

Interview with Rayna Andrews, The College of Physicians of Philadelphia College Archivist



Entrance to the Museum, taken by Laura Kathryn Nicol Jones.

On October 2nd, while visiting Philly for a wedding, my friend Katie Macmillan (KM) and I (LKNJ) visited The College of Physicians of Philadelphia to interview College Archivist Rayna Andrews

(RA) and see the highly recommended Mütter (Mooter) Museum. Photographs are not allowed inside the permanent gallery, so here are some links to videos of the Museum to give you a sense of our experience.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GZIfOXKE70>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPtseJWGj1g>

Check out more videos, including informational webinars on the Mütter Museum's YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/@theMutterMuseum>

Interview Start

LKNJ: Tell us a little bit about yourself. What would you say is your official title and position?

RA: So, my official title is College Archivist. And with that, I am the archivist covering all of the collections, all of the archival collections owned by The College of Physicians of Philadelphia (<https://collegeofphysicians.org/>). And what that means is that I am in charge of, I oversee, the institutional records for The College of Physicians of Philadelphia and then any of the other archival collections that we have. So, we have all of the institutional records, which are ours. Our label for them is the 'CPP' collections. Then we have other manuscript archival collections that are collections related to the history of medicine, and so, I also oversee those. Then some bound manuscripts that we sort of cataloged in various different ways at the moment but are held within Archives for now.

LKNJ: And how long have you been at this current position?

RA: So, I started in May of 2022, so about a year and change at this point.

LKNJ: So, did you have a previous position here before?

RA: No, this is my first position here at The College.

LKNJ: And would you mind providing an overview of your path to this point in your career?

RA: Sure, so I went to Pratt (Pratt Institute, <https://www.pratt.edu/>) for my master's degree.

LKNJ: Is that an MLIS, MLS?

RA: Yes, I have an MLIS, Masters in Library and Information Science. And I have an Advanced Certificate in Archives. So, I did, like, an archives concentration. And while I was doing- While I was in grad school, I had a number of different internships: sort of testing the waters and doing different things. And, I think, at least two of them were archives and/or rare book related. I

went into grad school wanting to be a rare book librarian; there was supposed to be a rare book concentration: none of those classes were being offered.

LKNJ: I feel you. My college, same thing.

RA: Oh, I'm shocked (sarcasm). Where did you go to school?

LKNJ: I went to the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee (<https://uwm.edu/>). And they were supposed to have rare book and more archives courses. And when I started, it was, like, nothing but digital librarianship.

RA: Yeah, so classes weren't really being offered while I was there. And so I was like, well alright, I'll take an archives class and see. And I kind of just fell in love with the archives track. So, that worked out well for me. So, I went in that direction, but I still wanted to, like, test the rare books thing, so I did an internship. So, when I graduated, I moved down here to Philly and started working at the University of Penn (University of Pennsylvania, <https://www.upenn.edu/>) doing- It was a project position doing cataloging of a special or semi-special collection. It was a lot of copy-cataloging, a little bit of original cataloging. And it was a really good position to, like, start with, but it was also a term position, and I think term positions are term positions.

LKNJ: Just for clarification, Penn means?

RA: The University of Pennsylvania.

LKNJ: I'm not from Pennsylvania, so I wanted to make sure.

RA: When that term position was complete, I didn't have another full-time job figured out yet. So, I started- I moved from that department to a part-time archival processing position in the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books, and Manuscripts (<https://www.library.upenn.edu/kislak>), also at Penn (University of Pennsylvania). So, I was getting more archival experience, but it was a part-time and term-limited position. So, to supplement that, I started working at Bryn Mawr College (<https://www.brynmawr.edu/>), also on a part-time limited position doing more cataloging. And that's also where I went to college, so it was like a little bit- It was weird. I don't necessarily recommend working where you went to school; it's a weird vibe. It was lovely; I love it there, but, like, it was weird.

RA: So, I worked there. I ended up working on, I think, three different projects at Bryn Mawr. I went from that to working on a grant-funded archival collaborative digital project that is really cool, but was also, again, part-time, term-limited, etc, etc. So, when that was over, I worked on- I just went back to a different cataloging project. All this to say, while I'm doing all of that part-time, cobbling together part-time work, I am applying for full-time jobs anywhere, or not anywhere but- It feels like all of the full-time jobs, everywhere, anywhere: does it pay? Cool, here's my application.

RA: I grew up in the (Washington) D.C. area. There was a full-time position in (Washington) D.C. at the Archives of American Art (<https://www.aaa.si.edu/>), which is part of the Smithsonian institution. This was technically a term position, but it was a three-year term. I applied for that position and was successful, so I took that job. So, I moved to (Washington) D.C. and was there from 2017 until 2022. So, it started off as a term position, but it turned into a permanent position. I left my job at the Archives of American Art to come here.

LKNJ: So, since that position became a permanent position, why did you decide to seek out a different permanent position?

RA: I got married and he lives in New Jersey.

LKNJ: I see. So, do you live in New Jersey?

RA: I do. Yeah, I live in the part of New Jersey that touches Pennsylvania. So, it's like a thirty-minute commute. It's a thirty-minute drive; it's like a forty-five minute commute (by train).

LKNJ: That's nice; that's a lot better than commuting from (Washington) D.C.

RA: So, I did that for a while at, like, that weird time when we weren't sure about what was going on with the (COVID19) pandemic. And so, I only had to be in the office three days a week. I would be up here (New Jersey) then drive down; my parents still live in [Maryland], so I would just stay with them. I did that drive recently, and was, like, "How was I doing that every week?" I got a quarter of the way in and was just, like, "this is awful!! How? I hate this!" It's doable; it's just awful.

LKNJ: That's a lot of commute.

RA: It is.

LKNJ: I'm sure you're much happier now that you are much closer.

RA: Yeah, it's- I listen to way fewer audiobooks, but I also see less of my car, and prefer it that way. My car is lovely, but also no.

LKNJ: That's a lot of gas.

RA: It is a lot of gas. Thankfully I stopped doing that before gas was six dollars a gallon or whatever.

LKNJ: So, you had internships in both archives and rare books; did you have internships in any other adjacent fields?

RA: I'm trying to remember. This was, like, ten years ago now, so- I think I had just sort of quote-unquote 'library' internships that were, you know, general; you just sort of do what needs to be done. And then, the ones that stick out the most are the- I had a museum archives internship and then a rare books internship.

LKNJ: Which one of those internships do you think was the most helpful for getting you to where you are now?

RA: I think both of them were actually really helpful in different ways, obviously. But they both helped me, gave me different kinds of experience; experience working with different systems, experience, as well, with writing- Actually, I guess I had three: one other, a university archives experience. Experience writing documentation to sort of say, "This is where the project I was working on left off and this is how it could continue with people either who have archival experience or have rare book experience, or this is how it could continue if they don't have experience and you need to train them in this fashion." Sometimes you just need to be able to say, "I have worked with this system," or "I have worked with a system like this, and I, therefore, am familiar enough with how these kinds of things work." Or "I know how to catalog a book." Sometimes it is just, "I have cataloged a bunch of books." the end. Sometimes it is just literally things like that. I did a bunch of cataloging of books; therefore I was a stronger candidate for my project at Bryn Mawr because I did a rare books internship that involved looking at cataloged rare books, or uncatalogued rare books rather. Sometimes it is seeing how things play out.

LKNJ: And so, let's switch gears a little bit. Do you mind going over the structure (of the institution)? Like we mentioned, a lot of people get the Museum and the College itself kind of mixed up. So, you work for...?

RA: I work for the College of Physicians of Philadelphia (College), so that is the overarching institution, because I'm the College Archivist it's a little bit weird. Because I am the *College* Archivist, so my position is housed within the Library, which is one of the departments. The College is sort of the overarching, umbrella organization, and then there's the Mutter Museum (<https://muttermuseum.org/>; Museum), there is the Historical Medical Library (<https://collegeofphysicians.org/our-work/historical-medical-library>; Library), and then there's also the Center for Education (<https://collegeofphysicians.org/programs/education-blog>); those are the sort of three sections, or the three departments under the College umbrella that are more forward facing. The College also has a fellowship structure, so there are college fellows that are members of sections, and that is all sort of a whole other separate part that, I guess is not really relevant to this part of the conversation.

RA: As the Archivist, I'm housed within the Historical Medical Library, but I'm also responsible for records of the entire institution, so I'm responsible for any- I guess we say museum: 3D, library: 2D. So, I'm responsible for any of the archival records that the Museum generates, and the Center for Education generates, and also that the College in general generates. It gets a little wibbly-wobbly sometimes, but that's sort of the general structure of it.

LKNJ: So, with that then, if a collection were to come in that had a combination of 3D and 2D, it would get separated between the two different departments?

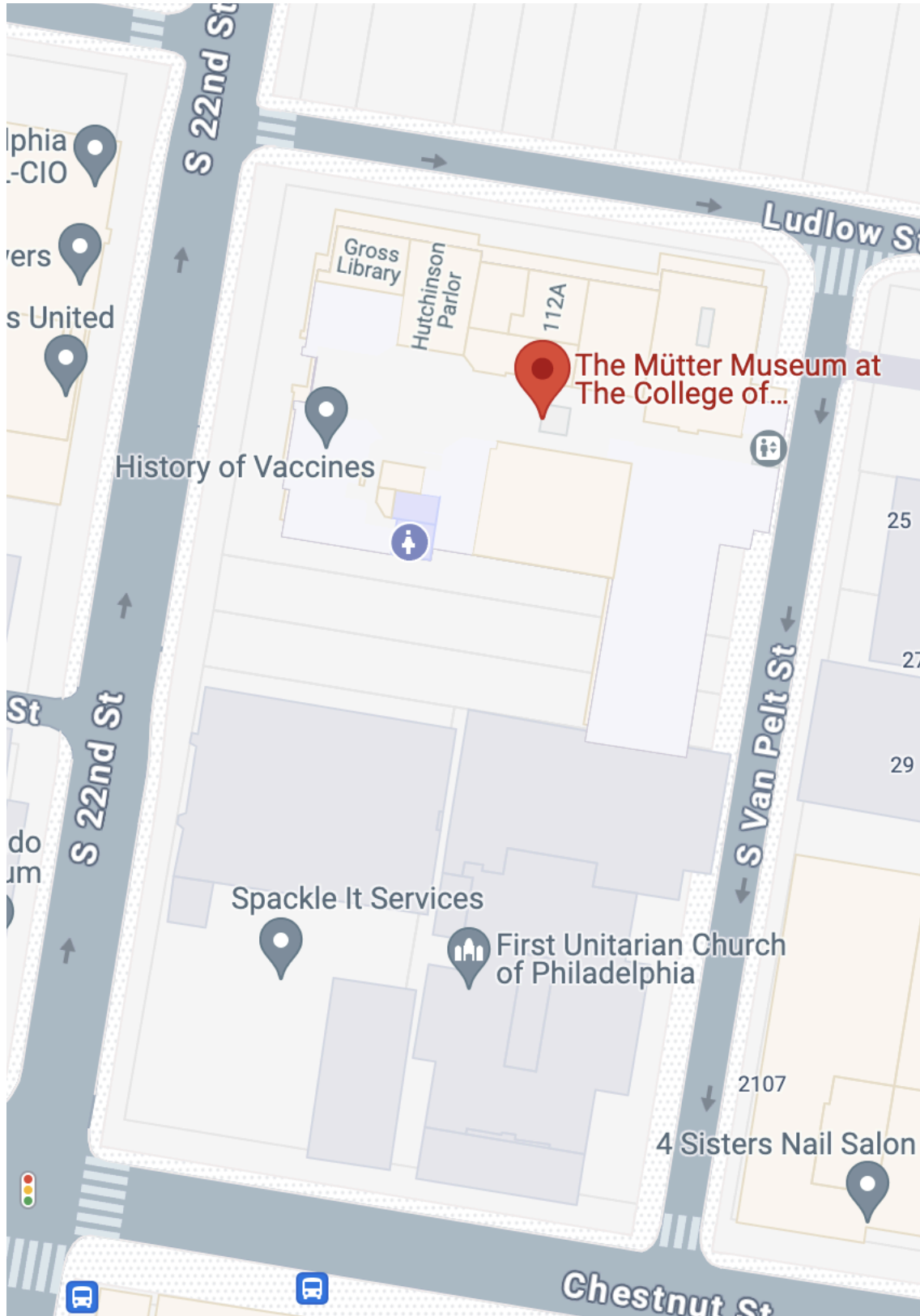
RA: It sort of depends. Generally speaking, if it is a collection that is sort of- If somebody came to us and wanted to donate say a collection of medical instruments and also the personal papers, the accompanying personal papers, then it would be, for lack of a better word, split, yes; the Museum would take the instruments and we (the Library) would take the papers. If it is something, like, smaller, or just a single object that is not particularly medical but is somehow tangentially related- We have things like medals or other various ephemeral or paraphernalia kinds of things that are still within our (the Library's) collections. We have objects in our collections, but generally speaking objects, anything that is an object (a 3D kind of thing), goes to the Museum side and anything that is a book or a piece of paper or a photograph, things like that, come to the Library side. On the flip side of that, if it's an object and there are a few accompanying photographs or one or two accompanying documents that provide further information that go with that object, those few documents will go, generally, with the object. Because that's just what makes sense, and we don't want to divorce those from each other.

RA: For example, we located this very large certificate of some sort, and it didn't appear to have an accession number on it right away or didn't appear to have a Library accession, and so I was like, "Oh no, I have to figure out where this is from and who this is." But it had a note or something that was clearly added by us, and then I was able to locate and realize it was a certificate that accompanies an award that was given to a physician. And so, the object is in the Museum collection, and so the certificate was sort of floating around in the vault because it goes to this other object. I was like, "Oh, this isn't mine: take it."

LKNJ: So, going back to the different departments, would you provide a little bit of an overview of where things are [on the campus]? So, the Museum is located in a separate building?

RA: No. Everything is located within this single building. So, if you- We're on the second floor (in the Library) right now. If you were standing in the main hallway, like, in front of that main staircase, the Museum is past that main staircase on the left, and then there is one other gallery to the right. So, right now we are all in one building.

RA: We did just purchase recently the church across the garden, so we will, at some point, be a campus. At that point, I think- The idea isn't, as far as I'm aware, to move collections over there; I think all Museum and Library materials will generally stay in this building. I believe the intention for that building (the church) is staff space and programming space. That is the intention that I have heard, but I don't know, things could change.



A view of the block from Google Maps for orientation and visualization.

LKNJ: And people change their minds, too.

RA: Exactly. But from a logistics and materials safety point of view, it would be a bad idea to put collections over there, because right now, like, you would have to take things out onto Chestnut Street to get them around into the other building. What we really want, just from a laziness point of view, is for them to just, like, put a hole in that wall (in the garden) so that we can just use the garden as a pass through, but I don't think that's going to happen; I feel like it's probably a little difficult to just blow a door shaped hole in a building.

LKNJ: So, within this building then, is the Museum only on the lower levels and then the Library is up here, or how does that work?

RA: No, so the Museum, if you were to walk into the Museum, it's that floor and then it goes down a level; it goes down to the basement level. So, the Museum has two floors and a sort of number of galleries. The Mütter Gallery, which is not part of the permanent collection gallery, which has *Spit Spreads Death* (<https://muttermuseum.org/exhibitions/spit-spreads-death>) in it right now (as of October 2023), is sort of off to the side, and that's one, and Thomson, which has *Unseen* (as of October 2023; <https://muttermuseum.org/exhibitions/unseen>) in it is off to the other side.

LKNJ: And then the Library has upper spaces, or is it just a single room?

RA: So, the Norris Reading Room is just this space, and this is the- This space was redone- The renovation was completed in 2022. And this space is a reading room and an exhibition space. Beyond that wall is our stacks. Our stacks is seven floors. You will notice that this building is three floors, so they are half-floor stacks. So, it is seven floors and that's where our materials are housed. And we have some off-site housing, but most of it is in there.

LKNJ: Does the Archives have its own space within the Library space or is it more of a shared space?

RA: Yes, we have a specific location within that's where the archival material is. Most of it is one specific location; some things, because of the nature of them are located in a different area. But for the most part, most archival material is housed together.

LKNJ: Does the Library or Archives ever loan or share materials with the Museum for exhibitions or programming?

RA: Yes, there is some Library material in the Museum right now. So, it is not- Because it is all sort of one organization I don't know that we really treat it as a loan so much as it's on exhibit. I think that's sort of the idea moving forward, is that it's just on exhibit. So, it's not- we need to keep track of where in the building it's on exhibit, but it's not really being loaned to a different

department even though it kind of is. But the short answer is yes, there is Library material in the Museum.

LKNJ: Is that a pretty frequent occurrence?

RA: Well, remember, I've been here a year, and there's been a lot of staff turn-over, and the permanent gallery is the permanent gallery, so it doesn't change that much. So, the stuff that's in there has been in there for a while.

LKNJ: Is that something that they ever plan to revamp in any kind of way, or is it just static?

RA: So, you have a question later on about "Postmortem..."

LKNJ: Ah! I guess we'll get to that then.

LKNJ: So, what about your typical day? What do you normally do?

RA: Oh, there's no such thing as a 'typical day.'

LKNJ: I know, but people like to know what goes on in different positions.

RA: It does sort of depend on what we have going on, like, what is going on in the greater Library, and 'collections' department, and institutional world of the day, or of the week. If we have researchers coming in, we are open for research on Wednesdays and Thursdays- If we have researchers coming in and they are looking at archival material, which they frequently are; sometimes, it doesn't matter, and I know which researchers are coming in and I'm familiar with the materials that they are coming in to look at. Sometimes, they are coming in to look at materials I'm not as familiar with or we haven't pulled in a while, so I like to look at the stuff that we're pulling for them- And the Reference Librarian will usually do this too, so sometimes we'll look at it together just to see what kind of condition it's in and sort of get a feel for- The Reference Librarian is usually, like, sort of making a list in her head of what kind of supports will they need, does it need gloves or- Will they need gloves for any of this? Will they need any special anything? So, just things like that. So, just thinking about things like that.

RA: Sometimes we'll look at those materials. Sometimes its'- Again, we have our Reference Librarian, but a lot of times if there are sort of internal questions, archival questions- We are trying to train people to email the Reference Librarian; sometimes they do that, sometimes they don't; sometimes they just email me and that's fine. So, depending on how busy she is (the Reference Librarian) sometimes I'll send them (internal reference questions), and sometimes I'll handle it, because sometimes it is something she can do while she is sitting at the Reference Desk while researchers are here, and she needs something to do. But other times it's, you know, I'm the Archivist: I can also do reference, it's fine.

RA: Or it's- Somebody recently emailed me about pulling things for a fellowship event- Actually no, that's not what she emailed me about; she emailed me about revamping that fellowship section. And so, I have to do research into that, if it exists.

LKNJ: So, you do exhibits as well?

RA: So, sometimes we will- We have an exhibit (referencing the exhibit on the other side of the room), but sometimes we will put things out in cases out in the front hallway, out there (indicates beyond the door), for special events. So, the [fellowship] section on ENTs- We put materials out in the cases because they recently had a fellowship event related to that (otolaryngology).

RA: And just other things: sometimes it's meeting with people like you (interviewers), or emailing something to donors or prospective donors; sometimes to say, "Please tell me more information on the thing you'd like to donate." Sometimes it's saying, "Thank you but no thank you." Yeah, just all sorts of things.

RA: I'm doing more research into our collections to figure out what's going on and sort of getting a handle. A lot of the stuff that I'm working on right now is, like, trying to do a lot of, like, backlog, and not exactly reprocessing but getting things in a good state for collections care.

LKNJ: So, you are responsible, then for accessioning new archival collections? And then do other staff then do that with the library collections?

RA: Yes, so I accession new archival materials. I sort of accession new library materials as well just because I'm the one assigning the accession numbers, so to keep things easier. And I have made the executive decision that everything is getting accessioned into ArchivesSpace (<https://archivesspace.org/>), because you can make accession records there. So, at least if we're (the Library) getting a bunch of books as one accession, I won't make an accession record for every individual book but I'll make an accession record for the lump of books. But I'm at least doing that top level accessioning at the moment. Thankfully, there haven't been too many to really test that theory.

LKNJ: So, are you a 'lone arranger?'

RA: I guess technically yes; I don't necessarily call myself a 'lone arranger,' because I do have other Library colleagues. So, while I am a lone archivist- I think I would use the term *lone archivist* for myself, because I'm a lone archivist but I have three librarians working with me. So, they're- I always have other people who are familiar with libraries and library work, and at least sort of familiar with archives even if they're not trained archivists: who I can at least talk at to work my ideas out, and they'll say, like, "Yeah that makes sense," or "No, that doesn't make sense." And I believe them.

LKNJ: And what would you say is your favorite part about this position?

RA: It kind of changes. You know, it's never boring. I really do like working with the collections; the collections are some of the weirdest and most interesting things that you'll see. Like, I love the botanicals and the- They are just so detailed and fascinating. I am also, right now, really interested in all of our recipe books. We have so many of them; some of them are in terrible condition and really need to be conserved. So, I'm, like, trying to get as comprehensive of a list as I can of them so I can check them against that list and figure out which ones need conservation and which ones don't, which ones are digitized and which ones can be digitized, ones that are digitized and transcribed: things like that. Because they're such a cool example and resource for studying early medicine. They are just so cool! I feel like they are a really good example of why archives are really cool.

LKNJ: And do you have a favorite collection or item?

RA: I feel like right now all of the recipe books are my favorite. Things change, like, you know, if you ask me in two weeks I might have a different answer. But at least right now, all of the different recipe books, which, you know, are from a multitude of different collections; they are not a single collection.

LKNJ: Are people able to view those, or no because they are in such bad shape?

RA: Some of them are- You could come in and make a research appointment and view them. Some of them are digitized and are online on Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/>). And then some, I'm hoping to get them up on the Early Modern Recipes Online Collective (<https://emroc.hypotheses.org/>) to get the ones that are already online available for transcription. So, if people are interested, they can help us transcribe them to make them even more accessible. So, I've been, like, in communication with people on that project. I don't think- We were going to do one as a test, and I don't think it's up yet, but fingers crossed that goes up soon (<https://fromthepage.com/folger/early-modern-recipe-books/10a-198>).

LKNJ: What types of materials do you work with? So, we've talked about documents, institutional records, photographs, books; is there anything else?

RA: So, we have, as an off shoot of photographs, we have a lot of lantern slides and glass plate negatives. So, we have a lot of different photographic media in different formats. We do have some digital files and digital formats. And so, I'm working with that to the best of my abilities. We also have av (audiovisual), though we don't have a great capability to really do anything with it at this point; so, it's just kind of here which I don't love, and that's one of the things that's sort of on my list of- It's on my ever-growing list: just sort of "deal with this better."

LKNJ: So, you have some older stuff and no way to play it or make it accessible?

RA: Mhm, yeah.

LKNJ: What kinds of av (audiovisual) materials?

RA: I mean, we have film, and then we also definitely have VHS. I think we have- Which other kinds of cassettes do we have? I've seen- We have at least one other kind of cassette. We also, I'm remembering now, have the large floppies, which would actually count as digital; I just remembered that and wish that I hadn't. Well, because you know we were- They were scientists and so they were early adopters of all of the different technologies, and then they gave them to me. Not actually me: my predecessors, or probably my predecessor's predecessor.

LKNJ: Did you have to go through any kind of additional training or any kind of specialization to deal with any of the different types of materials?

RA: I didn't *have* to. I have done workshops and webinars and things for my own edification. Which is something I recommend people do, and I honestly still don't necessarily feel entirely comfortable working with other formats all the time. Which is, perhaps, a me thing and not a- You know, how much is 'imposter syndrome' and how much is just I don't do it every day and therefore I'm not as comfortable doing it kind of thing. I also think that's part of it; that, like, if you generally haven't been working with these materials and you know that you're going to start doing that, it is a good idea to watch a webinar or, if possible, take a workshop so that you are setting yourself up for more success to working with the materials.

LKNJ: How does your institution decide what is added to the archives?

RA: So, there are a few different steps, and we are working on a new collection development policy. So, those could change a little bit, but essentially, like, if somebody is a fellow it is a little more streamlined, but if someone says, "Hi, I have this thing, or I have these papers." We will first ask some questions to determine if it is within scope. And if things are within scope, and would fit within our collection, then I will make a recommendation and say, "Yes, we would like to accept this donation." to our Executive Director: and say yea or nay. Generally, we'll accept it and move forward with it. And then present it to the Board for them to vote on, and once the Board- And so we'll have it, but not like, have it fully, we'll have accepted it conditionally, I guess. And once the Board approves it then we go through everything.

LKNJ: So, what are some strategies your institution is implementing to bring marginalized stories to the forefront?

RA: So, this is part of the institutional conversation that's happening right now. Partially with "Postmortem." From an archival perspective, it's a little bit more difficult; simply because I'm the archivist for the organization. So, I am doing- My work reflects what the organization is doing, and so there is going to be a time-lag (referring to when records arrive in the Archive). So, what they are currently doing is staying in their records, and it's only once someone retires, or a project is complete that I will then get those records. So, there is going to be a time-lag in that sense. Any material that- I'm also not actively sort of collecting; if people contact me, then I will continue with that, but I'm not going out and actively collecting for materials. We're also

historical, so, we're looking for material related to the history of medicine; we're not really looking at contemporary things. Which makes all of that (referring to highlighting marginalized stories) difficult. That being said, I think we're trying to be more thoughtful about the material that is currently in the collection, and those marginalized stories and the voices of those who are in the margins and who are represented in the margins. In the materials that we currently have and how we can look at those materials, maybe not with new eyes, but look at those through different contexts; and recontextualize them, or contextualize them at all and really look at them in that way, to bring those stories to the forefront.

LKNJ: And how is your institution navigating the respectful representation of remains in a way that places their humanity first when recorded traces of these individuals may have been discriminatory or dehumanizing? I know you talked about that a bit, so the ways that context is being added.

RA: Two things: one, the short answer for this is that's really the whole reason for "Postmortem," the "Postmortem Project." So, a huge component of the project is the grant that is specifically addressing what respect means in this context and how we show and display human remains in a respectful, humanizing way. But more specifically, as an archivist for these collections, I'm- The collections under my care do not include human remains, so I can't specifically speak to that beyond what I can say about "Postmortem," but I can talk about the ways that I'm, like, updating policies related to how I'm handling protected health information, how I'm talking about, like, how I'm thinking about the materials under my care. And, for example, the ways that marginalized communities or, even just anyone, really, who is represented in- Any of the patients who are represented in the materials, and their private information, and making sure they are either represented respectfully or that there's context in that way, because, you know, these were records often taken or- These materials were given to us, generally speaking, by doctors. So, there are medical records, there are photographs: all of these materials, related to these people-

KM: How does that comply under HIPAA (<https://www.hhs.gov/hipaa/index.html>)?

RA: A lot of this is pre-HIPAA. So, there are two components with HIPAA: first of all, we're not technically bound by HIPAA, because we're not a medical institution. However, it would still be unethical of us not to follow HIPAA. So, we don't operate by "HIPAA doesn't apply to us, so it doesn't matter," we operate according to HIPAA. However, a lot of this is pre-HIPAA: these are patient records and photographs of patients from the Turn of the Century or from earlier than that. So, in that respect, they are pre-HIPAA, they are allowable, but we also still want to be respectful of their humanity and how they're being represented, so thinking about what are acceptable ways of presenting their information, presenting their images, if we're allowing that, things like that.

KM: And who oversees presenting that information?

RA: I am working on that policy now. I need to figure that out, because right now there isn't a policy. It's sort of me; I email my boss and say, "Is this allowed?" And that's not a great policy, so I'm writing one that will be more than that. Basically, if someone is asking to say publish a photograph of a patient, for me, personally, they need to have a good reason for why that photo needs to be included; it can't just be, "Well, we needed to have a photo on this page." Like, that's not a good reason; explain to me how the image of the photo is being used, explain to me the context: why it's important for X, Y, Z.

KM: How does the photo relate to the article, and does the photo add more detail to what is being said, so people can understand what's being said.

RA: And also, what is the photo portraying? A lot of these photos are showing people who have some sort of limb difference, who have been disfigured by a disease, who maybe are in some state of undress, like, are in incredibly vulnerable situations. Some of them are minors. Some, although not all, not as many as you would think, thankfully, are People of Color. All of these things are stacked on top of each other, and it's- All of this taken together is sort of like you're taking vulnerable people in vulnerable states. So why are we then using these photographs?

KM: Making them more vulnerable.

LKNJ: It's, like, continuing that cycle.

RA: Right, you know, because these photographs were often taken for publications or for teaching. And so, if we're going to continue using it for teaching and for edification, then that might be ok, but please explain the reasoning.

LKNJ: A lot of these materials, the actual people that they're about, did those people provide permission, or was a lot of this taken without their permission?

RA: And that's the hard thing to know. We don't necessarily know that. It's easier to assume that- It's easier to sort of understand and assume that with human remains they were not taken with consent. With patient records and things like that, generally speaking when you go to a doctor you understand that patient records exist. However, there's very little thought or conception that your patient records would end up at a different organization a hundred years from now. So, that part is probably less of a thing. You know, now our patient records are archived but they stay within a hospital archive system and there's a records management policy for these things, and there are laws about that. There weren't laws back then about those sorts of things.

LKNJ: Ok, so back to the "Postmortem" project: can you provide an overview of what that is.

RA: To a certain extent, yes. So, it's giving- It's looking at our collections through a different eye and giving people an opportunity to give input, I guess, in the future of the display of our collections. So, what does the display of human remains respectfully look like? What might it

look like in the future? What might the Mütter Museum look like in the future? So, it will involve many different components, first of which is a 'Town Hall' coming up on October 17th (watch the replay here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Da0uMLOBP4>). So, that will happen here, and you can join it via Zoom. Unfortunately, we can't do participation via Zoom, because that would be too much logistically, but there will be future online things (you can keep up to do through here: <https://muttermuseum.org/mutter-matters>). So, there will be 'Town Hall' components, there will be different programming and things that will happen, just really trying to do community engagement to figure out and get lots of input from different communities about the Museum: what do they like about the Museum, what do they not like about the Museum? Why? What do they love, from people who love it? Why do they come? From people who hate it, who have never been, or who came once and never came back: why? Trying to get as much of that information as possible. From disability rights communities, there is a dividing line there; some people in the disability community really like this museum and some people really dislike it and find it incredibly offensive. And hearing from both sides of that.

RA: There will then be an exhibition, so within the permanent gallery, using overlays to sort of recontextualize some of the parts of the things in the- So, basically the permanent gallery will essentially remain as it is for the most part but will have overlays over the glass to have more context, or different context, or encourage you to see things in a different way. I'm sure I'm forgetting things.

LKNJ: And so, do you have any kind of role in this big project?

RA: I don't have a direct role in it, because so much of it is about exhibitions and about the Museum. With that being said, there will definitely be components that require archival research, because there's also stuff that involves learning more about the history of our collections and the history of certain items, which may or may not be in my side of things. So, I anticipate that I will probably be called on for certain materials and certain records at different points.

LKNJ: And do you have tips for students and new professionals? What do you think that they should do if they want to pursue a position like yours?

RA: I think for students, definitely if at all possible, try to get as much hands-on experience as possible, whether that is through an internship, you know try to get a paid one. This field is wild with their internships, but you know. Trying to get hands-on experience is really going to help. And to new professionals, don't be discouraged, like, you can see through my work history that this is my first job that didn't start out as a term position. It's a long road.

LKNJ: And it just keeps getting harder. I hear from so many people that they just keep having to move from one term [position] to another.

RA: Yeah, and sometimes it's just a numbers game. I don't know that I have, like, any advice that people haven't heard a million times before.

KM: So when you were going through it, what made you to keep doing what you were doing? Instead of saying, "Ok, I've had enough!"

RA: I really- I know that I really, really, enjoy the work. And I really enjoy archives, and I think that I knew that when I was looking for jobs, and so I knew that, like, I wasn't going to be, not even happy, but I knew I was going to be mad at myself if I went through everything and then did something else. Like, I was just going to be annoyed. Also, I'm really stubborn! Like, *really* stubborn!

KM: Did you ever want to give up?

RA: Oh, absolutely! Like, the number of times where I've been, like- You know when you're, like, third time that night you've uploaded your resumé, and you've, like, hit 'Next' and then you somehow need to then add in all of your job information that is on the resumé that you have just uploaded, and you're just like, "This is it; this is my villain origin story." Yes, I've absolutely thought about quitting. Then you're just like, "Ok, shut the computer for the night; we'll come back to this later."

KM: So, you just had this gut intuition that you just followed?

RA: I guess... Or, again, stubbornness. But it's a little bit of both, I guess. But it's also just sort of like, if this is what you want to do then-

KM: You're going to fight until the end.

RA: I mean, that sounds really flip, because it's also, like- That's a privileged thing to say; that's also saying, like- Because if you need a job, you need a job. And there were times where, again, I was, to be clear, I was working two part-time jobs and those jobs basically paid my rent, and the rest of it was going on a credit card, and I only recently paid off my credit cards for that. So, like, if you need a job, you need a job and sometimes the job is not the job that you want. So, you know if it's really not working out and you're feeling too beaten down by that then it's also ok to, like, save your peace. I'm not saying, "Real archivists fight until the end!" No, that's not-

LKNJ: Did you have a support system?

RA: Oh, absolutely! Like, I had friends, I had my family, I had my partner. Support systems are key. Especially when you have gotten that, like, rejection you knew was a rejection because you hadn't heard from them for multiple months, but then when you finally do get it you're just like, "Oh, right, I already knew I didn't get that job but, like, now I *know* I didn't get that job." But it's also draining, like when you already are working one to three jobs and then you have essentially another job of applying for jobs.

LKNJ: Is there anything else you'd like to share with us, not necessarily on this note?

RA: Oh, if it's within your means, join your regional organizations. They are great resources. They usually have student- They sometimes have student and new professional membership rates. They are, generally speaking, significantly cheaper than SAA. SAA is great, it's fine, whatever, but regional orgs are where it's at. The conferences are also great; there are usually scholarships for the conferences, which people don't apply for. They also often have scholarships to go to SAA [conference]. Yes, that is my actual advice: regional orgs are where it's at! Why did I not think of that first? I'm Chair of a regional org committee...

KM: What is your favorite exhibit of the Museum?

RA: I think I'm contractually obligated to say *Illustrating Medicine* open in the Norris Reading Room (<https://muttermuseum.org/on-view/illustrating-medicinab>)!

KM: Besides that (all laughing)!

RA: So, the thing is we don't have- Like, we have the permanent gallery, then we have *Spit Spreads Death*, which is closing soon and *Unseen*, which is closing soon. So, like, there aren't that many to choose from. It's just those three, and then this one (indicates the one in the Norris Reading Room).

LKNJ: So, four?

KM: But out of the entire thing, what is the most fascinating thing that-

RA: Like single item?

KM: Yes.

RA: Oh, I don't know.

LKNJ: There's probably a lot to choose from.

RA: Yeah, there's too much to choose from.

KM: Like, is there one thing where you're just like, "Wow, that just blew my mind"?

RA: I feel like the real answer to that is you guys have to go through the Museum, and then you have to tell me what you chose.

LKNJ: That's your assignment.

RA: Report back!

KM: Will do!

LKNJ: Thank you so much! This has been a pleasure!

RA: You're welcome!

Interview End

After the interview, Katie and I spent several hours looking at everything in the Museum. Andrews was correct, there were too many things to choose from, and I felt like almost all of them made me think, "Wow, that just blew my mind!" After careful consideration, these are the objects Katie and I picked as the most memorable:

Katie: the skull simply labeled "Idiot" that is part of the wall of skulls that were used to disprove phrenology.

Myself: the panel explaining how liquid specimens are conserved.

So now it is your turn! Go check out the Mütter Museum for yourself and share with us your most memorable object on exhibit. If you're unable to make it in person, keep an eye out for virtual events here: <https://muttermuseum.org/events>.

Still can't attend or visit? Share a "Wow" worthy item from another institution, maybe even your own! Don't forget to tag us on social media (#SAASNAP)!