

# OUT OF THE ARCHIVES

## New Trends, Connections, and Experiences at MAC 2019

FROM APRIL 3 THROUGH 6, Archives Assistant Natale Krecek and I were fortunate enough to be in Detroit as the Motor City played host to the 2019 meeting of the Midwest Archives Conference (MAC). We're excited to share our experiences with you, and should first tell you a little about the gathering. MAC is one of the largest regional associations for archival professionals and institutions, and holds its annual meeting (which bears the same name as the organization) in a different midwestern city every year. While the conference's location is always selected from within the MAC region,\* participants can hail from any state or nation. They often include the large and established, such as the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame out of Cleveland or Detroit's own Henry Ford Museum, as well as the up-and-coming—like us!

MAC 2019 was organized around “Innovations, Transformation, Resurgence,” a theme germane to the current narrative of the hosting city as well the status of the American railroad, to an extent. After all, Detroit has recently been the setting of what Center board member Kevin P. Keefe described as a “miracle,” as the Ford Motor Company stepped in and purchased Michigan Central Station, whose “deterioration mirrored the general decline of Detroit's industrial infrastructure and became a darling of ‘ruin porn,’ symbolized by websites and tours trolling the remnants of lost empire.” Needless to say, Natalie and I found Detroit the perfect place to delve deeper into the archival profession and even experience a bit of railroad history. Get our perspectives below. (I am AE; Natalie is NK.)

### Two Perspectives:

#### The Lone Arranger and the Young Gun

**AE:** I am what is known in the archival profession as a “lone arranger,” (meaning I am the Center's sole archivist), so gatherings like MAC are very valuable to me. I do not want for help or support at the Center, but I do miss the collaboration, discussion, and advocacy that takes place within archives and collections departments at larger institutions. MAC affords me the chance to spend a few days immersed in the profession during which time I explore new tools and trends, connections and community, and experiences that will inform future archival work at the Center.

\* *The MAC region is: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.*

**NK:** As a new addition to the Center and the world of archiving, I didn't know what to expect from MAC. While I have previously worked at collecting institutions (experience that has greatly benefitted my work at the Center), MAC offered me much more knowledge about the archival field and its community on a larger scale. Much of my archival experience has taken place at the Center, an engaging workspace that is constantly evolving. As the Center grows, we continue to discover new questions and needs to address for our collections. Attending MAC is an integral part of finding solutions.

### Tools and Trends

**AE:** I dedicated much of the conference to acquainting myself with the latest archival technology. It was a particularly auspicious time to play catch-up; the Center is currently in the market for a robust collection management system (CMS: software and online platforms that will enhance digital access to our holdings). The MAC vendor fair and networking events brought me face-to-face with representatives, developers, and clients of the archival field's most widely-used tools including ArchivesSpace, Archiv-Essentia, TMS (The Museum System,) and AtoM (Access to Memory.)

In addition to learning about various CMS tools from vendors, I also took in critical perspectives on these products from fellow archivists during panels like “Light from the North: Reviving the Spirit of Archon through AtoM.” The landscape of CMS tools is crowded and varied. Selecting a system appropriate for the Center's needs and resources will be challenging—many archivists rely on information technology departments within their institutions for guidance when transitioning to a new CMS (another useful tidbit I picked up at MAC). But after attending the conference, I am much more confident moving forward with an open mind and an analytical eye.

**NK:** During my time at the conference, I learned a lot about archival tools and technology. These tools allow professionals to assess their collections and facilitate new ways to navigate them. A CMS such as ArchivesSpace, for example, could be utilized at the Center to cohesively combine various types of collections, such as digitized negatives and born-digital content, and provide access to them on one platform. A CMS would also enable us to streamline our metadata entry and image retrieval workflows.

### ARTICLE

Adrienne Evans and  
Natalie Krecek

### PHOTOGRAPHS

As noted

“Out of the Archives” brings to light the world of professional archiving, providing a regular forum to share selections from the Center's collections and tips for maintaining your own photographs. Whether you are a photographer, collector, or avid fan, it is important to organize and preserve the materials you create or collect.



Above: Westbound Detroit, Toledo and Ironton Railroad freight train on Conrail at the Michigan Central Station in Detroit, Michigan, on June 3, 1976. Photograph by John F. Bjorklund, Bjorklund-50-23-06



Left: Head Librarian Maria Ketcham leads MAC tour of Detroit Institute of Arts' library and archives. Photograph by Adrienne Evans



## Connections and Community

**AE:** At MAC, archival professionals come together to confront common issues affecting the profession. If shared in a panel or poster session, the experiences of one archivist can benefit the entire community. It's one of my favorite aspects of the gathering. This year, I learned a lot from the cautionary tales told by the archivists of "No Free Kittens: Turning Acquisitions Headaches into Positive Experiences." This panel fostered a radically frank discussion (panelists even discouraged recording the session in order to create a safe sharing space) about the consequences of institutions acquiring materials that violate U.S. copyright and property laws. Panelists also discussed resources



within the archival community to which archivists can turn when institutional collecting practices fail. After this session, I felt particularly thankful for the diligent work of Center's Collections and Acquisitions Committee and our protocols regarding the transfer of donations and acquisitions. Not to mention, we just updated our Collections Management Policy—which we put in place in part to prevent the legal entanglements of copyright and ownership issues—with even more rigorous language and policies. That said, this panel did serve as an important reminder to stay vigilant about enforcing and even frequently updating these policies. When institutions fail to do so, the potential legal ramifications can be dire.

**NK:** Many of the panels at MAC encouraged fostering relationships between community groups and archival institutions. Opportunities for new collaborations and outreach programs can emerge from these connections. The session "Reach Out! I'll Be There: Four Institutional Approaches to Transparency and Access," discussed how archival professionals and citizen-archivists (those without formal positions or training) focused their collective efforts to the benefit of community archive projects. The exchanges described in this panel actually caused me to think of the Center and its members. Our "Out of the Archives" columns function as a form of archival outreach that simultaneously promote and provide transparency for our work while giving our community information that members can apply to their own image collections. In return, the Center receives your trust, support, and expertise. We welcome your questions and comments, and I am excited to be a part of nurturing this institution-community relationship.

## Experiences

**AE:** It's important for archival professionals to visit unfamiliar locations and cultural heritage institutions. These experiences enhance our understanding of archival work's importance to different communities in various settings, expose us to new practices, and in some cases, expand our subject knowledge and appreciation. The latter was certainly true when Natalie and I took a break from the conference to visit the The Henry Ford. While the Greenfield Village portion of the museum was still closed for the season, we did get to spend time among the locomotives, railcars, and coaches of the Ford's railroad exhibit. While this was not my first time seeing historic locomotives up-close (our fall conference took place at the California State Railroad Museum), it was the first time I had the opportunity to hop into the cab of one of them.

As I climbed aboard the Ford's Chesapeake and Ohio 2-6-6-6 Allegheny my reverence for the engineers of the steam era deepened. I mean, first of all the Allegheny is *massive*, a quality that I discovered is best comprehended in-person rather than via archival photographs. Measuring 125 feet long and weighing approximately 771,000 pounds, the Allegheny is sec-





ond in size only to Union Pacific's Big Boy (although the Allegheny's firebox and boiler are actually bigger). Second, the cab's interior boasted what appeared to me to be a dizzying assemblage of fantastic-looking valves, levers, and gauges. As I stood looking admittedly bedazzled by it all, a young railfan was passing by with his mother. He stopped to enthusiastically shout out various components of the locomotive controls, such as the Johnson bar and engine brakes. As we rewarded him with some Center membership information, I felt a renewed certainty that the future of the community is in good hands.

In addition to the Allegheny, Natalie and I also had the opportunity to appreciate the size and aesthetics of several other locomotives and railcars including a replica of the 1831 Dewitt-Clinton steam locomotive that was built for the 1893 World's Fair; a 1924 refrigerator car used by Fruit Growers Express; a Canadian Pacific snow plow built in 1923; and my personal favorite, a 1920s replica of an elaborately decked out Bangor & Aroostook Railroad passenger car from the Civil War era.

**NK:** As a first-time attendee to MAC, I appreciated how the host city was incorporated into the conference. This started with the conference's plenary session, a discussion about preserving documentation of Detroit's public art with Viranel Clerard of the Detroit Mural Project (an online image database of Detroit's public art). Clerard spoke about Detroit's recent history through various examples of public art and its effect on the local community. Public art has played a large role in Detroit's revitalization narrative, especially since the City of Detroit instituted the City Walls program in 2017. Aimed at discouraging vandalism and beautifying Detroit, City Walls allows property owners who have received a blighted property ticket as a result of vandalism to have a mural painted to satisfy the remediation portion of the ticket. Despite these efforts, vandalism does still happen, and public art is often ephemeral in nature; since Clerard started the Detroit Mural Project, a handful of public art pieces he's photographed have already been destroyed, covered up, or simply painted

over. After this session, I had a new appreciation for the role of archiving in preserving our culture and communities, especially in places like Detroit.

In addition to this session, we also had the chance to tour the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) Museum and its archives. Here, Adrienne and I, along with several fellow archival professionals, were given the opportunity to see the DIA's extensive archival collection and highlights from its fine art holdings. Touring the physical space, we were able to ask the staff questions about their archival practices evoked by the surrounding environment. This visit, combined with the information gained via conference sessions and discussion, provided us with valuable information about improving our current practices to provide appropriate care for our growing collection.

### Railroad Heritage Visual Archive Updates

At our Madison office, I have been occupied with organizing our holdings related to former *Trains* editor David P. Morgan, surveying early accessions from the John Gruber Collection, and helping executive director Scott Lothes and our Collections and Acquisitions Committee update the Center's Collection Management Policy. You can now find the newest version of the policy on our website. Archives assistant Natalie Krecek (formerly Dust) continues to digitize the Victor Hand Collection. She is currently working on the ninth batch of negatives to arrive at the Center with the tenth batch close at hand. Once Natalie completes this batch, we will be three-quarters of the way through digitizing the approximately 46,000 negatives in the Victor Hand Collection. In addition, volunteer John Kelly is recording metadata from the Perry Frank Johnson Collection.

At Lake Forest College, associate archivist Colleen O'Keefe is currently making high-resolution scans of the entire Wallace Abbey Collection. Keep an eye on our social media accounts and website for new selections from Fred Springer, Victor Hand, Wallace Abbey, and others in the coming months. You can view highlights and galleries from many of our collections on our website: [www.railphoto-art.org](http://www.railphoto-art.org) •

MAC attendees view Diego Rivera's *Detroit Industry Murals* in Rivera Court at Detroit Institute of Arts.

Opposite, above: Museum visitors admire the Chesapeake and Ohio 2-6-6-6 Allegheny (on right) in the Henry Ford's railroad exhibit. An 1893 replica of the Dewitt-Clinton steam locomotive is visible to the left.

Opposite, below: Viranel Clerard (seated next to podium) discusses his work to create an online image database of Detroit's public art for the Detroit Mural Project.

Photographs by Adrienne Evans