

SOURCE: Student Organization for Unique and Rare Collections Everywhere
Society of American Archivists Student Chapter
Agenda for October 8, 2024, 6 pm Meeting

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Attendance:

Hilde Creager

Gail Lordi

John Beekman

Christian Ryder

Jacqueline Silver-Morrillo

Vanessa Castaldo

Marija Dalbello

Jillie Fisch

Kelan Amme

Tom Acs

Emma Balkoski

Introductions

- John Beekman is Chief Librarian of Jersey City Free Public Library and Reference Librarian of the New Jersey Room. He has worked in the New Jersey Room since 2006. John is a Rutgers MI alum and former SOURCE board member.
- Jacqueline Silver-Morrillo is Senior Librarian/Archivist at the Atlantic City Heritage Collections at Atlantic City Free Public Library. In addition to being librarian and archivist, she is also the curator of the Atlantic City Experience Museum at Whelan Boardwalk Hall.
- Vanessa Castaldo is the Archivist at the Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center at Newark Public Library. Prior to her current position, Vanessa worked at Newark Public Library's Puerto Rican Community Archives at the NJ Hispanic Research and Information Center.

Jersey City Free Public Library

John Beekman Speech

1) What materials are kept at the New Jersey Room

- Special collections unit, collects primary & secondary items related to Jersey City, Hudson County, and New Jersey in general
- Books, photographs, maps, subject research, magazines, ephemera, newspapers (hard copy & microfilm), archival collections organized by collector, periodicals

2) What sorts of researchers visit the NJ Room and how do you provide reference services for their local history queries

- Genealogy and house history are the two main groups of users
- Closeness to Ellis Island helps genealogical researchers, records can also correct genealogical mistakes
- Census records and surveys help house historians
- Large amount of reference work is digital, especially since the pandemic

3) Describe your average day in your job as NJ Room Librarian

- Not many 'average days'
- Large amount of management, conflict resolution
- Reference work, responding to queries
- A lot of work goes to digitization – currently working with a grant to digitize large scrapbook collections (scanning is done offsite by Internet Archive but prep work is done on site)

Additional JCFPL Questions

When and how were the NJ Room Research Guides developed?

- Started during 2020 with LibGuides to provide digital resources for users

How did the NJ Room Programs on Video come to be? Who is Frank Hague?

- Programs on Video also started in 2020 due to lockdown, looking for new ways to do outreach
- Reached out to professors who had done research in the NJ Room for talks
- Frank Hague is a former mayor & Jersey City power broker, significant figure in Jersey City history

Atlantic City Free Public Library

Jacqueline Silver-Morillo Speech

1) What materials make up the Atlantic City Heritage Collections

- Archive is about 2200 sq ft., storage area on the second floor and two off-site containers
- Contains postcards, documents, yearbooks, maps, newspapers, artifacts
- Museum houses items from the archive
- Digital repository launched in 2022, contains about 14,000 items

2) What sorts of researchers visit the Heston room and how do you provide reference services for their local history queries

- Variety of visitors – students, historians, professors, genealogists. Every researcher is different

- There is a large number of reference services – in-person or online
- In-person research room hours, reading room, nighttime hours for students, AC Research Club

3) Describe your average day in your job as Atlantic City Heritage Librarian

- Runs a number of different departments
- To-do list of researcher questions to answer
- Works as a lone arranger, the only person in the archives

Additional ACFPL Questions

Could you tell us about Atlantic City Free Public Library's approach to exhibits at the Library, virtual exhibits, and the Atlantic City Experience at Jim Whelan Hall?

- There used to be a museum elsewhere, but materials have been moved back to the archives
- Sections – the beach, entertainment, convention center, etc.
- Temporary exhibits changed each year, new exhibit on a civil rights protest from 1968 at the DNC, working on a temporary exhibit on the Hispanic community in Atlantic City (likely opening early next year)
- Virtual exhibits are usually done in tandem with the exhibits at the museum

Newark Public Library

Vanessa Castaldo Speech

- First archivist hired by the Newark Public Library

1) What materials are kept at the New Jersey Room at Newark Public Library

- Materials collected since 1929, NJ Room was established later
- Documents, posters, photos, non-circulating (some rare) books, newspapers, maps
- State, county & city documents both official and unofficial
- Some parts are digitized

2) What sorts of researchers visit the NJ Room and how do you provide reference services for their local history queries

- Variety of researchers in all stages of research – professors, students, authors
- Largest group is amateur and professional genealogists
- Some people come in without knowing what they're looking for
- Researchers contact through emails, phone calls, and on-site reference questions
- More extensive research requires a few days for off-site

3) Describe your average day in your job as NPL Archivist

- When not doing reference, archival work is a significant part of her day
- Collection development, acquisition of new materials
- Collection maintenance, rehousing is significant being the first archivist at the library as standards were not applied previously

- Less glamorous side – establishing standards such as updating deed or gift agreements

Additional NPL Questions

What informed NPL's decision to provide digital access to archival materials through the Internet Archive?

- Previously used Islandora, done through a vendor with only one staff member assigned to them and encountered multiple tech issues
- Internet Archive is free and has greater access, even without control of the backend

Can you tell us about the newspaper and photograph collections at the New Jersey Information Center, and how Library staff uses microfilm and indexes to search large collections for obituary/biographical info? What are the challenges of managing such extensive collections?

- Due to digitization, microfilm is used less frequently
- Hand-written indexes were created by the papers themselves and were useful for research, OCR searches are used for digitized
- Photo collections are kept both on- and off-site, most are catalogued
- Challenges: microfilm faces wear and tear, newspapers only have one copy so have to be kept carefully, temperature controls, vinegar syndrome
- Most requested items are kept in the main space

Concluding Queries - All Panelists

Why should public libraries invest in local history departments? Why are public libraries the best repositories for these materials?

- Vanessa: Public libraries often have the relevant materials already even if they don't have the departments, and they often have the best access compared to places like historical societies
- John: Local history department grounds the library in the community, makes the library unique to its community. The way people use libraries is changing, but local history hasn't changed
- Jacqueline: It keeps the history alive within the city. Many don't know that the archives exist, and publicity can help.

Advice for someone hoping to revitalize their library's archive that is not currently being managed

- Vanessa: Conducting a survey can help to make the argument that the position is needed

How would you like to see your local history department change? What new or ongoing projects at your department are you excited about?

- John: Need to diversify and expand the collection to show more of less well-represented communities. Currently looking to establish an oral history project
- Jacqueline: Archives are currently being worked on after difficulties, new floor, ceiling, etc. Received a grant to work on the history of the Asian-American community in Atlantic City, project running until September 2025.
- Vanessa: Wants younger learners to engage with the material. Get them to think about what they're working with in a relatable way. Digitization projects of newspapers, attempting to get more papers digitized to move away from microfilm.