we did make a change in what sort of collections we do take on.

In a... a few years ago we did not take material from churches that are still open. We now do that. It's kind of in the middle. The idea here is, you know, we are a repository for Congregational collections.

So if you want to reach out to us through the emails, we'd be happy to talk to you about it.

But at the same time, like, we're encouraging the churches to have conversations within their own community to, you know, do this work as well.

So it's not like we're, you know, it depends. I know it's always a weird answer, but it's very much a case by case basis.

And for those churches that don't want to give their material to a different location, you know, the whole point of these is to sort of serve as that middle ground.

But yeah, I don't know if Zack has anything to add there.

**ZACHARY:** Nope. You pretty much said it.

We wish to encourage churches to be... to empower churches and encourage churches to have the power to manage their own records, to be a resource, to provide answers to questions, to continue with this series of workshops and webinars about church stewardship.

But church stewardship does include situations where, for whatever reason, materials do come to us, and we are a resource when that situation comes.

So, basically, at any point in your journey on your stewardship of records, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

**TRICIA:** Okay, great. Thank you, Zachary and Billy, for this presentation today.

So thank you very much, everyone.

And in the meantime, if you have any questions for Zachary or Billy, you've got their emails, and we hope to see you sometime soon, either on Zoom or in the library.