Sharing for the Greater Good: Outreach and Collaboration from the Perspective of Community-Based Archives

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Abstract: This platform presentation focuses on collaborative efforts by larger archives from the perspective of a community-based archives and local history collection. Methods for and approaches to outreach will be discussed, with a focus on the process of contacting and collaborating with organizations in order to create greater access to community-based primary sources. Acquisition of local collections by larger archives and special collections departments can lead to cultural displacement and leaves some materials inaccessible through institutional gate-keeping and inevitable backlog. The North Carolina Room at Forsyth County Public Library in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, has benefited from the collaborative efforts of larger repositories to educate untrained staff and to share resources that allow local archival resources to remain in the hands of the community.

Two large digitization grants awarded to Wake Forest University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Digital Forsyth and North Carolina Maps, respectively, provided ample resources for collaboration with smaller repositories. By sharing their technical resources, equipment, and metadata expertise without attempting to acquire archival materials for their own collections, these large repositories have been able to help preserve the cultural assets of our community. This goes beyond rhetoric of “collaboration” and “equitable access,” supplementing the Code of Ethics for Archivists to include respecting the value of materials that remain in geographic and cultural context. As a result of this work, Forsyth County Public Library (in collaboration with Wake Forest University) has received a grant to teach smaller community-based archives about digitization and preservation.

About the author:

Audra Eagle is currently the special collections librarian of the North Carolina Room at Forsyth County Public Library in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She uses free and low-cost technologies to make available special collections, local history, and genealogy resources in the North Carolina Room. She is also creating and managing the first archival program at FCPL and serves as project lead for “Preserving Forsyth’s Past,” an LSTA-funded outreach grant to educate local nonprofit organizations about preserving and digitizing their archival collections.

Audra attended Duke University, earning a BA in Literature and Cultural Theory as well as a certificate in Information Science and Information Studies in 2006. She completed her MLIS with a specialization in archival studies at UCLA in 2008. She has experience in a variety of special collections departments and archives including the Walt Disney Company’s Creative Resource
Center and Archives and the UCLA Department of Special Collections. Her career as an archivist began as a Junior Fellow in the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress in 2005.

Audra is interested in archives 2.0, education using primary sources, archival information access, and digital collections. She blogs at librarchivist.wordpress.com and tweets at twitter.com/librarchivist.