# SOLO

Newsletter of the Lone Arrangers Section, Society of American Archivists

Fall 2022

#### Letter from the Incoming Chair

Lone Arrangers Section Members,

I am excited and honored to serve as the 2022–2023 chair for the Lone Arrangers Section. My early interactions with LAS occurred during my first year as a librarian and archivist with limited knowledge of archival management. Through practical guidance and camaraderie, I gained a better understanding of the value of connecting with fellow archivists and practitioners with similar interests, goals, and challenges.

Through my experience on the Steering Committee, I continue to see the power of connections and dialogue via section activities, from listserv discussions to event gatherings. Much of this is a product of the Steering Committee, and I am thankful for their dedicated work and guidance. I want to especially thank our outgoing leaders (Katrina O'Brien, Sauda Mitchell, and Margaret

Hewitt) for their collaboration and leadership these last two years. With their assistance, we successfully hosted section programming and developed additional priorities guiding us forward.

When looking at years past and today, I think LAS has done a tremendous job within three core areas: meeting members' needs, facilitating networks, and serving as partners in professional growth. To start our new year, we will be conducting a survey of our membership to guide us in strengthening these efforts. Please keep a look out for a survey in the coming weeks as we transition to our new leadership team.

I very much look forward to providing thoughtful support and leadership in the coming year as your new chair, as well as learning more about our membership and



community. I also eagerly anticipate welcoming our new leadership team and getting started on additional programming, discussions, and planning. Thank you for your continued support of the Lone Arrangers Section.

Micaela Terronez Special Collections Librarian and Instructor Augustana College

micaelaterronez@augustana.edu

Welcome, New LAS Leaders!

Julie Yamashita, Vice Chair/Chair-Elect Rebecca Leung, Events Coordinator Hilary Swett, Regional Representative Shaun Kirkpatrick, Web Liaison

### Letter from the Outgoing Chair

It has been a great pleasure to be part of the Lone Arranger Section leadership, first as a steering committee member and then as vice chair/chair-elect, implementing a much-needed and overdue restructuring of the LAS steering committee into defined leadership roles. This year, 2022–2023, will be the first time that all members of the leadership team will have been elected to specific roles.



Through member surveys, section activities, in-person introductions, and online inquiries, I have had the pleasure of getting to know many of you, and, with that, steering an SAA section with the focus on meeting the needs and interests of its

members. During that time, I moved from Head of Archives & Collections at World of Speed Motorsports Museum to Director of Programs & Services at Oregon Military Museum.

Building and developing archives programs continues to be a source of pride and growth, and I continue to look to and support LAS and its members in managing archives programs and professional development. I am excited to hand over the reins to the newly elected lineup of LAS leaders. Thank you for allowing me to be part of your section leadership. It has been an honor.

Katrina O'Brien
Director of Programs & Services
Oregon Military Museum
katrinatobrien@gmail.com

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## Highlights

### Share what you've been up to with your fellow solo archivists!

#### Name

Georgina Tom

#### **Position title**

Archivist

#### Institution

'Iolani School

#### What kind of institution do you work at?

Coeducational, K-12, college-preparatory school

#### What's the most interesting thing in your collection?

Personally, I enjoy our rare books from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. In my working context, it is the World War I– and World War II–era photo albums and the World War II–era student newspapers because they clearly show how world events trickle down to impact subcommunities, even K–12 students. I am able to show our students that they have a

connection to history through fellow 'lolani students of the past; they can read accounts and see images of the ways in which students their age lived through adverse circumstances and contributed to war efforts on both the home- and battlefronts.

# What's your major accomplishment in the last year?

I am happy to be the recipient of the Society of American Archivists 2022 Spotlight Award and believe it is a contributing factor in the archivist position receiving parity status with the librarian positions of our institution.

<u>archivists.org/2022-Spotlight-Award-Georgina-Tom</u>



Courtesy of Georgina Tom.



#### Name

Carla N. Cain

#### Position title

Library Specialist, Archives

#### Institution

El Camino College

### What kind of institution do you work at?

Community college library

# What's the most interesting thing in your collection?

Court papers from the Gordon Manor case, documenting how the city used eminent domain to take property away from an African American developer in 1926. In the 1940s, the El Camino campus was built on the same site.

# What's your major accomplishment in the last year?

The space was built for an archive in 2009, but no one was hired. I've been in this position since 2021 and had to start almost from scratch, from a warehouse full of cardboard boxes. So far, I unpacked, sorted, and rehoused the materials so that they are not piled up in cardboard boxes anymore. I still have to do the "real"

organizing/arranging/describing but at least I know where/what everything is. That next step is going to take some time, but I think of it as job security!



#### Name

Laura Grove

#### Position title

Archivist

#### Institution

**Dominican Sisters of Houston** 

## What kind of institution do you work at?

Religious archives

# What's the most interesting thing in your collection?

My favorite piece in our repository are our Novice newsletters. These are handwritten and illustrated satirical newsletters produced by the Dominican Sisters of Houston's Novices (sisters in formation) from the 1920s through the 1940s. Some of the articles and cartoon reels are hilarious, and they provide great insight into what life was like for these young sisters. They serve as a wonderful reminder that these sisters, and all sisters, were and are unique individuals who could be just as silly as they were pious.

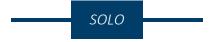
# What's your major accomplishment in the last year?

This year, we completed a remodel in the archives. I added new shelves that can properly hold our materials, repaired damage caused by an old water leak, and installed a dehumidifier to protect our materials from Houston's extreme humidity.

## **Updates**

**Lisa Huntsha** was recently promoted from archivist/librarian to assistant director and head of collections at the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. The Swenson Center is an international research center for Swedish American studies.

The center celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 2022 with a symposium, *The Migration and Beyond: New Perspectives on Swedish-American Relations*, which invited four scholars (two Americans and two Swedes) to present on new topics in Swedish American studies. Talks included, among others, "Vikings and Dumb Blondes: The Construction of American Discourse on Nordic and Scandinavian Whiteness" and "An American Myth: Birth Control, Sex Education, and the Creation of the Swedish Sin." Recordings are available on the center's YouTube channel for a limited time. youtube.com/c/SwensonCenter



# The Seattle Art Museum's Historic Media Collection: Year One Project Overview

By Mia Ferm | Project Manager, Seattle Art Museum

The Historic Media Collection is housed in the Dorothy Stimson Bullitt Library at the Seattle Art Museum in downtown Seattle, Washington. Currently including over 3,000 audiovisual materials on physical carriers—from analog film, to optical discs, and all the magnetic media formats in between—it ranges in dates from 1933 to 2018. The goal of the collection is to share and preserve the history of the museum through audio and moving-image documentation of its people, places, and buildings.

The job title of project manager written on my badge doesn't do much to describe the work I do with the collection, but fundamentally, I'm the lone archivist in the museum, with a strict focus on video materials and a three-year mission to digitize, preserve, and make accessible as much of this history as I can. Hired in July 2021, I'm just past the one-year mark, and in that time I've become a particular fan of the news broadcasts from the 1980s and '90s. These often feature commentary on a new exhibition, or interviews with artists or museum directors—even extended coverage of President Bill Clinton's November 1993 visit to Seattle where a reception with leaders from Pacific Rim nations was held at the Seattle Asian Art Museum and became a temporary stage for world diplomacy amid protests over China's human rights violations.

While I have a personal nostalgic appreciation of news graphics and television studio sets from that time, news broadcasts of the past also show us what we considered important in our

communities and how we talked about the issues and concerns of the time. Some things change, but a lot stays the same. The Historic Media Collection also features lectures, oral histories, and marketing campaigns, and documentation that often arrives without much context. For example, we have over an hour of film demonstrating how to clean and set up the teahouse installed in SAM's downtown building. The teahouse was designed and built at the Urasenke Foundation for tea masters in Kyoto, Japan, then disassembled for shipment to Seattle and reconstructed onsite in 1992 by four specialist carpenters from Japan. The video, originally shot on MiniDV in 2009, has no introduction and little talking; it's mainly a woman and an unseen camera person apparently tucking themselves into the teahouse to go over the scheduled maintenance.

Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities for three years, during my first year on the job, I've taken time to get to know the institution and collection and given significant energy to identifying, building, and configuring a digital asset management system (DAMS) that will better organize, describe, and make accessible the digital



Still images from the SAM's Historic Media Collection. Top: President Bill Clinton at the Seattle Asian Art Museum taken from "KOMO News Broadcast: November 19, 1993," originally on VHS. Bottom: A person cleaning the teahouse at the Seattle Art Museum taken from "Teahouse Maintenance, tape 2" (2009), originally on MiniDV. Courtesy of Seattle Art Museum.

surrogates. I've also begun transferring material off of the hundreds of optical discs, in addition to the long, long process of description. The audiovisual materials are described at the item-level, so the DAMS also serves as collection and preservation information management. While the museum utilizes other management software for art objects in its collections, for marketing and communication assets, and for library materials respectively, none of these systems were a good fit for the HMC, so it got its own DAMS, selected partially on what the budget could accommodate. Fortunately, the museum has its own IT department, which made it possible to mount an open-source DAMS, though not without some technical learning curves on all sides.

The NEH grant-funded project was originally slated to begin in early 2020 but was obviously delayed by the pandemic. At SAM this meant a good year and a half of library and building closures, part-time furloughs, full layoffs, and remote work. Things were still unstable when I came on, as the hope of summer 2021 quickly soured with the Delta and then Omicron variants of COVID-19. While I was working full-time on-site, there was still limited access to buildings,

furloughs, and remote work for many. Then six months into my role as project manager, the senior librarian who had been the gracious champion of the project from its beginning moved on, taking with her almost twenty years of institutional knowledge. That's when I found myself truly on a solo mission.

The churn and turn of the pandemic had its effects throughout the museum. As a newer employee confronted by a growing vacuum of institutional knowledge but whose job it is to help preserve the institution's history, this has meant accepting I was going to have to ask a lot of questions and maybe not to the right people and maybe without ever getting a final answer. I often go back to the grant narrative, goals, and project timeline to help me understand the scope of things, but with an awareness that—based on my own expertise and professional experience—the way in which those goals are met will change and maybe even the goals themselves as well.

What's in store for year two? For the materials on magnetic media, I'll continue to work with a local Seattle vendor and nonprofit, Moving Image Preservation of Puget Sound (MIPoPS). They bring incredible expertise to digitizing video formats and just happen to be based within walking distance of the museum. Ideally, all the moving-image materials that can be, will be digitized by spring 2023. This means continuing to add digital surrogates into our DAMS, rehousing and more safely storing the original tapes, producing finding aids for series within the collection, and starting to share some choice videos through public programming. Looking back at this first year, I think it will have been the hardest one with having so much to learn. But only time will tell.

Current shelving for the videotape collection, including formats VHS, Betacam, ¾" U-matic, and MiniDV, in the Dorothy Stimson Bullitt Library at the Seattle Art Museum. Courtesy of Mia Ferm.



# My Tiff with TIFF: Rethinking Digitization Standards in the Era of Digital Preservation

By Heather Perez | Special Collections Librarian, Stockton University

I preface this article by confirming that I am a novice at digital preservation. I spent most of my graduate school years (fifteen years ago now!) sticking my head in the sand and declaring that I didn't need to deal with digital records. I was going to be a reference archivist. I didn't want to deal with processing or preserving digital. But as a lone arranger twice over now, I have resigned myself to the fact that if I don't deal with these records at my institution, no one else will.

Starting out in the field, I was the first-ever professional archivist hired by the institution. I spent many hours digitizing thousands of photographs, carefully creating high-resolution TIFF master images and JPG access copies, creating file naming conventions, recording metadata on a spreadsheet, and storing them on RAID drives on a server and in the cloud. Following a scanon-demand model, I digitized images and documents from the collections for customers—for research use, for publication in books, for exhibits, for presentations, and for the walls of the local coffee shop.

But I didn't have a digital preservation plan. Well, to be clear, I drafted a plan, but had no reasonable way to implement it as a solo archivist. No ability to create checksums or migrate files or even to ensure that the digitized files were in fact really the files created. No budget to purchase an all-in-one solution and no IT support. The long-range plan was to obtain an online database or digital asset management system that would allow users to search and browse all of these amazing images, but the time was never right to move forward with that.

Since then, I have spent the past five years at my current job—again as the first professional archivist—carefully tiptoeing around the digital records world—attending conference presentations, taking workshops, playing in the sandboxes of various systems, all while amassing digital records on a server space for the day when I would know what to do with them. My reluctance to dive into digital preservation without a complete understanding combined with a backlog of 250 gigabytes worth of digitized information to manage has led to an epiphany. Are those giant uncompressed TIFF master files really needed?

Digitization standards instruct us to scan at the highest possible resolution and to create a master file. This file shouldn't be manipulated or touched in any way. It should be an uncompressed or lossless format, usually a Tag Image File Format (TIFF), so that when the file is opened and closed all of the bits and bytes of information are there and the file is not recomposed each time. A compressed or lossy format, like a JPG or PNG, squeezes all of the bits and bytes together to save space, and so there is a risk of information loss over time.

Best practices also tell us to generate not one but at least two other files—an access copy and a high-quality copy to use to generate additional access copies. Some places also create a

thumbnail version of the file for their website. Often, these derivatives are JPGs. All of these digital files must be managed and preserved too, along with the TIFF.

Digital asset management systems (DAMS) are databases for digital images and can include both digitized and born-digital files. Some of these systems include digital preservation actions: generating checksums, ensuring the integrity of the records, repairing damaged files, migrating to new supported formats as needed, and storing the files in multiple, geographically-dispersed locations.<sup>2</sup> Examples of some of these digital preservation DAMS are Preservica, Archivematica, Rosetta, and DSpace.

All of these systems require storage space for the files. Most subscription DAMS charge based on the amount of storage requested. Even open-source systems will require that you purchase server space to store the digital files. Herein lies the problem with digitized master TIFF files: they are large! An 8.5-by-11-inch page, digitized at 600 dpi/24 bits can be 100 MB.<sup>3</sup> Given, for example, 250 GB of storage in your system, you can upload 2,500 of these TIFF images (and nothing else).

What's an archivist to do? I propose that we eliminate the creation of the TIFF master file if your institution is using a DAMS with digital preservation capabilities. Digitize at the highest-possible resolution and create a JPG or JPG2000 image to upload to the system. Through its checksums and migration and normalization work, the function of the digital preservation DAMS is to ensure that the file is not changed or corrupted. Therefore, the JPG file—even though it's compressed—shouldn't be at risk.

Take advantage of the smaller size of the compressed file formats to efficiently fill your DAMS with thousands more files than is possible with TIFFs. The same digitized image that took up 100 MB as a TIFF would be only 6 to 25 MB as a JPG, depending on the compression applied when the image is created.<sup>4</sup> Four times as many JPG files than TIFF files (more than 10,000) can now fit in that same 250 GB storage limit. And because the high-quality JPG image is in the DAMS, a second use copy of the file should also not be needed. Share the DAMS with your researchers, or download a use copy from the DAMS for them to review.

The same argument could be made for digitized audio: digitize and upload compressed MP3 files instead of WAV.

Likewise, the redundant copies of digitized files that we keep on our hard drives and in the cloud? Gone. If we trust the DAMS and their network of servers, we upload our files and then delete the local versions. Keeping the locally-saved versions eats up our hard drive space and is also one more thing to manage. Are you running checksums on these locally stored versions and comparing them against the ones in the cloud? I don't because of time constraints and the lack of automated ways to do this.

Call it blasphemy. Call it revolutionary. Damn the consequences? No, let the DAMS handle the consequences!

#### **Notes**

- 1. For example, *Digital Preservation Handbook*, 2nd edition, (Digital Preservation Coalition, 2015), https://www.dpconline.org/handbook, and *Recommended Formats Statement*, 2021-2022 (Library of Congress, 2021), https://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/rfs/index.html.
- 2. Preservica, "Welcome to Digital Preservation 101," accessed June 27, 2022, https://preservica.com/digital-preservation-101.
- 3. "Image File Size Calculator," https://toolstud.io/photo/filesize.php. See also formulas in Krista White, "Calculating All that Jazz: Accurately Predicting Digital Storage Needs Utilizing Digitization Parameters for Analog Audio and Still Image Files," *Library Resources & Technical Services* 60, no. 2 (2016): 76–88.
- 4. Ibid.



## World War II Letters Discovered at Tarleton Libraries

By Phyllis Kinnison | Archivist/Librarian, Tarleton State University

Change can lead to good things. A good discovery took place in the archives about two years ago when the Tarleton Libraries at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas, obtained a new dean of libraries. The dean planned to change the arrangement of departments in the library in order to provide more services to the university's students, faculty, and staff. That plan started with relocating my office.

I worked with a team to choose a room that was more accessible to patrons than the previous office and to make plans to convert it into the archivist's office. To prepare the room, furniture and materials had to be removed. The room contained a metal storage cabinet with doors that would not shut properly, and the materials in it were the first to be examined and moved to other archival storage areas.

While removing boxes of duplicate student newspapers from the cabinet, I found about ten oversized scrapbooks with paper covers. The scrapbooks had been stuffed into the cabinet to fit around the boxes. The first scrapbooks I pulled out contained old newspaper clippings from a newspaper clipping service. However, I saw some of the covers had "Correspondence" written on them in ink. My curiosity aroused, I opened a scrapbook expecting typed letters from some past office on campus. Instead, I found a treasure: handwritten World War II letters!

When the United States joined the Allies to participate in World War II, many students and some faculty from John Tarleton Agricultural College (now known as Tarleton State University) left their civilian life to join the military. The Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) began offering military training on the Tarleton campus in 1922. During the 1920s and 1930s, many

male students took advantage of the courses offered, which provided the skills they needed for their wartime experiences.

In order to support the morale of the "ex-Tarletonites" in military service, it was decided to send each of them free copies of the student newspaper, *The JTAC*. It is unknown who planned the project and when it started. It is also unknown how that project evolved into another project that sent a newsletter to ex-Tarletonites whose addresses were known.

At that time, Carl "Doc" Birdwell was the advisor for *The JTAC* as well as the manager of the College Store. He was an ex-Tarletonite himself, but he was unable to join the military side of the war effort due to a prosthetic leg. The newsletter project fell to him, and he was happy to take on the task.

The newsletter was titled *News from Tarleton* and was mailed for free to ex-Tarletonites in military service. The first issue, printed on January 5, 1943, was mailed to 121 soldiers. The main topics covered in the newsletter were campus news, news of ex-Tarletonites in the military, marriage and birth announcements for military personnel, names of military personnel who visited the campus during furlough, decorations awarded to military personnel, and names of casualties, the wounded, the missing in action, and prisoners of war. Many of the military personnel responded with letters and cards telling how much they appreciated the morale boost of knowing their school was supporting them, the comfort of knowing what was happening "at home," and the ability to keep up with school friends who were in the military.

By January 1, 1945, the second anniversary issue was sent around the world to 1,350 recipients. In that edition, Birdwell told the readers that editing the newsletter had become a major assignment that took up most of his and his secretary's time. He went on to say, "It is, truly, a labor of love—and when I read your hundreds of nice letters, I feel that in some small way I have contributed to your well being and to winning the war." The last issue of the newsletter was published on July 18, 1945.

The five scrapbooks contained copies of the newsletters as well as letters and cards from ex-Tarletonites. All of the items were adhered to the scrapbook pages with Scotch tape, which was causing damage to the newsletters and correspondence. Due to the acidity of the glue on the tape, some items were completely loose from the pages and in danger of becoming more damaged or lost. I knew the first step was to preserve the materials and as much of the original order as possible.

Removing the items from the scrapbook pages was a task that took a lot of time and patience. The letters and their envelopes had been taped into the scrapbooks one page at a time with the pages of one letter stacked on top of each other. So, the last page of the letter was taped into the scrapbook first, with the next page moved up about half an inch before it was taped to the scrapbook. This procedure had been followed until all the pages of a letter were attached as well as the envelope. I carefully removed one page of each letter at a time using a microspatula.

Sometimes the adhesive on the tape had completely dried up, so I was able to carefully remove the tape from the letter or envelope. Other times the glue was still slightly sticky and threatened to damage nearby materials. In that case, I sandwiched the items between sheets of PermaLife paper.

I enclosed the envelopes as well as damaged letters and cards in photo sleeves. That procedure protected letters and cards from the acidic glue used on the envelopes and preserved damaged items. I also used photo sleeves to preserve the few photographs included in the collection.

Change led to the discovery of a treasure at Tarleton Libraries. The Carl "Doc" Birdwell Collection of World War II Correspondence, 1941–1945, is a useful source for research for several reasons. First, it contains a cross section of World War II correspondence from military personnel of all ranks, in all branches of the military, stationed in the United States as well as in the different theaters of World War II around the world. It also demonstrates the creativeness of people on the home front when supporting the troops at war. Last, it adds to the legacy of Tarleton State University by demonstrating how a small rural school in central Texas affected World War II.

For more information about the Carl "Doc" Birdwell Collection of World War II Correspondence, 1941–1945, contact Archivist Phyllis Kinnison at <a href="mailto:pkinnison@tarleton.edu">pkinnison@tarleton.edu</a>.



# Archivist for the Columbarium: Organizing Records in a Cathedral

By Roxane Orgill | Project Archivist, Cathedral of Saint John the Divine

A columbarium (for those unfamiliar, as I was, with the word) is the space in a church for storing cremated remains. Ashes are stored in a brass *urn* and placed in a *niche* within a *vault*. The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City began with one columbarium in the 1970s, expanded to two, and now has three restful spaces constructed of marble and limestone for the remains of loved ones.

I was hired to sort out, rehouse, and digitize the records for 4,163 niches. Recordkeeping had been inconsistent, to say the least. In fact, records were so poor that one vault was sold twice, to different people. One of the tenets of a columbarium—like a cemetery—is that the dead be allowed to rest in peace. Moving an urn or even opening a vault unnecessarily is to be avoided. In this case, the result was injured feelings on both sides and, ultimately, a lawsuit.

This was my first job after receiving an Advanced Certificate in Archives and Records Management from the Palmer School of Library and Information Science. I arrived in June 2021 to find a four-drawer file cabinet stuffed with folders, sometimes filed by the name of the purchaser, other times the designee, of a niche. Vault numbers were incorrect. It was not clear whether the designees were still alive or had been interred. It took months to establish protocols and put the files in order, but the records are now rehoused in twenty-five boxes.

To prepare for digitizing the records, I made PDFs of just three documents: application, proof of payment, and certificate of right to inter. For content management software, I used FileMaker Pro and hired a designer because the project was so complicated and unusual. Fortunately, the designer had previously done a project for a cemetery, so creating a database for the columbarium was similar. Both the columbarium and visitors' services staff have access to the database.

There were some interesting moments over the course of this project, such as when I came across the names of painter Jacob Lawrence; choreographer Robert Joffrey; New York mayor David Dinkins and his wife, Joyce; and Cordia Gypsy, the young daughter of high-wire artist Philippe Petit.

The biggest challenge, in a way, came last: my job was temporary. The columbarium involves both an archive and records management, as niche sales are ongoing. I had to train staff members to continue the processes I established, and I met with considerable resistance, especially concerning the software. I feared that nine months' work would be in vain. Ultimately, it was decided that I would return monthly to update the records, both paper and digital. It's not a perfect solution, but it works for now. And access is significantly improved; a person looking for the vault of a deceased relative in one of the three columbaria can inquire at the visitor services desk and be directed—with the help of the database—to the correct location in a vast and glorious space, the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine.

Left & center: Disorganized records for the columbarium when Roxane Orgill arrived in June 2021. Right: Nine months later, the records are sorted, rehoused, and digitized. *Courtesy of Roxane Orgill*.



# Lone Arrangers Section Steering Committee 2022–2023

Micaela Terronez	Chair	Augustana College, Tredway Library
Julie Yamashita	Vice Chair / Chair-Elect / Regional Representatives Co-Lead	Lanterman House Museum and Archives
Hilary Swett	Regional Representatives Co-Lead	Writers Guild Foundation
Rebecca Leung	Events Coordinator	Mills College at Northeastern University
Katy Sternberger	Newsletter Editor	Portsmouth Athenaeum
Shaun Kirkpatrick	Web Liaison	Chubb Archives

## **Get in Touch!**

lonearrangersectionsaa@gmail.com

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archivists.org/groups/lone-arrangers-section

#### solo archivist

 $n. \sim$  an individual who is the only staff member or the only formally trained archivist working in an archives

Dictionary of Archives Terminology, s.v. "solo archivist," accessed September 1, 2022, dictionary.archivists.org/entry/solo-archivist.html.