

大の筆
書は
耀
後の手の
め



archival haiku





The Society of American Archivists
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Cover translation: *"The brush in my Grandchild's hand leaps as he/she writes."*

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introduction

Kathy Marquis

Editor's Note: "Archives After Hours: The Light, Literary, and Lascivious Side of Archives" was a session at "Sustainable Archives: AUSTIN 2009," the Joint Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists and the Council of State Archivists in Austin, Texas, in August 2009. The session explored the many ideas and interests archivists have that expand far beyond the walls of traditional archival thought. Presenters Kathy Marquis, Arlene Schmuland, and Danna Bell-Russel respectively addressed archival haiku, the steamy side of archival fiction, and how archivists are using blogs to talk about their profession, their work, and their lives outside the profession. This publication captures the archival haiku segment of the session, which was chaired by SAA President Frank Boles (2008–2009).

Now we have arrived at the "light" portion of "Archives After Hours: The Light, Literary, and Lascivious Side of Archives." I would hardly call haiku "light verse," however. A Japanese poetry format, haiku is centuries old. It was discovered by the Western world in the mid-nineteenth century, and ever since we've been trying to squeeze our large, ungainly words into this spare and graceful form. Japanese haiku are often about nature or the seasons. They are written to capture a feeling and image, rather than to tell a story. Their proscribed form is simple: five syllables, seven syllables, five syllables.

I will admit that my own favorite example of this form of poetry is from the recently popular set of cat haiku:

You must scratch me there!
Yes, above my tail! Behold,
elevator butt.

And if you wonder if this is a perversion of the Japanese concept, I can tell you that there is even a Japanese term for silly haiku: *senryu*.

American poets from Marianne Moore and Carl Sandburg to Allen Ginsberg, Richard Wright, and Jack Kerouac have written or been influenced by the structure and elegance of haiku. But, luckily for all of you, there isn't time today for a full history

and analysis of the haiku form, nor for a literature review of all things haiku. I will simply share a few observations about our archival haiku contest (held in summer 2009), and then get on to the main agenda: reading some of the wonderful poems submitted for this competition.

When Arlene Schmuland, Danna Bell-Russel, and Frank Boles first asked me to join their merry band for this session, I was certainly game. I wrote back:

Archivy in verse
Can I rise to the challenge?
Dude . . . Of course I can!

We put out calls for entries on the Archives and Archivists list, and Teresa Brinati, Director of Publishing for the Society of American Archivists, was kind enough to run calls for submissions in *Archival Outlook*—as well as joining us a distinguished judge.

The entries came from as far away as the United Kingdom. In all, we received 65 poems and were delighted at their quality and variety. Interestingly, very few were humorous; most took on the task of translating the archival mission, or the experience of arranging, describing, or providing access to archival materials into verse. We are such a serious lot!

So, without further ado, enjoy the archival haiku!



first place

*Speaking to the dead
Through a paper veil requires
A necromancer.*

Terry Baxter

second place

*I describe your life
Everything you thought you'd wiped
I show to the world*

Ian McCulloch

third place

*Endowment way down
Budget cuts everywhere. Here,
A silverfish sighs.*

Kathy McCardwell



honorable mention

“What Archivists Do All Day”

*Read dead people’s mail,
Snoop through their diaries, and
Help you do the same.*

Elizabeth Engel

anticipation

*“How long,” I wonder,
as I put on these white gloves,
“can I make it last?”*

Chris McDonald



more haiku!

*Micro-spatula:
The staple element of
A diet breakfast.*

Chris Abraham

*Archives saves the world
From mem'ry's oblivion
For tomorrow's child*

Linda Barnickel

*Impatient patrons
Can't wait, need it yesterday
Smile breathe deep, don't scream*

Nicole Feeney



*flooded dirty box
reboxed and trucked to freezer
now dry, clean and safe*

*dusty boxes here
papers full of bugs and things
quick, get the brushes*

Pamela R. Cornell

*Folders in boxes
Neatly aligned side by side
Fill the stacks five high.*

Susan Hamburger



Introductions

*“You’re an archivist . . . ?
Oh yeah, I know what those are—
National Treasure!”*

Rules

*“No coats, pencils only,
You may not take papers home—
Donations welcomed.”*

Tim Gladson

*“Digitize!” they cry.
“Too expensive!” you reply.
Who will win the fight?*

Veronica Marshall

*Deadline tomorrow
Primary source required
Poor frantic student.*

*Snake in a jar
First edition of Darwin
Archives exhibit.*

Kathy McCardwell

*content standard
arrange and describe
in seventeen syllables
what this is about*

Chris McDonald

*Papers donated
Processed and accessible
They **are** here somewhere*

Karen Osburn

nostalgia

*opening the box,
a whiff of camphor sends me . . .
there's nothing like it.*

Chris McDonald

*Organized Chaos.
We guard Past for Future's sake.
Our sleeves, tinged with dust.*

Brittany Parris

The Manuscript

*Laid bare before you
Springs flower bud, bursts open
Friend and foe are found*

Karen Lea Anderson Peterson

*Write, edit, type, scan
Papers, folders, labels, box
Index, greet and show*

Erin Santana, Nicole Shuey, and Michael Zaidman

*Am I Archivist?
Records Keeper, Anarchist?
Id is confusing.*

Mary Schleifer



*Records management—
the dreary side of archives—
who can escape it?*

PRODUCT! LESS PROCESS!!

*Isn't it the processing
that makes life so good?*

Anna M. Stadick





*So I wonder why
The previous archivist
Used pen on folders*


*And I wonder why
The previous archivist
Wrote on the front not the tab*

Susan Woodland

Illuminating the Past: An Archiving Haiku

*Yellowed leaves lit by
fireflies' glow; preserve our past
in linear feet.*

Anna Kalina and Michael Boyd



*Boxes from donors
Awaiting my careful eye
Truly, do we want?*

*Fragile paperwork
Take care while processing it
Irreplaceable*

*I open boxes
Filled with valuable papers
Researchers delight*

*Piece by piece I sort
Remnants of this person's life
With care and concern*

*Remains of one's life
Unbelievable treasure
Joy for the scholar*

*Sometimes boring work
Sorting through bits and pieces
What thrill awaits me?*

*Little old lady with bun
Archivist stereotype
Not this wild woman*

Kathie Johnson

*Online finding aid
Helps researchers greatly but
they want all online*

*This is what I do
I can't help myself at all
Academic voyeur*

*Same question daily
What does an archivist do?
Preserve history*

*Your life is nothing
Without your own history
We keep your story*

*Secrets that I learn
Would make many donors blush
Should I blackmail them?*

*This is my life's work
Preserving for the future
Remnants of the past*

Kathie Johnson

*Sneezing at my desk
These papers smell like cigars
I need more tissue*

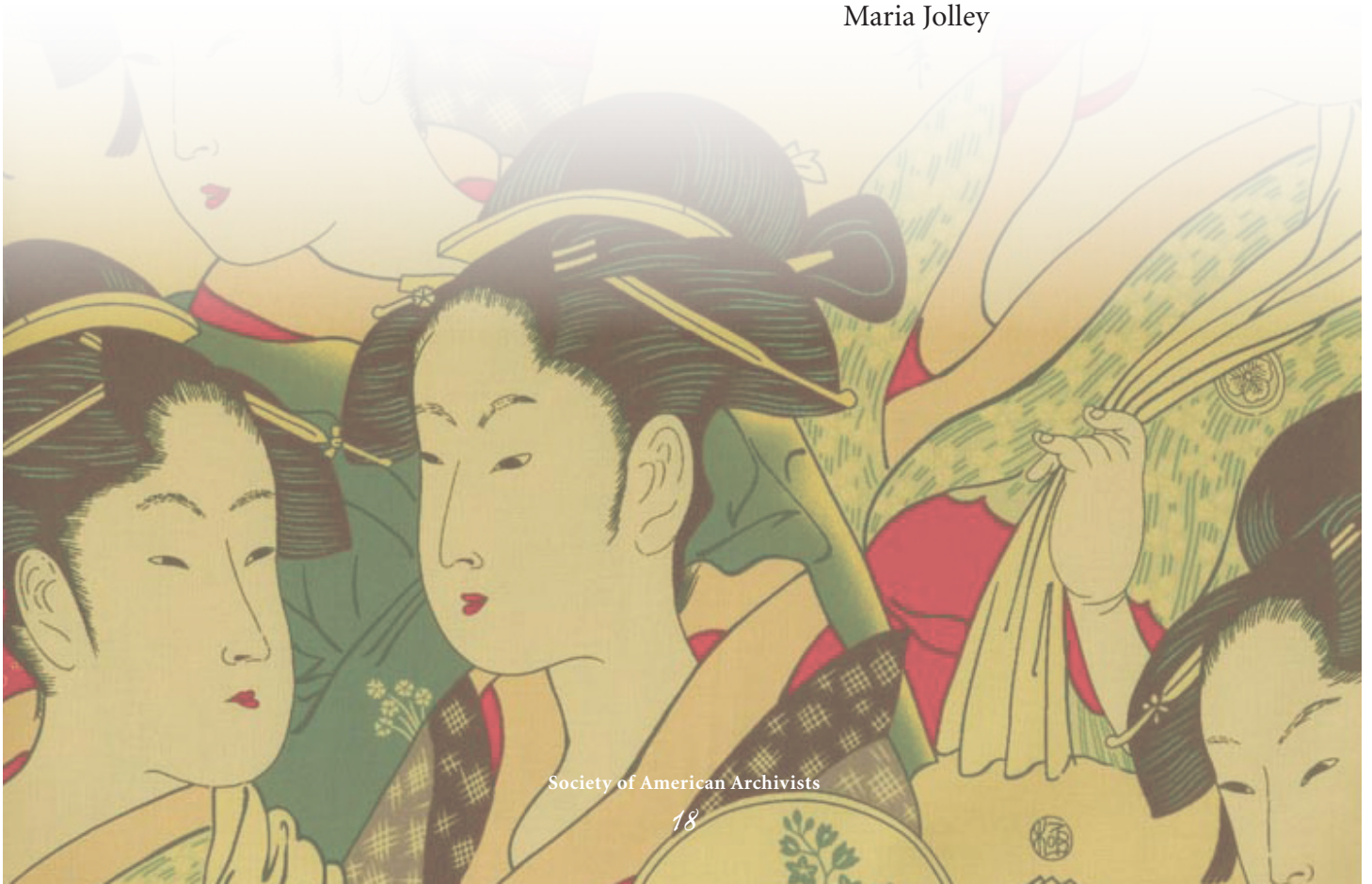
*This fiddle music
Must be preserved forever
I prefer disco*


Laura R. Jolley

*See Best Practices,
History in the making,
In Austin, Texas.*

*Hi-re, Acquire,
next, sorting through the mire,
all done, Retire.*

Maria Jolley





*A jumble of junk
But to us, a collection
Worth all the work.*

*Collections online
Show the world papers we've got.
Throw away your gloves.*

*Preserved for future,
Used to write a book or two,
Meet history here.*

*Reach out and tell them
How interesting this stuff is;
Maybe they'll come see.*

*Data and records
Folders, Boxes, series, fonds
Nested knowingly.*

Lisa Holzenthall Lewis

archival haiku



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