

2014

Welcome Address, Society of Georgia Archivists Annual Meeting, 2014

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Recommended Citation

Mendola, Rich, "Welcome Address, Society of Georgia Archivists Annual Meeting, 2014," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 32 no. 1 (2014) .

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol32/iss1/3>

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Welcome Address, Society of Georgia Archivists Annual Meeting, 2014

Rich Mendola

Let me begin by stating that I am not an archivist. I have no formal training in history, librarianship, records management, or any other related field. My Ph.D. and professional training was in clinical psychology, and I also ran a biostatistics and computer consulting company during college and graduate school. After receiving my Ph.D., I took a faculty position in psychiatry and eventually moved into a formal information technology role in an academic medical center in the early 1990s. Since the mid-1990s, I have held multiple Chief Information Officer (CIO) roles in several academic medical centers and universities. My first position with a library was in 2012 when I was appointed interim director of the Emory Libraries, which includes the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL). When I became Enterprise CIO and Senior Vice Provost for Library Services and Digital Scholarship in 2013, the Emory libraries became part of my ongoing portfolio of responsibilities.

I am not an archivist, and yet in the relatively short amount of time I've overseen the Libraries, I've come to understand the necessity of selling the value of archives. MARBL, alongside archives around the world, provides an essential service to the Emory community in managing, preserving, and making available historical resources that contribute to the scholarship that occurs in many disciplines on our campus. One of the greatest challenges facing professional archivists is determining which items have enduring historical value, particularly given the voluminous rate at which digital information is being produced. This has the potential to be a point of connection with those outside the archival profession, for in today's world, a large percentage of the human population is engaged in archival-related activities on a daily basis, either as creators, users or managers of records. Email and digital photographs are two of the more common examples that come to mind.

As a photographer, I've experienced the challenge of assigning permanent value in managing my own records. I've been lucky to travel to many parts of the world taking photographs,

and I often generate several thousand images on a trip. I prefer to keep the majority of the photos I take, deleting only those that are out of focus or with no aesthetic or practical value. With tens of thousands of images to maintain, I need good metadata to help me organize and describe the photos so I can find them later. In terms of the physical medium, I also need terabytes of redundant storage, which has thankfully gotten much cheaper over time. Because nearly all of my photographs are taken in my camera vendor's proprietary RAW format, I must also make decisions about preservation formats that will stand the test of time. All of these issues are key questions for archivists, only on a far larger scale.

Although this example was specific to my personal interests, securing the support and investment of your broader community of constituents, be they patrons, funding agencies, or the general public, is crucial, and likely to become even more so as resource constraints remain a key challenge in the academy. In positions like mine, I am constantly thinking about resources and the ways in which they can be allocated to add the most value to Emory's mission. That is a part of my job description. For those who may not consider that to be part of their job, I'd ask you to reconsider your perspective. Selling the value of archives to non-archivists is something all of us must strive to do.

MARBL's staff of curators and archivists has worked hard to demonstrate the value of archives to the Emory community. Founded in 1942, MARBL has become one of Emory's most distinguishing features. We have built first-rate collections in British and Irish literature, African American culture and history, Southern history and politics, and are aggressively building a new collection of LGBTQ books and archives. Additionally, MARBL is the home of the Emory University Archives - the official records of our institution. We have a robust instruction program that welcomes numerous undergraduate and graduate students into the archives every semester. We have also mounted popular exhibitions both within and outside the library that have introduced our holdings to audiences outside the academy.

MARBL's holdings are also a centerpiece of Emory's Quality Enhancement Plan, developed as part of our SACS re-accreditation process. The plan's theme is "The Nature of Evidence," and over the next several years, Emory students will be

encouraged to interact directly with primary evidence. The learning outcomes of the plan are for students to learn how different disciplines think about evidence; to discriminate between primary and secondary evidence; to identify, locate and identify primary evidence; and to build arguments supported by evidence and to evaluate the arguments of others. As the central location of primary source material for the humanities on campus, MARBL will serve a crucial role in the implementation and success of this plan.

Historically, MARBL has focused on acquiring materials over processing or digitizing them. Learning to resist the impulse to go after a new acquisition when opportunity knocks has not been easy. Though MARBL makes all of its unprocessed holdings available to researchers, the unprocessed backlog is large and remains a significant barrier to accessing information. The true value of our holdings will never become manifest if the resources spent on acquiring are not balanced with those focused on processing. The greatest opportunity facing MARBL is finding ways to make our collections more accessible, and in turn, promoting their use. I offer two examples of how MARBL is meeting this opportunity and taking advantage of the available resources to share our holdings with as broad an audience as possible.

In the summer of 2012, MARBL acquired the Robert Langmuir African American photograph collection, a collection of over 12,000 photographs depicting African American life and culture from the 1840s through the 1970s. Throughout this collection, researchers will encounter images of ordinary people and families alongside those of famous historical figures in nearly every photographic format from the period. This is a tremendously valuable resource and one that has seen a lot of research use since it was acquired, but we learned many lessons in its acquisition. Firstly, we announced the acquisition before any preliminary processing could be done. Patrons were on our doorstep the next day wishing to see the photographs, but we had very little to show them. Staff had to quickly determine safe and secure access policies so that the collection could be used in the reading room without causing damage to the photographs.

We were able to reallocate funds to support the digitization of the entire collection, using outsourced firms to expedite the process, and have now made the majority of the collection available via our Luna platform. Due to copyright issues, however, access to the collection requires authentication. Any member of the Emory community can access the collection online from anywhere using their university credentials. Non-Emory researchers may only access the online images from the MARBL reading room. Plans for a completely public subset of the collection without copyright restrictions are currently in development. Though our current setup is not ideal, digitization has improved researchers' ability to search the collection and find useful images. It also provides a measure of protection for the original photographs.

In 2012, MARBL acquired the Sidney L. Matthew Bobby Jones collection and research files, a collection that complemented and greatly expanded the existing Bobby Jones related material in our holdings. Matthew is the preeminent Bobby Jones scholar; he wrote and edited ten books about the Atlanta golf legend, and he also produced the hour-long documentary *The Life and Times of Bobby Jones*. The collection contains Matthew's research files for his books and the film, as well as his significant collection of Bobby Jones documents and memorabilia including photographs, film footage and printed material, and numerous interviews with Jones' colleagues, family and friends. Learning from our experiences with Langmuir, in this case we secured donor funding for processing and digitization before announcing plans for a major exhibition drawn from the collection.

Because of the international interest in Bobby Jones and his legacy to the sport of golf, we are using this collection to experiment with new methods of promotion. In addition to a traditional local exhibit in the Robert W. Woodruff Library's Schatten Gallery, we are in the final stages of planning a global tour that will target Europe, the Americas and Asia. The exhibit will be displayed at the 2015 Open Championship in St. Andrews, Scotland, followed by other major golf events around the world. The tour will target an international audience of golf enthusiasts who likely have little experience with Emory, our archives, or the primary source materials about Bobby Jones in our holdings. A

portion of the sponsorship fees for the tour will go towards directly funding the Robert T. Jones Jr. academic program at Emory, which includes scholarship and fellowships along with the Jones Program in Ethics.

I'm very fortunate to work at a premier institution of higher education that has phenomenal special collections and archives. Making sure we fully leverage the value of those collections means we must continue to find ways to reveal, promote and make accessible the rich information that all too often remains hidden. Whether you call it selling, advocacy, or simply doing our jobs, I hope you find inspiration in the methods and approaches I've shared with you here today as we all seek out ways to generate new communities of interest and support. Thank you.

Rich Mendola, Ph.D., MBA, is the Enterprise Chief Information Officer and Senior Vice Provost for Library Services and Digital Scholarship for Emory University. When Rich arrived at Emory in 2005, his charge was to create more synergy and innovation across all of the academic and healthcare information technology (IT) functions that existed at Emory. In 2013, Rich was asked to broaden the scope of his leadership to include the Emory libraries. As part of that organizational change, a new Emory Center for Digital Scholarship (ECDS) was also created. Prior to assuming his current position, Rich spent ten years at the University of Illinois, first as CIO of the UIC Medical Center, and then as Associate VP of Administrative IT for the University of Illinois three-campus system. Under his leadership, the UIC Medical Center implemented the core components of their Electronic Medical Record, which would later receive the Nicholas E. Davies award and CIO Magazine's Enterprise Value award. As Associate VP, Rich was the executive responsible for the successful implementation of a single ERP system across the entire University of Illinois system. In addition to his administrative roles, Rich has served as a faculty member in the health sciences at the University of Illinois and the University of Connecticut.