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Up-and-Comers: News for Student and New Archivists

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Meet Danielle Nowak, Access Services Librarian, the Sterling Morton Library



I was first introduced to archives my senior year as an undergraduate student at Purdue University Northwest. Eager to find a career that would accentuate my BA in history, I took up an internship in the university's archives, processing the papers of award-winning English professor Robert Nichols

Jr. Under University Archivist Joe Coates, I learned the basic foundations and principles of archival management and used my newly acquired knowledge throughout the semester to process the collection and create its finding aids. One of the most valuable aspects of my internship was that I was allowed to make mistakes and learn from them. Having some degree of experience in understanding what works and what does not helped propel me into my next archival position and step in my education.

Soon after beginning the MLS program at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), I began working as a Curt Teich processing assistant at The Newberry Library in Chicago. Two other archival professionals and I collaborated to establish an efficient workflow to rehouse and process the production files for the postcards in the library's newly acquired collection. Working with the postcard production files was a fascinating and diverse experience. The production files contained an array of objects, including photographic negatives, photographs, original artwork, correspondence, and invoices. Gaining exposure to a variety of archival materials was an exciting experience. Each time we opened a production file, we never knew what exciting treasures the envelope held.

Additionally, working on this collection helped me understand how valuable an archives is and how important our work in this field is. The collection contains over 110,000 production files, each file telling the story of its corresponding postcard. However, the production files do not only tell the story of the postcards, they also reflect the

culture and attitudes of their time periods (1890s–1970s). The drawings and messages found in the production files serve as context clues to what was important in American life, travel, and history. As a processing assistant for this collection, I was able to help preserve primary resources that can be used to reflect upon American culture.

Another appealing aspect of working with this collection was that I got to get dirty. Many of the production files had not been out of their filing cabinet for decades. Time had caught up to them, bringing with it dust, dirt, and even some bugs. To assist in the conservation process, we used a special vacuum borrowed from the conservation lab to clean the files prior to rehousing them. In addition, we discovered many nitrate negatives throughout our processing journey. Due to their acidity and flammability, we were required to proceed with caution and develop a keen eye so we could remove and properly handle the nitrate we ran into.

In July 2017, I graduated with my MLS and began working as a reference librarian at Prairie State College and the University of St. Francis in Illinois. Serving as a reference librarian was crucial in my development as a library professional. Both institutions had diverse populations of students, allowing me to sharpen my research skills on a variety of different subjects. In addition, I learned how to adapt to meet individual student's needs. As a library professional, I have found this skill essential in successfully assisting a patron.

In November 2017, I excitedly accepted the position of access services librarian at the Sterling Morton Library of the Morton Arboretum, in Lisle, Illinois. As the access services librarian, I am responsible for maintaining the arboretum's archival collections, facilitating digitization initiatives, collaborating with staff to uphold best practices regarding document management/retention, and serving as liaison to the coordinator of Adult Learning Programs and instructors within the arboretum's Education Program to select, facilitate, and promote use of the collection. In this position, I get to experience the many different facets of being an archivist. Being able to work with the collections and assist in promoting their value and use has been a fun, challenging, and rewarding experience.

My favorite part of being an archivist is having the opportunity to evaluate a collection's contents and figure out how to apply and promote them to the public. At the Sterling Morton Library, I am able to do that in multiple ways. Since January, I have been responsible for writing the library's *Monthly Profile*. The *Monthly Profile* analyzes a topic relevant to the arboretum community and provides readers with various links to resources that can be provided by the library. These resources include photographic images, maps/plans of the arboretum and surrounding areas, books (including ebooks), artwork, and other archival materials that will hopefully generate further interest in the designated topic or spark curiosity about what other items the library may have available.

The *Monthly Profile* has been a successful tool so far because it is easy to distribute. The arboretum is represented on the majority of major social media platforms. Rather than having each department representing itself through its own account, posts are created by a public relations professional and shared via the Morton Arboretum's umbrella-like account. While having direct control of your own social media may be desirable, the benefit of having a shared account run by a professional is that you can reach out to an audience that may otherwise not have been interested in the information you are attempting to convey. For example, when a post relating to the library is shared, it is not just being displayed for individuals interested in the library, but people interested in the arboretum as a whole. This provides the opportunity for the library's information to be extended to a larger community of individuals.

Another way I am able to relate our collections to the public is through the arboretum's Adult Education Programs. With the help of the coordinator of Adult Education Programs, I am able to connect with various instructors and assist in providing them with items from our collections. Thus far in my tenure at the arboretum, I have worked most closely with the instructors of the botanical art classes. The library has an impressive art collection that can be applied to many of the art classes being taught. I have been able to work with instructors by helping them navigate our online repository, ACORN, so they can search for or browse our cataloged art collection. Additionally, I can introduce them to relevant items or pieces that they may not have been aware of in the past.

The arboretum has a staff of scientists that conduct research on site and around the world. The Knowledge Management team (which includes the library) is currently leading an initiative to collect publications that scientists at the arboretum's Center for Tree Science have published. With the metadata from these publications, we plan to create records that make our scientists' efforts viewable to everyone. The mission of the Morton Arboretum is "to collect and study trees, shrubs, and other plants from around the world, to display them across naturally beautiful landscapes for people to study and enjoy, and to learn how to grow them in ways that enhance our environment." To support our mission, we are working to share the knowledge that the arboretum has collected.



Working at the arboretum has been a dream come true. As a nature lover, I am thrilled that I have the privilege of working for an organization that preserves, protects, and researches trees and other important parts of the environment. I am also grateful that I am able to apply my skills as an archivist to help support

the arboretum's mission. To that end, I plan to continue to work with fellow staff members to promote the utilization of library resources, participate in digitization efforts and initiatives, and present at conferences and publish so I can spread our mission and expertise to a greater audience.

