



A GREEN NEW DEAL FOR ARCHIVES

Eira Tansey

GEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION
MISSISSIPPI RIVER ALLUVIAL VALLEY
ANCIENT COURSES
**MISSISSIPPI RIVER MEANDER BELT
CAPE GIRARDEAU, MO. DONALDSONVILLE, LA.**
IN 15 SHEETS SHEET 11
SCALE IN MILES
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT, MISSISSIPPI RIVER COMMISSION
VICKSBURG, MISS. 1944
TO ACCOMPANY REPORT OF HAROLD N. FISK, PH.D., CONSULTANT
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY, BATON ROUGE, LA., DATED 1 DEC. 1944
R. H. S. - H. N. F. FILE NO. MRC/2888 GH. 55.K



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Cover image: Mississippi River Meander Belt, Harold Fisk, 1944. Mississippi
River Alluvial Valley, US Army Corps of Engineers, Plate 22, Sheet 11.

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Executive Summary

Archivists preserve the records of the past for the future through their stewardship of archives. As the world moves toward a future that looks increasingly uncertain, frightening, and chaotic because of the impacts of climate change, preservation of the historical record is essential both for continuity of cultural memory and civil society, and for documentation of the ongoing permanent alteration of natural and human environments.

Archives today face two intertwined existential problems: preparing for climate change and fully staffing archives. First, climate change poses immediate and long-term risks to archives. Immediate risks include fires, floods, and hurricanes, while long-term risks include sea-level rise and geographic relocation. Second, archives have suffered from decades of underfunding, leading to precarious staffing models at all but a few institutions. Most archives are not adequately staffed to deal with the normal influx of records, users, and technological change. Inadequate staffing also makes archives more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, as there are fewer staff either to undertake proactive planning or to respond to the aftermath of a disaster.

Policy makers, activists, and a variety of labor and environmental groups have been calling for a Green New Deal for several years. Taking inspiration from the New Deal programs launched by the US government in response to the Great Depression, a Green New Deal would address both growing societal inequality and the impacts of climate change. Recent Green New Deal proposals have focused on physical infrastructure and energy transition projects, although the original New Deal supported an astonishing variety of work across sectors—including education, arts and culture, history and writing, and libraries and archives.

Drawing inspiration from the original New Deal projects and reflecting on the relationship between labor challenges and climate challenges within archives, this publication is a proposal for addressing both within the framework of a Green New Deal. It is not intended to be a comprehensive history of the New Deal, nor is it a manual for reducing carbon emissions within archives. Instead, it offers a vision for a public policy program known as A Green New Deal for Archives, which would address the dual challenges of labor and climate change and would achieve its goals by significant new public investment in archives. This publication focuses primarily on archives of the United States, though the observations and recommendations may be applicable to other geographic locations and cultural sectors.

The first section opens with an extended discussion of how climate change and a destabilized workforce impact archives. Because of archives' unique role both in preserving cultural memory and in underpinning legal and civic life, they are a foundational infrastructure for a democratic society. Although there is a growing awareness of the importance of climate change for long-term archive planning, many of the existing plans focus on buildings and collections and rarely consider the people affected—in other words, staff and users. The most important thing archivists can do to prepare for climate change is to prioritize our chronic understaffing issues so we can continue to serve the public.

The second section explores three major historical precedents for public support for archives and documentary projects. The focus of this section is the Historical Records Survey, a Works Progress Administration program that began during the Great Depression. Between 1936 and 1942, the Historical Records Survey employed thousands of out-of-work individuals to survey and perform basic preservation work on local archives across the United States. Two additional projects also provide inspiration for documenting major environmental changes: the 1930s Farm Security Administration photographs and the 1970s Environmental Protection Agency's DOCUMERICA photographs.

The final section presents a public policy platform to address the current climate change and labor issues in archives with a brief exploration of budget considerations. This section outlines three foundational priorities of a Green New Deal for Archives:

1. Increase permanent staffing for archives that steward vital public records.
2. Create a nationwide plan for collection continuity and emergency response.
3. Develop climate change documentation projects organized by watersheds.

Abbreviations

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
AHA	American Historical Association
ARL	Association of Research Libraries
ASMP	American Society of Magazine Photographers
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and people of color
CoSA	Council of State Archivists
COSTEP MA	Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness in Massachusetts
EAD	Encoded Archival Description
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FSA	Farm Security Administration
FTE	Full-time employee
GIS	Geographic information system
HRS	Historical Records Survey
IMLS	Institute of Museum and Library Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JCMR	Joint Committee on Materials for Research
NAGARA	National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators
NARA	National Archives and Records Administration
NEH	National Endowment for the Humanities
NHPC	National Historical Publications Commission
NHPRC	National Historical Publications and Records Commission
NSF	National Science Foundation
PAC	Public Archives Commission
RA	Resettlement Administration
SAA	Society of American Archivists
SHRAB	State Historical Records Advisory Board
WPA	Works Progress Administration

Dual Threats to Archives

After her home was flooded in a hurricane, a single mother could not access her bank accounts for several weeks because all her identification documents, including her birth certificate, had washed away. Caring for her children, who were exhibiting signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, consumed all her energy. The only way to request replacement copies was through an online website. She normally used the public library's computers to access online forms, but her local branch had also been flooded and no one knew when it would reopen.

Across town at the city's main college, the minutes of the earliest trustee meetings had been lying in floodwaters for a week and were only slowly drying out in the cramped university archives reading room now filled with whirring fans powered by the last generator on sale at the local hardware store. The library director had not been able to hire a preservation librarian for two years because of hiring freezes. The university archivist hoped the minute books would be usable soon, as the current board had asked for information about the original donors to the college.

Insurance adjusters across the state were processing thousands of claims for property damage, which required access to century-old property survey and building records that had been only partially digitized and made available through the county recorder offices. Most of those records had made it through the storm safely, but after years of budget cuts, the historical records division in the worst affected county had only two remaining staff members. One had taken early retirement a week before the hurricane and could not be reached. The other had evacuated with his elderly mother to his brother's house and had no home to return to. Even if staffing returned to pre-recession levels, it would take three years to get through the backlog of requests from insurance adjusters.

This story is a composite sketch, but versions of it play out every year across the United States—and they will likely become uncomfortably common. Archives are foundational to a functional and accountable society. Within the cultural and legal context of the United States, archives exist across all institutions—government, tribal, nonprofit and for-profit corporations, education, and religious—and even outside formal institutions, in the case of community archives or activist archives. Archives preserve institutional records of enduring importance as well as records and other materials about individuals associated with various institutions and communities, including residents, voters, citizens, members, customers, employers, and students.

Archives preserve different types of records according to their core institutional mission. A government archive may include property records, vital records (e.g., birth, death, marriage), court records, and documents related to decisions made by government officials and agencies. Corporate archives preserve records of business decisions and external relationships. Educational archives preserve the records of student achievements, teaching pedagogy, and research accomplishments. Religious archives preserve records of congregants' major religious life cycle events and larger theological and organizational changes.

Archival records are essential to reconstructing the past in a way that makes it possible to understand present challenges. Archives preserve significant documentation across society recording how decisions have been made and why. These records are the key to transparency, accountability, and public oversight. Archival records have been used in countless ways to expose harm and redress injustice, such as to investigate redlining practices against Black home buyers, document the prevalence of industrial chemicals now known to pose dangers to humans and animals, and compensate the victims of Japanese American wartime incarceration. When records are lost, altered, withheld, or never created to begin with, the historical record is compromised, and our collective and individual rights may be in danger.

Archives today face two intertwined existential problems: preparing for climate change and fully staffing archives. First, climate change poses immediate and long-term risks to archives. Immediate risks include fires, floods, and hurricanes, while long-term risks include sea-level rise and geographic relocation. Second, archives have suffered from decades of underfunding, which has created precarious staffing models at all but a few institutions. Most archives are not adequately staffed to deal with the normal influx of records, users, and technological change. Inadequate staffing also makes archives more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, as fewer staff are available either to undertake proactive planning or to respond to the aftermath of a disaster.

Like crumbling bridges and roads that have suffered from decades of deferred maintenance, archives need significant new public investment to remain viable into the future. Most people recognize bridges and roads as essential infrastructure of the built environment. Archives ought to be considered forms of infrastructure that are just as critical for a functional civil society, as they allow citizens to understand the historical context of current events, substantiate their individual and collective rights, and prepare for future planning through broad access to archival records.

Although this publication specifically focuses on archives in the environmental, labor, and political context of the United States, archives and cultural heritage sites around the world face similar challenges. There are many lessons to be learned from archives in low-lying island nations as well as archives that have faced enormous disruptions as a result of armed conflict.

CLIMATE CHANGE RISKS

Archives contain unique materials that cannot be found elsewhere. A single burst pipe can cause enormous damage to an archive. A natural disaster that impacts an entire city or region may affect multiple archives. In a worst-case scenario, an archive subjected to a natural disaster may lose all its records. When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, many local governments experienced widespread damage to records, compromising the residents' ability to obtain replacement copies of vital records that they had lost in their own home floods (Sullivan 2005). Although few archives have managed to digitize the majority of their holdings, a municipal archive in New Jersey that had prioritized the digitization of property records found that easy access to these records was essential to Hurricane Sandy recovery efforts (Dickerson 2018). Because of climate change, future archives will likely face many more disasters in the coming decades.

After more than 30 years of research by international climate scientists, consensus is clear: climate change is already happening, and global temperatures have increased nearly 1°C in the last century (Masson-Delmotte et al. 2021, 5). Human activity is the unequivocal cause, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has found that “[g]lobal warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades” (Masson-Delmotte et al. 2021, 14). If major reductions to emissions and pledges for greenhouse gas emission reductions are not implemented, it is possible that the increase in warming could reach 3.2°C by 2100 (Shukla et al. 2022, 17). Every effort taken to address climate change within the next decade will determine how much worse things are in the long term (Pörtner et al. 2022, 13; Shukla et al. 2022, 14–16).

Where there are people, there are archival records that reflect their lives and the institutions that connect them. Climate change is reshaping the world not only through natural disasters, but also through its long-term impacts on residency patterns and the built environment. Scientists have found that even if global warming is kept to 1.5 C°, there will still be unavoidable hazards and risks to human and natural systems, including an “increasing occurrence of some extreme events” (Masson-Delmotte et al. 2021, 15). Extreme events include heavy precipitation, drought, hurricanes, and weather conditions that promote fire (Masson-Delmotte et al. 2021,

25-26). The IPCC estimates that approximately one billion people living in coastal areas across the world will be impacted by climate change (Pörtner et al. 2022, 17). As sea levels and temperatures rise, areas that have been inhabited by people for hundreds and even thousands of years will no longer be habitable. What will happen to their records?

Climate change is not just something happening in the distant future—it is already happening. Extreme events in the United States have cost \$1.1 trillion in the last 40 years. Climate change has affected and will continue to affect the intensity, frequency, and complexity of events such as heat waves, wildfires, droughts, hurricanes, tornados, and floods. Echoing the global findings, annual average temperatures have increased in the United States by 1.0°C over the last century and could increase by 2.5°C in the contiguous United States across all emissions scenarios (Wuebbles et al. 2017, 3–13).

Given the large geographic expanse of the United States and the many ecosystems within it, climate change presents significant regional variations. For example, scientists have found that “[h]eavy precipitation events in most parts of the United States have increased in both intensity and frequency since 1901. There are important regional differences in trends, with the largest increases occurring in the northeastern United States” (Wuebbles et al. 2017, 11). All states are experiencing the impacts of climate change already, although not at the same rate.

Researchers have found that 98.8 percent of US archives would be affected by at least one climate factor, such as storm surge, sea-level rise, increased rainfall, and increased temperature changes. Some archives will be more directly impacted than others, depending on their location (Mazurczyk et al. 2018). As certain areas become uninhabitable, serious questions about future archives in those locations arise. Research on the future of Pacific Island national archives raises questions about the protocols of transferring national archives to other legal jurisdictions (Gordon-Clark and Shurville 2010). Similar questions about the responsibility of state or county archives to rehome records from more vulnerable areas in their jurisdictions will almost certainly occur with more frequency in the United States.

Climate change is not a theoretical threat to archives: it is already impacting institutions at the highest levels (Tansey 2015). The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) climate adaptation plan discusses several climate-related hazards that have occurred just since 2006, including hurricane-related flooding at NARA facilities in New York and Texas, wildfires at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum and the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum in California, and sea-level rise vulnerability associated with the John F. Kennedy Presidential

Library and Museum in Boston and the National Archives in Washington, D.C. (NARA 2021, 20). There is no comprehensive annual accounting of the costs to archives of extreme weather events, but just as climate change disproportionately impacts impoverished and marginalized communities, archives with fewer resources (e.g., money, infrastructure, staffing) will likely bear the brunt of climate-fueled disasters.

Even in the absence of a headline-grabbing event such as a hurricane or a major flood, the combination of higher temperatures and more precipitation could tax many repositories' capacity to maintain appropriate environmental storage conditions for archives. Because archives contain unique and fragile materials, maintaining a consistent range of temperature and humidity levels is critical to prevent damage to them. Preservation professionals increasingly recognize the challenges of older standards that mandated a constant baseline for collection storage environments. New standards that have been published in recent years allow for some variability “based on a holistic approach that includes the most significant vulnerabilities of the stored materials, the capabilities of the HVAC [heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning] system, the external environment, and the limitations imposed by the building construction” (Image Permanence Institute 2012, 6).

Such a situation presents a conundrum: As climate change impacts archives' temperature and humidity control systems, it places more demands on these systems. Unless archives are using systems based on renewable resources, it also means that archives themselves are net contributors to carbon emissions, even as some may try to mitigate the effects of climate change. Because of this concern, archivists are increasingly considering their own contributions to carbon emissions (Goldman 2018; Pendergrass et al. 2019; Wolfe 2012).

ARCHIVIST WORKFORCE RISKS

Archivists have long struggled with chronic understaffing as a result of low funding levels for archives. Most archives are part of a larger institution and are thus dependent on funding from resource allocators who are not archivists. For example, a county commissioner may determine a county records office's budget, or the university librarian or provost may determine a university archive's budget. While archives may generate some degree of revenue through licensing or use fees, this revenue is not enough to make archives self-sustaining.

Because archives are not revenue generators, they are at a funding disadvantage in the neoliberal political and economic context of the United States (Cifor and Lee 2017). Neoliberalism is a widespread ideology that

emphasizes privatization and free markets and diminishes the role of public sector services because they do not replicate the logic of a profit-driven market economy. Of course, archives do not face this challenge alone—virtually all services to the larger public, such as public parks, public schools, public transportation, and public health care services, suffer from a similar lack of investment.

Forty years of political ideologies that prioritize austerity, budget cuts, and “doing more with less” instead of committing to significant and sustained public spending on public services and goods have decimated public institutions. Yet it is the records in those public institutions, supported by archivists who are public sector employees, that are most vital to the needs of everyday people. A joint policy statement adopted in 2014 by three major associations of American archivists called for a systematic study on the total funding costs for federal, state, and local government archives; increasing funding levels for archives to the level of funding for museums and libraries; and establishing per capita funding rates to support public archives. Although this position paper is nearly a decade old, its recommendations remain relevant—and yet to be completed (SAA, CoSA, and NAGARA 2014).

Insufficient staffing in government archives has serious ramifications for the public. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, many veterans were unable to secure adequate documentation to obtain veterans’ benefits and military burials because of insufficient staffing levels at the National Archives Personnel Records Center (Shane III 2021). A report on NARA’s challenges issued in November 2021 noted that the veteran records request backlog had “grown to ten times its pre-pandemic level and at full pre-pandemic staffing it would take [staff] over four years to work through such a large volume of requests” (Office of the Inspector General 2021, 4).

Staffing at the largest single employer of archive workers in the country, NARA, has remained flat for decades. Although staffing briefly increased between 2008 and 2011, numbers have dropped alarmingly in recent years. Current staffing levels are similar to those of two decades ago. In 1999, there were 2,629 staff. In 2009, there were 3,464 staff. In 2019, there were 2,612 staff. In 2022, there were 2,556 staff (NARA 2022a, 2022b; Worsham 2009). Although the issue of a pandemic-impacted workforce thrust NARA’s staffing issues into the public eye, problems with NARA’s funding and staffing long pre-date the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding for NARA has not meaningfully increased in the last 30 years, despite the fact that this period generated exponential growth in electronic records (Harper 2022).

State archives have also lost significant staffing numbers in recent years. The Council of State Archivists (CoSA) periodically issues comprehensive

reports about funding, staffing, programming, and statutory authority associated with state archives and records management programs. A 2007 report found that 15 state archives had lost 25 percent or more of their full-time employees (FTEs) since 1994. In 2019, CoSA found that most state archives had fewer than 20 FTEs. In 2021, eight state archives lost ten percent or more of their FTEs. Staffing challenges, particularly retention, remain among the top concerns reported by state archivists (CoSA 2007, 53; 2019, 5; 2021, 4; 2022).

Neoliberal logic affects archives regardless of their funding source. Even archives that are closely tied to private funding sources, such as those in private universities and corporations, often face funding pressures. Major research libraries have also registered significant staffing losses. According to the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) statistics, between 2012 and 2021, at least 25 ARL members reported special collections staffing losses (ARL 2021). Except for archives in the most generously funded elite private universities, archives everywhere operate on extremely thin staffing models.

Understaffing is linked with both archivist burnout and deterioration of the services offered to users (Warren and Scoulas 2021). In the most recent census taken of American archivists, 20 percent indicated that they planned to leave the profession within the next five years, and another 25 percent indicated that they were not sure about leaving the profession. After retirement, the biggest reason cited for leaving was burnout (Skinner and Hulbert 2022, 58–62). These figures should be cause for major alarm in the profession; the fact that nearly half of the profession is leaving, or has considered leaving, not only has the potential for significant brain drain, but also could exacerbate the existing understaffing crisis as vacant positions are frequently eliminated to balance budgets and approval for new positions is very difficult to obtain.

The increasing reliance on precarious labor (i.e., temporary, contract, or part-time jobs) worsens the thin staffing model in archives. Recent studies of archivist job postings have shown that about half of newly advertised positions are precarious positions with no long-term job security. Temporary positions in archives are often project-based. For example, the acquisition of a large collection that exceeds the processing capacity of permanent staff may result in the creation of a temporary project archivist position wholly focused on processing that specific collection. However, evidence is emerging that many temporary archivists are performing ongoing routine work associated with normal archives operations, but without the security of permanent employment (Bredbenner et al. 2022, 28). This kind of work has become much more widespread for today's early career professionals than it was for mid-career archivists when they entered the field (Bredbenner et al. 2022).

The dire staffing conditions across archives has serious ramifications for efforts to diversify the archival profession. The number of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) archivists in the profession has grown from 8 to 16 percent in the last 17 years (Skinner and Hulbert 2022, 3). This progress may be fragile in view of data indicating that BIPOC archivists feel less included than white archivists within the profession (Skinner and Hulbert 2022, 48). The American archives profession has historically been dominated by white archivists who primarily preserve the records of other white people and white institutions. Precarious employment conditions undermine the ability to diversify the archivist workforce, which has a ripple effect on the ongoing diversification of the archival record. Archivists from underrepresented communities have perspectives, connections, and cultural knowledge that must be retained to provide a comprehensive archival record that reflects our larger society.

In addition to negative impacts on individual archivists, precarious employment and chronic understaffing have repercussions for archival institutions and the users that they serve. Insufficient staffing is linked to persistent backlogs (i.e., materials that are held by the archives, but have not been processed and made available to researchers). Archivists find themselves in an impossible situation, constantly juggling the day-to-day needs of their users without being able to process the materials that would benefit the same community of users. Archives work is labor intensive, and little of it can be automated. Even digitization of analog archival records requires significant staffing to handle materials properly, create accurate metadata for discovery, and provide ongoing maintenance of digital files. Thus, technological solutions are not a substitute for sufficient staffing.

Understaffing and precarious employment undermine institutional knowledge, which is probably the most important skill archivists can possess. At even moderately sized archives, it can take years for archivists to become familiar with the entirety of the collections at their institution. A new archivist may take several hours to find the answer to a user's reference question, while an experienced archivist may be able to answer the same question in minutes. Experienced archivists accrue enormous knowledge about an institution's collections and how best to serve users. This knowledge is also vital when making connections with the local community, especially in the context of disaster preparedness.

CONTINUITY OF ARCHIVES

To date, there have been few American archives or special collections libraries that have proactively created and publicly disseminated a climate plan. Major examples of archives and special collections libraries that do have such plans include NARA and Emory University's Stuart A. Rose

Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (NARA 2021; O’Riordan et al. 2019; Rose Library 2022). However, neither of their plans comprehensively addresses the existing staffing situation or potential staffing gaps related to climate change preparation. As more institutions consider adopting climate plans, they must anticipate how the current staffing levels will support this work and what risks will remain without adequate staff. Staff will also require institutional support to sustain their own individual capacity to handle the acute (disasters) and the chronic (grief and trauma related to climate change-induced loss) aspects of climate adaptation.

Understaffing has become completely normalized within the archives profession. This chronic weakness may become archives’ undoing as climate change impacts archives more frequently and with greater severity. The combined effects of climate change and the instability of the archivist workforce present a profound dual threat to the continuity and accessibility of the historical record. A lack of staffing means that more materials are vulnerable to loss in case of a disaster. Major disasters will likely exacerbate staffing issues, because institutions may eliminate vacant positions and implement layoffs when facing enormous budget challenges.

Most archival repositories do not operate on a “one-in, one-out” collection growth model. Absent major deaccessioning or degrowth efforts, most archives are in a constant state of collections growth, even as their staffing has plateaued or shrunk. Many archivists work in repositories that not only have to steward collections acquired when more staff were available, but also must address new challenges related to digital preservation. In other words, the ever increasing quantity and complexity of archival records in most institutions are not matched by a parallel increase in the number and expertise of archival staff.

Just as future generations will inherit the poor decision-making around climate change of previous generations, so will future archivists constantly have to reckon with the decisions made by those archivists who do not adapt their practices in recognition of the climate crisis. Archives that rely heavily on precarious or understaffed workforces will not be able to meet the challenges of climate change as well as archives that maintain adequate and consistent levels of permanent staffing. Climate change is already here, as is a starkly destabilized archivist workforce. This reality is already affecting access to the historical record.

To understand how we can create a better future for archives, we can draw inspiration from looking back at the last century.

Historical Precedents for Public Support

The archives and documentary projects that grew out of the 1930s, a time of transformative environmental and labor tumult, offer inspiration for tackling archives' uncertain future. While the idea of a massive program to support archives, documentation projects, and environmental justice may seem far-fetched, there are numerous historical and ongoing precedents for such an approach. The most prolific projects took place during the Great Depression under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Decades after the Great Depression, the 1970s DOCUMERICA project attempted to replicate the success of the FSA photographs through the newly established Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Reviewing the challenges faced by past major archival and documentary efforts can provide guidance for a future Green New Deal for Archives.

WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION HISTORICAL RECORDS SURVEY

The Historical Records Survey (HRS) operated between 1936 and 1942. It was part of Federal Project Number One (also known as Federal One), one of many New Deal WPA programs that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) established to put unemployed Americans back to work during the Great Depression by launching a variety of government jobs programs. Federal One consisted of the Federal Art Project, Federal Theatre Project, Federal Music Project, Federal Writers' Project, and the Historical Records Survey. Although Federal One is best known today for producing WPA public artworks, publications like the American Guide Series, and oral histories like the ex-slave narratives, the HRS was astonishingly expansive in its reach and had a lasting influence on the American archival profession.

The HRS' most comprehensive program was its survey of county records across the United States. In addition to the county records survey, the HRS grew to include surveys of federal records outside Washington, D.C.; state and municipal records; church records; and manuscripts. It also supported highly localized projects, such as newspaper indexes and the American Imprints Inventory, a compilation of bibliographies of local publisher activity through the late 1800s.

There had been several archival survey projects in the decades before the HRS, and interest in developing a national survey of historical manuscripts and records had grown. The most comprehensive efforts were organized under the American Historical Association (AHA), which played a major

role in establishing the National Archives (Barrese 1980, 16). The AHA established historical records and public archives commissions in the late 1890s to advocate for archival materials and gather information on the whereabouts of archival records (Cox 1983). The first annual report, issued in 1901 from the AHA's Public Archives Commission (PAC), included information about state records; however, it was compiled primarily by university professors and students—not archivists (AHA 1901). The PAC went on to publish many more reports about local and state records over the following decades, and it served as the origin of the future Society of American Archivists (Barrese 1980, 35; Brooks 1947). Toward the end of its run, the PAC published a guide in 1932 about the preservation of local records for public officials (AHA and Newsome 1932).

In addition to archivists and historians, social workers and genealogists had advocated for more archival projects to provide employment relief. One of the most comprehensive pre-WPA archival survey relief projects began in 1933: an extensive survey, overseen by Pennsylvania state archivist Curtis Garrison, of local and state records as well as nongovernmental archival material. The project used standardized forms for collecting information, a model later used by the HRS. University of Pennsylvania law school professor Francis Philbrick contacted individuals from the AHA, the Library of Congress, and government officials about replicating the Pennsylvania survey on a national scale. Eventually, the project made its way onto the radar of Robert Binkley, chairman of the Joint Committee on Materials for Research (JCMR) (McDonald 1969, 752–755).

Binkley was a wide-ranging scholar, and his involvement proved to be a pivotal turning point in the origins of the HRS. The American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council had established the JCMR in 1929, and Binkley had assumed its chairmanship in 1931. When Binkley learned of Philbrick's proposal to expand Pennsylvania's survey to a nationwide project in 1934, he responded enthusiastically. Binkley had his own longstanding interest in finding ways to make research materials widely available, whether through surveys or new forms of technology (Barrese 1980, 17–19). Under Binkley's guidance, JCMR representatives, including Philbrick and archivist Theodore Schellenberg, quickly developed plans for a one-year national survey project of county archives that would employ 5,000 people. A new round of legislation that impacted federal relief projects in 1934 derailed the plan before it could start, however (Barrese 1980, 19–22; McDonald 1969, 755–757).

Fortunately, JCMR's proposal for surveying county records was not permanently abandoned. Shortly after the WPA was established, administrator Harry Hopkins developed an interest in the potential of archival projects for unemployment relief. An acquaintance of Hopkins

recommended Princeton University professor Luther Evans, whose university contract was in the process of being terminated; Evans believed this was probably because of his socialist views and public support for the New Deal. As Evans was drawn into the WPA's orbit, he turned to a longtime friend for advice on conducting a major archival project. That friend was Robert Binkley, whom he had first met while both were doctoral students at Stanford University. Binkley immediately suggested reviewing the prior plans developed by the JCMR (Barrese 1980, 7–9, 23–27; McDonald 1969, 759–760).

The HRS must be understood in the context of the larger development of the history of American archives and the professionalization of archivists. For decades, historians and genealogists, not government officials, had urged that archives be established at various levels of government. Archivists' earliest professional meetings were typically held under the umbrella of the AHA and its work with the PAC. But as archives began to be established and archivists began to identify themselves as a separate profession from historians, there was a major turning point in the American archival profession. The National Archives officially began as an independent agency in 1934. The Society of American Archivists (SAA) was founded in 1936, and Luther Evans was elected its first vice president (Barrese 1980, 17). The HRS was frequently discussed in *American Archivist*, SAA's journal, and at its annual meetings. The 1930s were arguably the most important decade for the US archival profession, and the HRS may not have enjoyed the success it did had it not been for the major interest in archives that was developing concurrently across the country.

The HRS officially began its work in 1936. It was initially part of the Federal Writer's Project, but Evans succeeded in making it an independent project of Federal One to give it greater autonomy. In addition to its headquarters in Washington, D.C., the HRS had state survey offices. Regional supervisors oversaw the work of the HRS across the country (Barrese 1980, 57, 60). To carry out the on-site records surveys that formed the backbone of the HRS, field workers filled out highly standardized forms. Standardizing the review process allowed the HRS both to hire workers who had never worked with historical records and to collect information consistently for future publication. Different forms existed for different types of records, such as bound and unbound records, individual manuscripts, maps, photographs, and newspapers. There were even forms that workers filled out to describe the buildings in which the records were stored. HRS field workers would often sketch drawings of offices to indicate the location of record storage areas.

Once records had been surveyed and forms completed, the information was sent to state editorial offices. Workers there handled compilation and editing, and often sent work back to the field or to Washington, D.C., for further revisions. The goal was to publish inventories from the surveyed records.

Because a considerable amount of editing, revision, research, fact-checking, and cross-referencing was required, these final stages of work progressed much more slowly than the initial collection of survey data. Most published volumes contained comprehensive information about the organization of the local government and an extensive history of the jurisdiction, making them not just useful inventories of records, but valuable research resources (McDonald 1969, 796–797).

What makes the HRS so remarkable is the number of archives workers it employed over its six-year run. At times, it even exceeded the estimated current 6,000 archivists working today, nearly 90 years after the program began (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2021). The HRS staffing peaked in December of 1938 when it employed nearly 8,800 workers, although staffing levels were usually between 3,000 and 4,000 (Barrese 1980, 59; WPA 1944). WPA projects were required to employ primarily relief labor (i.e., unemployed individuals) and were limited in how much nonrelief labor they could employ. When relief workers were offered private employment, they had to leave the WPA project. Therefore, as unemployment rates fluctuated during the Great Depression, so did the number of workers that the HRS could employ.

Unlike other Federal One projects that required specialized individuals, such as musicians or actors, the HRS employed a wide variety of white-collar workers (Barrese 1980, 6). Because it did not have to budget for the expenses of live performances, the HRS could employ more workers more cheaply and across greater geographic areas than other Federal One projects. Thus, WPA officials authorized more employees to work for the HRS than the other Federal One projects that are more widely known (Peterson 1974, 237).

By the time the HRS was completed in 1942, 90 percent of the 3,066 US counties had been surveyed by HRS field workers (McDonald 1969, 800–801). In addition, the HRS represented one of the most comprehensive preservation programs ever carried out for local government records. Survey workers often had to take basic preservation measures simply to inventory the records, meaning vast quantities of ledgers and record boxes were cleaned and organized. Some of the HRS activities even aided in disaster response—one project in Indiana involved microfilming 200,000 records, an activity that proved well worthwhile after many of the records were lost following the 1937 Ohio River flood (McDonald 1969, 816).

Despite these impressive numbers, historians and archivists have drawn mixed conclusions regarding the legacy of the HRS. Even though nearly every US county was surveyed, only about 20 percent of the surveys were compiled and published in county-level inventories (Barrese 1980, 92–93). The reason for this gap was that staffing was much more difficult on the publishing side of the Survey than on the fieldwork side. HRS officials had

developed an assembly line style system using standardized procedures and templates to survey records in the field, but it was difficult to apply the same level of standardization to the publication of the survey records as well as to find enough skilled editors (Barrese 1980, 84–85).

Toward its end, the HRS program experienced two major disruptions. Both are instructive for what they reveal about the enduring importance of local infrastructure and vital records. First, the Emergency Relief Act of 1939 eliminated federal sponsorship of the WPA Federal One projects, which effectively abolished the other Federal One projects. Thanks to the decentralized nature of archival work (such as the existence of many state archives) and the Survey's network of state and local organizations, HRS activities were able to continue with the support of local sponsors (Barrese 1980, 67; McDonald 1969, 786).

Unfortunately, the end of federal sponsorship meant HRS never fully launched a promising new project. In late 1938, plans were made with the guidance of historian Carter Woodson to survey archival manuscript materials related to Black life and history for potential deposit in the Library of Congress, an effort Woodson had pursued for years before the HRS (Goggin 1985; Woodson 1930). When federal sponsorship ended, only programs with state and local sponsorship continued (Barrese 1980, 46–47). Given the resistance of several Southern states to incorporating aspects of Black life into other WPA projects, it is unlikely that this project could ever have been carried out without federal sponsorship (Sklaroff 2009, 118–119). The plans for the program were eventually abandoned in 1940 (McDonald 1969, 807).

The second major disruption was the prospect of US entry into World War II. As war planning began, the HRS developed plans for the coordination of vital records necessary for draft boards, the collection of information for civil defense organizations, and the evacuation of vital records threatened by war. By 1940, the HRS was a shadow of its former self, but it was hoped that—if it could last through the war—the HRS could finish the inventories and other incomplete work after the war. Instead, the HRS effectively came to an end in 1942 with the loss of key leaders, resulting in the eventual termination of the program (Barrese 1980, 75; McDonald 1969, 825).

Interest in the HRS revived in the 1970s when archivist Leonard Rapport reported on his attempts to track down unpublished HRS inventories (Rapport 1974). Other archivists who had been on a 1973 SAA conference panel with Rapport also published information about the legacy of the HRS in various states (Bowie 1974; Papenfuse 1974; Peterson 1974). In 1977, SAA received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to publish a guide on the unpublished HRS inventories known to still exist in archives across the country (Hefner and SAA 1980). Organized by state,

the 1980 guide contains information about the disposition of each state's HRS records. Some states reported that the majority of their HRS records had been lost or destroyed. In a survey of repositories represented in the 1980 guide, archivists reported that they believed the HRS inventories remained valuable, but that they were underutilized by researchers (Adams 1987). Although the HRS has not garnered much sustained attention from archivists in recent decades, it remains a rich source for inspiration for its ambitious goals. Viewed with the hindsight of current standards such as Encoded Archival Description (EAD) and federated finding aid projects, the HRS was arguably the first major US archival network project, the kind of project that archivists now take for granted to increase user access to records through standardized forms of descriptive access.

ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION PROJECTS

Federal government agencies have directed two major environmental documentary photography projects. Both were initiated during periods of significant environmental change in the United States that prompted federal intervention and new policymaking for land use, agriculture, and pollution. These two projects are the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographs and the DOCUMERICA photographs. Both created a comprehensive photographic portrait of the nation during two major turning points in US environmental history: (1) the Great Depression and Dust Bowl during the 1930s with the response of FDR's New Deal and (2) the crisis of air and water pollution in the 1970s with the establishment of the EPA.

Farm Security Administration Photographs

The Dust Bowl was one of the greatest environmental catastrophes in American history. A series of dust storms crossed the Great Plains during the 1930s, primarily caused by drought combined with the topsoil erosion resulting from agricultural practices. Some storms were so vast that they carried pollution as far as New York City. The dust storms ruined crops and made the already precarious occupation of small-scale farming unworkable for vast numbers of farmers. Displaced by the effects of the dust storms, millions of farmers became migrant laborers. FDR's government responded to the labor and environmental devastation by implementing a variety of agricultural controls, land conservation practices, and relocation efforts. The Resettlement Administration (RA) was one of the New Deal's major agencies designated to assist the tenant farmers and migrant laborers impacted by the Dust Bowl (National Drought Mitigation Center 2022; Sparrow 2018).

The Farm Security Administration (FSA) photography project had originated in the RA under the direction of Roy Stryker. He was a former student of Rex Tugwell, a Columbia University economics professor who was part of FDR's so-called brain trust. At Columbia, where he also taught, Stryker was



"Heavy black clouds of dust rising over the Texas Panhandle, Texas." Arthur Rothstein, 1936. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives.

deeply influenced by New York's documentary photographers such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, and he became increasingly interested in the use of photography for economic education. When Stryker was brought on to start the RA photography project in 1935, he was given considerable autonomy, with the understanding that the photographs should demonstrate both the need for and the impact of New Deal relief programs, particularly for poor farmers (Stryker and Wood 1973).

RA was one of the more controversial agencies within the New Deal, as its emphasis on collective and cooperative alternatives to free-market capitalist forms of production invoked allegations of communism against its programs and Tugwell's leadership. RA was absorbed into the Department of Agriculture in December 1936, at which point Tugwell resigned. Stryker stayed on in his capacity as director of the photography project, and RA changed its name to the Farm Security Administration in September 1937 (Carlebach 1988). Photographers working with the RA and FSA produced some of the most iconic images in American photography. Stryker hired several photographers who became quite well-known, including Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Gordon Parks, and Arthur Rothstein. FSA photographers shot in both urban and rural locations, although small towns and rural settings constituted the majority of photographic assignments, reflecting the agency's original mission to aid rural residents (Natanson 1992, 71–72). Photographers were expected



"Daytona Beach, Florida. Woman sitting on her porch on Sunday morning." Gordon Parks, 1943. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives.

to spend a significant amount of time researching the geography and cultural context of their field assignments. Despite Stryker's indifference to the documentation of Black individuals and communities, several photographers had an active and enthusiastic interest in this area. Documentation of Black life made up about 10 percent of the final FSA photographic file (Natanson 1992, 53–66).

Photographers followed shooting scripts developed by Stryker and were advised to document everything from particular aspects of the landscape to the changes in people's expressions, depending on whether they were on the job or at leisure (Stryker and Wood 1973, 187). Photographers often worked in the field for months at a time, sending images back to the D.C. headquarters where Stryker reviewed them to determine which were to be printed and distributed. Negatives of images that were not selected for further dissemination were hole-punched to indicate their unsuitability (Library of Congress n.d.).

FSA photographs were widely disseminated during the Great Depression. The agency used the photographs to illustrate numerous government publications and made the photographs available to newspapers and magazines. Some photographers had editorial and logistical conflicts with Stryker, but the FSA project was overall a highly successful government project that achieved its original mission: to convince Americans of the need for massive government intervention to address issues of employment and environmental conservation (Carlebach 1988). The photographs had widespread influence both outside and inside government; John Steinbeck, for example, drew inspiration from the images in his preparations for writing *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Stryker collaborated with Archibald MacLeish (the Librarian of Congress) on a publication of FSA photographs (Stryker and Wood 1973).



"Gas Station. Kern County, California." Dorothea Lange, 1938. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives.

Much like the HRS, the FSA photography project was cut back significantly following the US entry into World War II. It was incorporated into the Office of War Information in 1942, and Stryker left the project in 1943. (He later directed photography projects for Standard Oil.) Over the course of the FSA photography project, more than 270,000 images were created. At the end of the project, the photographic negatives were in danger of being lost entirely, as the Federal Records Act mandating the transfer of federal agency records to the National Archives was not enacted until 1950. The Library of Congress received about 175,000 negatives in 1944 (Library of Congress n.d.; Stryker and Wood 1973).

DOCUMERICA

The expansive photography project DOCUMERICA was an early project of the newly formed EPA. It was created to provide a “visual baseline” of the environment prior to the implementation of major federal pollution laws such as the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act (Berman and Cronin 2018). Gifford Hampshire, deputy director for Public Affairs at the EPA, grew up in Dust Bowl Kansas and was deeply influenced by the FSA photography project. Before he went to work at the newly established EPA, he had worked for Fairchild Camera, National Geographic, and the Food and Drug Administration. When he approached EPA administrator William Ruckelshaus with a proposal for a photography project inspired by the FSA photographs, Ruckelshaus was supportive. The project was announced in 1971 (Bustard and Potter 2013, 52–53).

DOCUMERICA photographers created significant portfolios documenting environmental concerns such as strip mining in Appalachia, air pollution in major urban areas, and oil spills in waterways. Like FSA photographers, they also documented daily life in communities across the United States. The photographs fell into four broad categories: wilderness, regulation, the built environment, and the social environment. More than 70 DOCUMERICA photographers worked between 1972 and 1977 on assignments in all 50 states. By the end of the project, more than 20,000 images had been created (Shubinski 2009; Simmons 2009).

The FSA photographs project inspired DOCUMERICA, but the logistics, cultural context, and editorial approaches of the two projects were markedly different. Historians have attributed these differences for the limited success of DOCUMERICA compared with that of the FSA. The FSA photographers were agency employees who developed strong and long-lasting working relationships with Roy Stryker, whereas DOCUMERICA photographers were typically freelance photographers who worked on short 20- to 30-day assignments. Further, Hampshire exerted far less ideological and aesthetic editorial control over DOCUMERICA’s output. In addition,



"Spring roundup at Paiute-owned cattle begins at Sutcliffe Payramid Lake Indian Reservation."
 Jonas Dovydenas, 1973. DOCUMERICA: The Environmental Protection Agency's Program to
 Photographically Document Subjects of Environmental Concern, National Archives.

photography had less cultural relevance as a medium in the 1970s than it did in the 1930s (Berman and Cronin 2018). By the 1970s, television had displaced photography as the major form of image-based media, and the reach of photographic magazines had started to decline.

Hampshire's goal of replicating the FSA project faced early challenges because of the changed status and labor concerns of professional photographers in the 1970s. Originally, Hampshire had sought to cultivate photographers through the American Society of Magazine Photographers (ASMP), but the Society withdrew its initial approval when it became clear that the government would retain most of the rights to the images. Hampshire had also proposed a computerized database to index DOCUMERICA photographs, which led to concerns from ASMP and its constituents that the government was effectively establishing an enormous resource for free stock photography. The breakdown between the ASMP and DOCUMERICA meant that the project relied on more amateur and lesser known photographers than initially envisioned, and it removed a major source of industry support for the project (Shubinski 2009).

The political context of the 1970s was starkly different from that of the 1930s New Deal. In the 1930s, the government had been able to position itself through FDR's New Deal political framework as the antidote to the failures of the private market. Following the political upheavals of the 1960s, however, public distrust of the government had increased. In

addition, the time at which DOCUMERICA launched overlapped with the 1970s oil embargo and increasing ambivalence about the role of industry and state regulation in American life (Wellum 2017). The approaches of the FSA and DOCUMERICA toward potential audiences also had different implications. FSA photographs were largely sympathetic to their subjects and functioned as a powerful tool of persuasion for middle-class viewers that the poor needed government support and environmental restoration, whereas DOCUMERICA photographs implicated many of their viewers as part of the problem of environmental devastation. As Shubinski wrote, “In the Documerica photographs, the government was implicitly accused of not doing enough, or even of fostering environmental destruction by colluding with and turning a blind eye to industry. Even when the EPA took action, its regulatory role of setting limits and imposing punishments often made it seem like a nagging rather than a benevolent parent. Unlike the FSA, it offered regulation, but not relief” (2009, 6).

Owing to the challenges it experienced from the outset, DOCUMERICA did not last anywhere near as long as originally envisioned. It was intended to be a decade-long project, but budget cuts began almost as soon as the project began. William Ruckelshaus left the EPA in 1973, and the project unofficially ended in 1975—though it was not officially terminated until 1977 (Shubinski 2009, 3). Although DOCUMERICA images did not enter contemporary American consciousness to the same degree as the FSA photographs, recent traveling exhibits of them have given them an afterlife, and digitized versions of them can be seen on NARA’s website (Simmons 2009; Smithsonian Institution 2014). DOCUMERICA was also the last major environmental documentary effort organized and carried out by a federal agency.

Public Policy Platform

With the dual crises of climate change and archivist workforce instability, the American archives profession is on the precipice of major existential challenges. But as has been seen with the HRS, as well as the FSA and the DOCUMERICA photographs, there is a precedent for investment to shore up records and create new documentation projects. Just as incremental improvements have not been enough to stem global warming or to reduce exploitation of workers, incremental changes are unlikely to provide the lifeline that archives and archivists desperately need. It is essential to consider potential public policy proposals, as well as the challenges and opportunities for charting a new way forward.

GREEN NEW DEAL FOR ARCHIVES FOUNDATIONAL POLICY

A comprehensive program is necessary to bolster archives and archivists to meet the challenges of the future. A Green New Deal for Archives would strengthen archives with people power and plans for climate change, and it would develop documentary projects to capture this critical movement in climatic history. It would have three priorities:

1. Increase permanent staffing for archives that steward vital public records.
2. Create a nationwide plan for collection continuity and emergency response.
3. Develop climate change documentation projects organized by watersheds.

Increased Permanent Staffing for Archives That Steward Vital Public Records

Because archives exist across the public and private sector, there is no unified way to increase funding for staffing at all archives that serve the American public. However, some archives serve a vast number of diverse users through their stewardship of vital records. Therefore, increasing funding for those entities should be a top priority. These entities include the National Archives, state government archives, and local government archives.

According to SAA, vital records can constitute two major groups: those “that [document] significant life events, including births, deaths, marriages, and divorces” and those that are “necessary to begin recovery of business after a disaster, as well as a record necessary to protect the assets, obligations, and resources of an organization” (SAA n.d.). Vital records are statutorily defined for the National Archives as “essential agency records that are needed to meet operational responsibilities under national security emergencies or other emergency conditions (emergency operating records) or to protect

the legal and financial rights of the Government and those affected by Government activities (legal and financial rights records)” (Office of the Federal Register 2011, 589).

The amount of stewardship required by vital records increases over time, as new records are always being added to previous records. It would be logical to assume that as archives grow in volume over time, staffing would increase as well. This is not the case. Despite historically low levels of full-time permanent staff, many archives are now stewarding more records than ever in ever more complex digital formats. NARA, for example, has had flat staffing levels for more than 20 years, despite being charged with stewarding an enormous and increasing volume of electronic records. While NARA is often in the news for its role in assuring the preservation of records from the President and federal agencies, the agency also preserves countless vital records for millions of Americans, particularly those who have served in the armed forces.

In addition to vital records, federal, state, and local archives are responsible for significant records related to environmental protection. Preservation and access to these records are essential to documenting changes to ecological systems. These records can also aid in efforts to ensure environmental justice so that communities disproportionately impacted by pollution and climate change have access to data and documentation to substantiate their claims. The role of recordkeeping laws and the importance of environmental documentation can be seen in the custodial history of DOCUMERICA. When the National Archives evaluated EPA’s records practices in 1992, it noted that it had to intervene to prevent EPA from violating the Federal Records Act by transferring the DOCUMERICA photographs to a private institution (NARA 1992). The lack of dedicated archives and records management staff compromises the enforcement of existing recordkeeping statutes and regulations.

In a 2014 statement, SAA, CoSA, and the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) approved an issue brief that called for establishing per capita funding levels for federal, state, and local archives. The brief noted that, based on fiscal year (FY) 2012 funding, the United States spent \$1.24 per capita for the National Archives and an average of 43 cents per state resident for state archives. Compared with other agencies such as the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress, NARA received lower levels of funding (SAA, CoSA, and NARA 2014). As NARA’s funding levels remain flat, archival spending per capita has almost certainly decreased, particularly in view of inflation and population growth over the last decade (National Security Archive 2022).

In recent years, the archival profession has become more comfortable with articulating the costs of collection stewardship. For example, OCLC has developed a tool for projecting the costs of processing a collection, an invaluable part of planning for collection development and backlog management. However, most of the recommended labor metrics within the archives field revolve around processing projects, which are most easily made precarious through the use of contingent labor. And for the most difficult metrics to estimate, such as reference questions for which permanent staff who have deep institutional knowledge are vital, there has been little discussion of minimum staffing.

Although most of the work on an archival collection usually occurs during processing, all collections continue to require attention from permanent staff long after they have been processed, whether for digitization, preservation, or simply for ongoing collection management. Yet there are no established standards for the minimum number of archives staff necessary for permanent staffing. Some professions have proposed staffing ratios to ensure that working conditions do not reach crisis levels. Staffing ratios are an increasingly popular collective bargaining demand for nursing unions, as nurses rightfully argue that chronic understaffing in hospitals can create dangerous conditions for patient care. Although archives do not have the same degree of regulation that health care does, the archival profession may find it useful to pursue the concept of staffing ratios.

Archive staffing ratios could be based on different factors, such as staff to total volume of records or staff to anticipated audience of users/frequency of use. Perhaps there should be one archivist for every 50,000 state residents. One challenge to the use of a staffing ratio based on anticipated use is that a given population could decrease, but the volume of records would remain the same or could even increase. The best staffing ratio may be one that combines both factors, with staff to volume of records (e.g., a floor) as a minimum staffing ratio and staff to anticipated use as a preferred staffing ratio.

Currently, every archive that stewards vital records in the public interest needs more staff. What would a fully staffed archive look like? The following proposal is an attempt at establishing such a baseline:

1. *Enough staff on hand to keep the archive open seven days a week, including evening hours.* Although many archives have digitized portions of their analog materials, most archival records can be accessed only by visiting an archive in person. Many archives serving the public rarely have consistent weekend and evening hours, limiting their accessibility to entire groups of users, particularly many working-class users.

2. *Enough staff on hand to respond to routine reference and scanning requests within five business days.* Many bureaucratic processes require users to obtain copies of vital records, and missing a deadline for turning in paperwork can mean the loss of critical benefits or other personal setbacks. Many archives have records at offsite storage facilities, and it can take several days to retrieve them. As an archivist's attention is always pulled in multiple directions, staffing levels need to be strong enough to ensure that even when staff are on leave or are interrupted, there are still enough staff to keep turnaround times to five business days.
3. *Enough staff on hand to ensure that newly acquired records are processed within six months of receipt.* Backlog management is a critical component of disaster preparedness, because problems can be magnified when materials that have not been fully inventoried and processed are damaged.

Creation of a Nationwide Plan for Collection Continuity and Emergency Response

The archives profession needs a nationwide plan for ensuring collection continuity in the face of climate change. The plan should include a range of essential activities that guarantee the survival of critical archival collections, whether through sustainable preservation and conservation measures or through physical relocation or institutional transfer. Collection continuity requires appropriate storage conditions for archival records, disaster response measures, and long-term preservation planning.

Fortunately, models for funding preservation and conservation measures at the local level (e.g., grant programs) already exist. As the major federal funding agencies for archives—the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), NEH, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)—all have corresponding state partners, these partners could provide a vehicle through which to direct expanded funding to support the most vulnerable small archives in local jurisdictions. One area of concern is that funding and capacity differ among state partners of federal agencies. In the summer of 2022, CoSA found that 40 percent of survey respondents reported that their State Historical Records Advisory Boards (SHRABs), which exist to distribute NHPRC funding at the state level, are currently inactive (CoSA 2022).

Many existing models for disaster response networks among cultural heritage institutions could be expanded or replicated elsewhere. The Heritage Emergency National Task Force was established in 1995 and is cosponsored by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Smithsonian Institution. It provides training and resources to

its 60 national organization and federal agency members (Smithsonian Institution 2021). The largest coordinating organization for local and regional disaster response networks is the Alliance for Response, an initiative started in 2003 and managed by the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation (American Institute for Conservation and Foundation for Advancement in Conservation 2023). Disaster response networks such as Coordinated Statewide Emergency Preparedness in Massachusetts (COSTEP MA) proactively bring together emergency management officials and cultural heritage institution leaders for emergency planning so that, when disaster strikes, they know how to work together most effectively.

Even if funding is expanded, the question of coordinating long-term collection continuity for locations that may no longer be able to house collections remains unaddressed. For archives on the frontlines of sea-level rise or facing other threats, the best-case scenario may be that the institution should move to higher ground or to a safer location. However, a move may not be possible for many archives, which will then have to determine what to do with their collections if they face closure or downsizing. In the starkest circumstances in which an entire community relocates or is abandoned, where should the local records be transferred?

There is no single federal agency or national plan that coordinates relocation of residential communities, a process also known as managed retreat (US Government Accountability Office 2020). As a result, relocation decisions are usually a reaction to a major disaster. Some municipalities and state governments have started to address the managed retreat process, but without a national plan, such activities will result in a patchwork of different approaches. Similarly, there is no current national framework for the permanent relocation of collections, either by keeping them within the same custodial organization or by transferring them to other institutions. Without national coordination across the archives profession, decisions about archival relocation are likely to be inconsistent across the country. Jurisdictions with strong archival associations and support for archives may be better positioned to find ways to relocate archival records. But what about archives in more isolated jurisdictions? Or what happens when an archive may have to disband because there is no path to relocation? Can archives from one political jurisdiction be easily transferred to another if there are different laws, regulations, and practices related to recordkeeping?

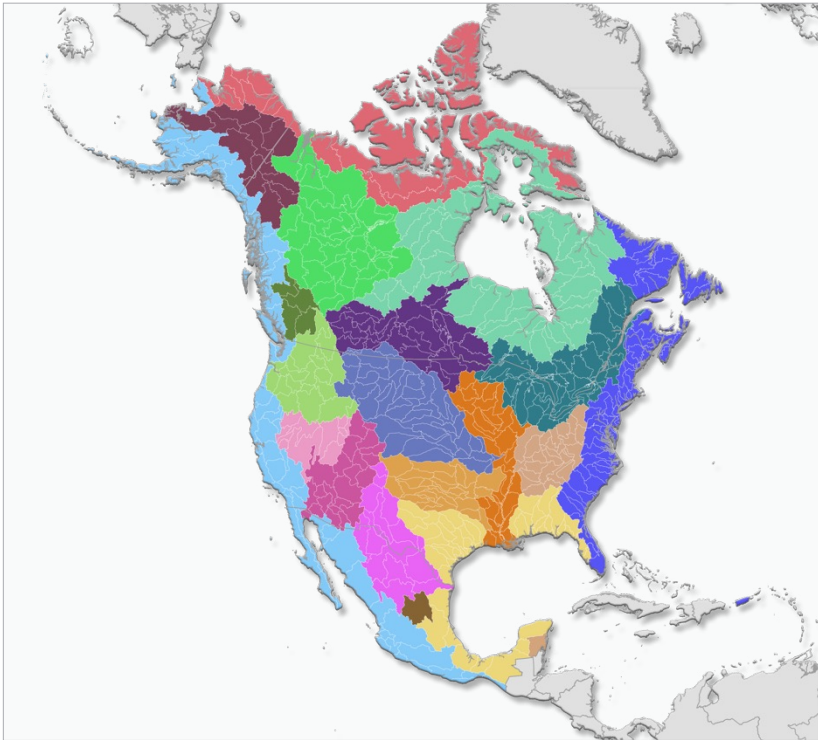
This proposal would likely require an unprecedented level of coordination among funding agencies, archives associations, and other entities. Ideally, this work should begin as soon as possible to allow for proactive planning

instead of reactive decisions made during emergencies. Such an endeavor would need to be charged with the following responsibilities:

1. Identifying safe harbor institutions to be designated as receiving repositories for collections that their original institutions can no longer manage, and
2. Passing model legislation that would facilitate the legal transfer of records across jurisdictions.

Development of Climate Change Documentation Projects Organized by Watersheds

Building on projects like the HRS, the FSA photographs, and DOCUMERICA, the final priority of a Green New Deal for Archives would be documenting climate change impacts by surveying existing archival collections and expanding new documentary projects and archival acquisition efforts. A new set of documentary projects could be organized by watersheds. According to the US Geological Survey, “a watershed is an



Map illustrating one set of watershed boundaries in the continental United States (US Geological Survey 2019)

area of land that drains all the streams and rainfall to a common outlet such as the outflow of a reservoir, mouth of a bay, or any point along a stream channel” (US Geological Survey 2019). Since John Wesley Powell’s work on western watersheds, water managers have pointed out that historical methods for drawing political jurisdictions often make water management enormously complex. Water experts have proposed reorganizing the United States according to its watersheds. For example, one model would replace 50 states with 36 watershed-based states (Kauffman 2002).

Within the United States there are 21 major hydrologic units, which are made up of 221 smaller watersheds (US Geological Survey 2022). Several of these watersheds cross international borders. For those watersheds, a joint cooperative agreement would be needed. Fortunately, there are precedents for these agreements, such as the Great Lakes–St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement, which is recognized by a number of US state governments and Canadian provincial governments (Conference of Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers n.d.).

The impacts of climate change also cross political jurisdictions, rendering climate change archives based on political jurisdictions less useful than those based on the boundaries of the natural world. Documentation projects organized by watersheds would be a powerful counterweight to environmental records historically organized by political jurisdiction and would honor the fact that water is the source of all life.

There is a rich history of subject-specific survey and documentation strategies with a geographic focus—for example, labor records in Ohio undertaken by the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL–CIO) and the Ohio Historical Society, or archives related to African Americans in Chicago undertaken by the Black Metropolis Research Consortium (Meade and Myers 1980; Walker-McWilliams 2021). These surveys and documentation strategy projects have often resulted in newly available archival materials for users and have developed archivists’ preservation and advocacy skills. In the spirit of the HRS, dedicated archivists for each watershed would be hired to conduct the following activities:

- Survey the existing natural and environmental science records documenting the watershed, including climatological, hydrological, geological, and biological records.
- Review records documenting human-environment interaction, such as agricultural use, land use, transportation, and urban planning, with a particular focus on environmental justice, that is, an awareness that communities of color, low-income areas, and tribal lands are often disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation (EPA 2022).

- Identify repositories and records in each watershed that are the most vulnerable to climate change and labor shortages.
- Work with institutional archivists and subject matter experts to identify current recordkeeping gaps and develop local documentation projects to ensure that the impact of climate change in each watershed is fully documented.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

All three of the archives policy proposals described—increasing permanent staffing for archives that steward vital public records, creating a nationwide plan for collection continuity and emergency response, and developing climate change documentation projects organized by watersheds—would require unprecedented and transformational funding for archives at a level that has rarely been seen in the history of the United States. The collective budgets of the United States across federal, state, and local governments in recent decades reflect a prevalent disregard for the preservation of our shared collective documentary memory. Because federal, state, and local funding sources for archives are already so limited, any meaningful expansion of funding at any of these levels has the potential to transform the landscape of archives stability in the country.

The idea that budgets are moral documents has a long history, stretching back to civil rights activists who promoted an aspirational “Freedom Budget for All Americans.” Labor and civil rights leaders A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin proposed the Freedom Budget. Published in 1967 with an introduction from Martin Luther King, Jr., it called for a budget that would eliminate poverty within a decade. The Freedom Budget also called for a jobs guarantee for all those capable of work, a universal basic income for those who could not work, affordable housing, accessible health care, environmental regulation, and improvements in transportation infrastructure. In describing the Freedom Budget, Randolph wrote, “It is not visionary or utopian. It is feasible. It is concrete. ... It tells how these can be achieved. And it places the responsibility for leadership with the Federal Government, which alone has the resources equal to the task” (Randolph and Rustin 1967).

The morality of budgets has been recognized most recently by progressive congressional leaders (Jayapal 2022; Ocasio-Cortez 2021). A Green New Deal for Archives will require new budgetary approaches to funding archives. This path to a Green New Deal for Archives cannot happen in a vacuum; it can be achieved only as part of a larger long-term political project to reassert the importance of public services and spaces. Archivists can help by joining in larger political efforts to shape and influence a Green New Deal to address our crumbling infrastructure, increase public sector staffing, renew

the ability of workers to unionize, and even consider more radical measures such as a reduction in the work week or the provision of a universal basic income.

The American archival profession places access to and use of archival records among the highest professional values. The larger political project of a Green New Deal may eliminate barriers to the use of archival records and increase user access by freeing up the most precious nonrenewable resource of all—*time*. How many potential users of archives cannot visit in person because they must work multiple jobs to stay afloat? If they had a living wage and a shorter work week, could they find time to finally work on their family genealogy or local history project? Would increasing staff so that archives could have more open hours to accommodate evening and weekend schedules and to digitize more material for greater accessibility expand the reach of archives?

The archive landscape looks radically different today than it did during the original New Deal, when SAA and the National Archives were both in their infancy. Today, there are many federal and state agencies that support archives. Public funding sources that already support archival work in the public interest would be ideal sites for vastly expanded support. Now there are also many private philanthropic organizations that support cultural heritage institutions, including archives.

A Green New Deal for Archives must have significant expansion of public funding. Archives are as important to the public as schools, libraries, parks, and medical services, and thus they should be supported by a radical expansion of foundational public support by federal, state, and local governments. This is especially true for enormous swathes of vital records such as property records; birth, death, and marriage records; and other legal records stewarded by government archives. Funding for the stewardship of these records is essential to the continuity of government and civil society and to ensuring people's legal rights.

PUBLIC FUNDING SOURCES FOR ARCHIVES

Unlike other major countries, the United States does not have an overarching national cultural policy and system of funding. Cultural policy in the United States is decentralized by design. Although public sources of funding are vital to cultural heritage organizations, most such organizations draw from a mix of public and private funding sources. Public funding can include federal, state, and local sources. Among the federal funding sources that support the work of archives across the country are the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (part of NARA), NEH, and IMLS. Each of these agencies maintains a series of grant

programs to which archivists and other cultural heritage professionals can apply for grant funding to support specific projects. Many of these grant programs support preservation and disaster response activities, which are essential to climate change adaptation. These three federal funding sources also have corresponding state level committees that direct additional funding. Despite persistent funding challenges, even during the early shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IMLS and NEH received additional funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan—measures that helped make it clear that funding cultural heritage is important in the context of crisis (IMLS 2020; NEH 2020, 2021).

National Historical Publications and Records Commission

The legislation that established the National Archives in 1934 also established the National Historical Publications Commission (NHPC). The NHPC had limited activities until legislation was passed appropriating funds to the commission, and it began making federal grant awards in 1964. Early on, the NHPC's activities primarily supported the publication of edited volumes of historical documents and the microfilming of various collections (Burke 2000). By the 1960s, archivists began to focus on how best to leverage federal funds for the benefit of local communities; the library and architectural preservation communities were undertaking similar efforts. The American Bicentennial provided an opportune moment to consolidate these efforts. Archivists from SAA joined forces with the Organization of American Historians and the AHA to draft legislation that would create a National Historical Records Commission (Lee 1972).

The draft legislation was eventually modified to expand the scope of the original NHPC. The expanded commission thus became the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. With the enlarged scope, the NHPRC was charged with funding historical records programs and, in more recent years, related professional development and training across the United States and its territories. To carry out this new mandate, the NHPRC established the State Historical Records Advisory Board, a model that still exists today. The state archivist typically chairs the SHRAB, which includes representatives from various archival programs in the state (Burke 2000). The NHPRC remains a program of NARA.

There are other agencies and philanthropic organizations that support grantmaking to archives, but to date, the NHPRC is the only source of federal funding with an exclusive focus on archival records (SAA 2019). NHPRC appropriations for FY 2022 were \$12 million (National Coalition for History 2022).

National Endowment for the Humanities

The NEH was created through the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, which also resulted in the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts. The National Science Foundation (NSF), established in 1950, was viewed as a model for the new agencies, particularly the NEH. In fact, some argue that the existence of the NSF helped spur the creation of a national funding program for the humanities. By the 1960s, there was widespread societal skepticism around the legacies of science and technology, and humanities advocates explicitly urged the provision of government funding for humanities similar to the funding that had already been created for science (Miller 1984).

The NEH established an Office of Preservation in 1985 with a focus on projects benefiting libraries and archives. The office was established when it was recognized that large numbers of source documents for humanities research were at risk of degradation. Over the course of its grantmaking history, NEH has funded projects to preserve thousands of archival collections, to train staff to conduct preservation and conservation activities, and to support research on preservation and storage conditions (Field 2003). Its Preservation Assistance Grants program and Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections program enable institutions to begin preservation planning and to undertake sustainable preservation measures.

According to NEH's most recent budget justification, it plans to incorporate preparation for the effects of climate change into more of its funding priorities. The most recent example of this shift can be found in two recently announced climate grant programs: the Climate Smart Humanities Organizations Challenge program, which supports institutions in carrying out long-range climate mitigation and adaptation planning activities (NEH 2022a), and the Cultural and Community Resilience program, which provides funding for community-based collections of materials related to climate change and COVID-19 (NEH 2022b). NEH appropriations for FY 2022 were \$180 million (NEH 2023).

Institute of Museum and Library Services

A major milestone for post-New Deal federal support for library services was the 1956 passage of the Library Services Act, administered by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The Library Services Act was amended in 1964 to become the Library Services and Construction Act. In 1996, the passage of the Library Services and Technology Act created the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS). This act consolidated the library work that previously had been the responsibility of the Department of Education with the Institute of Museum Services (Martin 2003, 114).

Although IMLS has not specified climate change as a priority in its appropriations request, the agency recognizes the need for direct funding to “strengthen the ability of libraries to provide services to affected communities in the event of an emergency or disaster” as part of its National Leadership Grants for Libraries program (IMLS 2022a, 42). A notable climate change–related grant was recently made under this program to Louisiana State University and Arizona State University to develop a national climate change risk assessment for the nation’s libraries, archives, and museums using a geographic information system (GIS) and existing data sources (IMLS 2022b).¹ IMLS appropriations for FY 2022 were \$268 million (IMLS 2023).

¹I currently serve on the advisory board for this project through Louisiana State University.

Conclusion

As unemployment crested to 25 percent during the Great Depression, it became clear that the hands-off approach of Herbert Hoover's presidential administration and public expectations that the free market and private charity could solve the overwhelming political problems were insufficient. As one of the starkest repudiations of failed policy, voters in 1932 elected FDR to the presidency in a landslide. With this mandate, FDR embarked upon significant new public spending by developing a comprehensive set of programs to stabilize the banking system, address environmental devastation, and create a series of jobs programs that collectively became known as the New Deal.

The New Deal was a monumental achievement in American public policy. Its legacy still benefits Americans through the built environment and infrastructure, consumer and financial protections, public parks, the National Labor Relations Act, Social Security, and many other programs. It is estimated that 10 million Americans were employed by New Deal jobs programs (Living New Deal 2019). More than 100,000 structures were improved or built, many of which are still standing today (Federal Works Agency 1947, 131). In addition to construction and engineering projects, the New Deal was also dedicated to the maintenance of existing resources, whether by undertaking the Historical Records Survey, improving thousands of miles of water mains, or repairing more than 90 million books for schools and libraries (Walker and Brechin 2010).

The New Deal was far from perfect, and many New Deal programs had a mixed record concerning the inclusion of women and people of color. Although the popular image of the Great Depression focuses on the plight of white male heads of households who suddenly found themselves unemployed following the Wall Street crash and the Dust Bowl, women and people of color in the workforce often suffered from greater economic devastation because they tended to work in industries that lacked labor protections (Rauchway 2008, 44–45). New Deal administrators had a range of attitudes toward the inclusion of women and people of color; thus, some New Deal jobs programs were quite progressive and inclusive, while others replicated existing workforce gender and racial discrimination. New Deal programs located in the South were especially prone to excluding and marginalizing Black workers. Right-wing reactionaries often accused the most progressive jobs programs that employed women and people of color, such as the WPA arts projects, of frivolous waste and Communism.

Even with these limitations, the New Deal was a pivotal turning point in American politics. It ushered in a transformation away from an ideology that did not assign government any responsibility to intervene in the failures of the private sector to a new paradigm in which the government *should* provide a social safety net and assist people in their darkest hours. The legacy of the New Deal held strong for nearly four decades in the American political establishment until the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps no phrase more perfectly encapsulates the turn away from the New Deal promise of government as a safety net as President Ronald Reagan's declaration that "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem" (Reagan 1981, 2).

Paradoxically, as political realignment over the last 40 years has produced a systematic dismantling of the New Deal through deregulation, tax cuts, and shredding of social safety nets, interest in the historical legacy and promise of the original New Deal has grown. Calls for a Green New Deal to address the climate crisis and provide jobs amid soaring economic inequalities have gained advocates among progressive constituents (Kurtzleben 2019). Although recent calls for a Green New Deal have focused primarily on built infrastructure and the caregiving economy, bolstering societal, historical, and cultural infrastructure deserves greater attention as well.

Decades without enough resources and staff, combined with the threats posed by climate change, have left archives at a major turning point. Archives without archivists are simply storehouses of material. Many archives have already been put into this position as archivists are laid off or vacant positions are not refilled. We risk losing some of our most talented archivists and denying entry to new archivists if we do not find a way to keep them in the profession. There are no shortcuts, no innovations, no short-term solutions, and no technological quick fixes that change the fundamental fact that without archivists to care for archival records, climate change may destroy many archives that underpin our collective democratic rights and shared memory.

Archives and archivists are worth fighting for. To win a Green New Deal for Archives, archivists will need to develop a coherent shared sense of the critical importance of archives to a functional society. They must develop the political and advocacy skills necessary to assert that the continuity and preservation of the archival record is just as essential to the well-being and flourishing of everyday people as bridges, schools, and other public infrastructure. To be an archivist is to continue to believe in a future where our work will be meaningful to people we will never meet, that we can reach out to future generations we can barely imagine, trusting they will benefit from our collective efforts.

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