

# Teachers **IN THE** ARCHIVES

## Hosting a Professional Development Day for K–12 Teachers

Annie Tummino, SUNY Maritime College

Shortly after I started as the archivist and scholarly communications librarian at SUNY Maritime College, the library director informed me that we'd be coordinating a professional development day for sixty K–12 teachers, including a module on working with primary sources. The idea of teaching teachers made me nervous, especially given that I was brand new to the collections and fairly new to archival pedagogy. However, I put aside my trepidation to focus on the benefits of this exciting opportunity to bring more people into the archives.

Tucked away in the Bronx on the Throgs Neck peninsula where the East River meets the Long Island Sound, SUNY Maritime is a hidden gem. The college prepares students for jobs in the maritime industry through a unique combination of academics and applied learning, including summer sea terms and internships. A large percentage of students participate in a structured Regiment of Cadets, famous for fostering leadership skills, and earn Merchant Marines licenses.

SUNY Maritime's Stephen B. Luce Library is located in Fort Schuyler, a nineteenth-century pentagonal fortification that is a centerpiece of the campus. The library is home to the college's archives, which document the history of the institution since its founding in 1874, as well as the papers and records of many significant maritime organizations and professionals. These collections tell the story of the development of nautical education and the role of mariners in American history.

### A Collaborative Approach

The professional development day evolved to include several departments on campus.

In addition to attending a primary sources workshop in the library, teachers were treated to a tour of the Maritime Industry Museum and a lecture on the history of Fort Schuyler by a professor in the humanities department. Representatives from the Admissions Office welcomed the group and students escorted the teachers around campus.

This collaborative model allowed each department to take on a manageable segment of the day while providing a balance of activities. The tour got visitors moving, the lecture allowed for sitting and listening, and the archives workshop facilitated discussion. Together, the modules offered insights into the history of the site, broader maritime history, and the resources of the college. Building relationships with

local schools is an important recruitment tool, so the event fulfilled the college's larger administration objectives while also meeting the library's goal of making the collections more accessible to the larger community.

### Focusing the Primary Sources Workshop

The teachers were divided into three teams of twenty that rotated through activities, making me responsible for three seventy-minute workshops over the course of the day. My goals for the workshop were to advertise the special collections and archives at the Luce Library and encourage a broader discussion about the use of primary sources in the classroom.



Visiting K–12 teachers become students in the archives for a day. *Courtesy of Annie Tummino.*

Initially I thought I'd show off some of our "greatest hits," like a letter from George Washington to the Marine Society of New York. However, I soon discarded that approach in favor of something more hands-on and participatory. I envisioned pulling an assortment of boxes from the shelves for teachers to dig through. But after browsing *TeachArchives.org*, a wonderful resource developed by the Brooklyn Historical Society, I decided instead

to do a document analysis exercise. Julie Golia and Robin M. Katz, who developed the TeachArchives philosophy, note that for students with little or no prior exposure to archives, navigating whole boxes or even folders can be confusing and overwhelming. "Focus instead on an initial encounter with one document," they advise. I had noted this confusion even among graduate students, and it was important for this exercise to work in a K-12 setting. To properly design the activity I had to stop thinking about arrangement of materials and start thinking about how particular objects could bring history to life.

In order to narrow things down, I selected items from the records of Sailors' Snug Harbor, a retirement home for "decrepit, worn-out, and aged sailors." The home was founded in 1801 via the will of Robert Richard Randall, a wealthy merchant who owned twenty-three acres in what is now Greenwich Village. For more than 140 years, the facility provided a home to a diverse group of sailors from around the world. The 375-foot collection consists largely of resident records, including applications for admission, death certificates, health records, and ledgers. The collection also includes photographs, minutes,

correspondence, complaints, real estate records, receipts, and books from the library, including one signed and possibly annotated by Herman Melville, whose brother Thomas served as head of the institution in the late 1800s. Overall, the collection documents a significant but relatively unknown piece of New York City and maritime history.

### Providing an Authentic Experience

Before beginning the exercise, I introduced the Luce Library Archives and Special Collections and the Sailors' Snug Harbor. Then participants paired up in teams. Each team received a folder containing one or two original documents, a citation providing context for the items, and a Library of Congress handout. Teams had twenty minutes to read and discuss their documents, using questions listed on the handout as a guide. Walking around the class, I was delighted to overhear (and get

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drawn into) competing interpretations of difficult handwriting, Googling of unknown phrases and terms, and other conversations about the materials.

In the next twenty minutes, one member of each team summarized their items

for the larger group. All of the documents originated from one of three groups: Thomas Melville's correspondence, residents' records, and complaints. As participants compared the experiences of residents, they began to raise questions about the biases embedded within the documents, furthering a class-wide discussion.

At the end of each workshop, I asked the teachers to discuss the benefits and challenges of using primary sources in the classroom. Their responses reminded me all over again why I became an archivist. Teachers said the benefits of using primary sources made the experience "real world," authentic, motivating, and hands-on; and that primary sources heighten inquiry, foster empathy, and teach perseverance.

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They cited the challenges of working with primary sources as being the risk of damaging items, difficulty reading cursive, difficulty with older language, and the ability to provide enough context for the items to be understood. This became a nice opportunity to reiterate that the library could host tailored class visits. I also provided a handout that included links to web-based pedagogical tools and digitized archival collections.

Then teachers brainstormed ideas for primary source activities that would work well for their students. Some of their ideas included using enclosed documents and protective devices, trigger questions and prompts, artifacts in addition to texts, and transcribed and audio recorded versions of texts, as well as asking students to respond with skits or speeches, bring items to class representing their personal or family histories, and “be a detective” to search for clues within the documents.

## The Start of a Relationship

By the close of the day I was in awe of the creativity and skill teachers bring to their work. One day of workshops was enormously exhausting to me—and these folks do it day in and day out with much more challenging populations!

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either to not consider it a problem or were mistaken about the situation in their states/territories—they thought they had a law governing abandoned cultural property when in fact they did not. Take, for example, this email exchange in May 2016 with two curatorial professionals (the former an archivist at a major repository and the latter a museum curator—both at a public university). The archivist reported, “I confess that I am not familiar with issues involved with abandoned property and have not dealt with any situations related to it at work,” whereas the museum curator was adamant that “There is no statute and it’s a big problem. . . . We might need to work with a legislator to get a bill on this.”

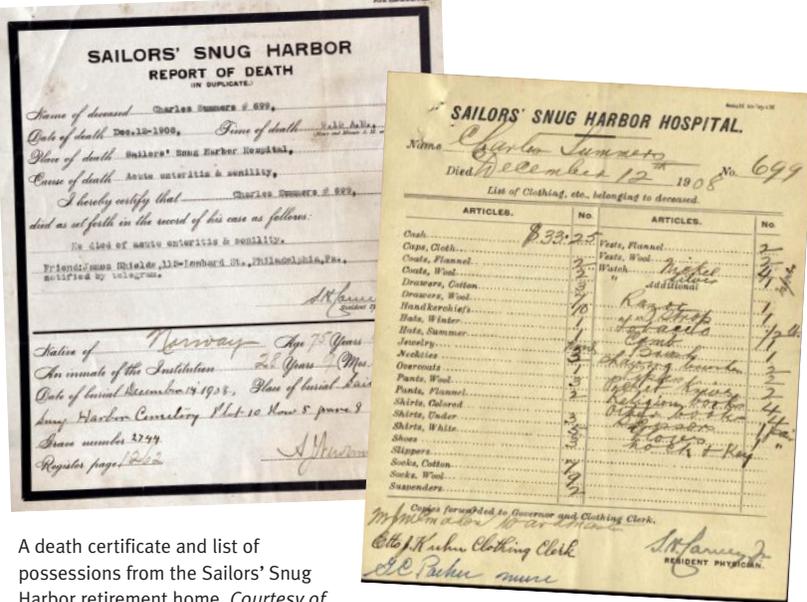
In any event, our project presents its information as in the examples immediately below, with the “link” leading directly to the relevant state statute. We are hopeful this format is accessible and useful, but welcome suggestions to make the presentation even better.

**CALIFORNIA**      Yes      [Link](#)

### Citation

California Civil Code Section 1899-1899.11

**Notes:** “A ‘museum’ is an institution located in California and operated by a nonprofit corporation or public agency, primarily educational, scientific, or aesthetic in purpose, which owns, borrows, or cares for, and studies, archives, or exhibits property”; outlines the issues and conditions in which



A death certificate and list of possessions from the Sailors’ Snug Harbor retirement home. Courtesy of the SUNY Maritime Library and Sailors’ Snug Harbor Trustees.

If you are looking for opportunities to establish relationships with K–12 educators, hosting a professional development day within your archives is a great way to start. We hope the event will serve as a stepping stone for future collaboration with local teachers, but it will take time to evaluate how that goal progresses. In the meantime, I have started a conversation with the humanities department about incorporating the archives into undergraduate US history classes. Overall, working with K–12 teachers gave me renewed excitement about the potential to facilitate use of these unique materials. ■

museums function and may claim title to property; lists donor and museum obligations; provides notification templates; unclaimed Property Law beginning with Section 1500 of the Code of Civil Procedure may also apply.

Some states are listed not as “Yes” or “No” regarding the existence of abandoned property law, but as “Other.” These latter entries, four states and one territory, generally have statutes that cover only a subset of archives, museums, and/or libraries, as below:

**NEVADA**      Other      [Link](#)

### Citation

Nevada Revised Statutes, Chapter 381, Section 9 (see also section 1 for covered museums).

**Notes:** Apparently applies only to museums in the state system of museums.

## Share Your Feedback!

If the project pages might be useful to you or if you have a question or additional facts to supply, visit [www2.archivists.org/groups/acquisitions-appraisal-section/abandoned-property-project](http://www2.archivists.org/groups/acquisitions-appraisal-section/abandoned-property-project) or contact Linda Whitaker at [lwhitaker@azhs.gov](mailto:lwhitaker@azhs.gov).

Those who are interested in the work of the best practices subcommittee, including our current project on collection development policies, may contact Marcella Huggard at [mdwiget@gmail.com](mailto:mdwiget@gmail.com) for additional information. ■