

Fall 2025

PastForward

PROVIDENCE ARCHIVES NEWSLETTER

Sisters of Providence, Mother Joseph Province • Providence Health & Services

Staff changes

There have been a lot of changes at Providence Archives since our last newsletter. After about a year at the post of visual resources archivist, Grant Mandarinino took a new position in an academic archives in December of last year. During his time here Grant helped to implement the ArchivesSpace content management database, helping to set standards, and adding existing photograph collection finding aids to the software. Grant also relabeled boxes, accessioned collections, and performed a lot of reference work.

After nearly ten years as the senior archivist for text-based collections, Elizabeth Russell accepted a position in special collections at her alma mater, the University of Washington, in March. Elizabeth made a lasting impact on the Archives, helping to standardize and document our processes, processing collections and providing reference service for many Sisters and staff of Providence Health. Elizabeth also helped to spearhead transition to our ArchivesSpace database.

We are very pleased to introduce our two new staff members! Brian Drischell joined the staff as visual resources archivist at the end of March, and Arabella Matthews took over as senior archivist for text-based collections at the end of June. Both have unique backgrounds that they bring to the jobs, as you will read here in a brief Q and A.

A grand old flag

Jessica Long

One of the most recognizable symbols in the world is the United States flag. On any given day it's common to spot several flying over American cities, from government buildings to baseball stadiums and private homes. But did you know that we have a few flags in the artifact collection?

Two of our flags are from St. Vincent Hospital in Portland, Ore. Very little is known about them other than that one is a 46-star flag used between 1908 and 1912 and the other is a 48-star flag used between 1912 and 1959. A third Star-Spangled Banner, on the other hand, has an interesting story that has recently come full circle (or should we say rectangle?).

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Meet visual resources archivist

Brian Drischell

Tell us about your professional background

My path to the archival field was not a very direct one. I initially studied history as an undergraduate at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, which introduced



me to archival work through one of my senior classes. But it wasn't until about seven years after graduating that I discovered an audio-visual archive program that perfectly combined my interest in history and my passion for movies. It still took a few more years to get there, but in 2003 I entered an interdisciplinary program called Moving Image Archive Studies at UCLA. Internships were a key component during my second year in order to gain hands-on experience, and I was lucky enough to land one at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences during my last

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Meet senior archivist

Arabella Matthews



Tell us about your professional background/ How did you get interested in Archives?

I had been interested in working in libraries and museums since I was very young, although I didn't know what an archive really was yet. I studied history and anthropology as an undergraduate, which gave me some familiarity with archives as a researcher. While writing a capstone paper my senior year, I remember being really struck by the breadth of the collections at my university and amazed by what was contained in them. That same year, I was talking to a supervisor at the museum where I worked, and he encouraged me to consider a career in archives rather than museums. His advice was purely practical, but to my surprise, I found I enjoyed the more detail-oriented as-

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Brian Drischell

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six months of school, which later turned into a full-time position. I ended up being at the Academy for 18 years in a variety of roles from my initial position as Film Traffic Coordinator to Associate Director at the end of my run. (Fun Fact: I attended the Oscars 14 times!). But after 20 years in Los Angeles, I wanted to make my way back to the Pacific Northwest (I grew up in Walla Walla), and ended up in Seattle. I initially took on a temporary records management position at an environmental consulting firm before moving to Providence Archives this spring.

What is your favorite aspect of archival work?

There are two aspects of archival work that I most enjoy. The first is arrangement and description, an important step to ensure that collections accurately reflect the persons or institutions who collected them, which in turn helps to foster a better understanding of the subject for researchers. Secondly, and closely related, is working directly with researchers to help them locate visual resources for their particular project. It's always gratifying to hand over materials that best reflect and inform the researcher's topic. I also like the hands-on aspect of being an archivist, whether that's scanning photographs or inspecting film prints.

Tell us about your job as visual resources archivist

As visual resources archivist, I'm responsible for overseeing all aspects of the photograph, film, and video collections. This includes everything from accessioning, appraising, arranging/describing to digitization, as well as ensuring proper housing and storage for the collection. I also field research requests from those within and outside of the religious community and Providence Health. A typical day could start with creating finding aids in the database, to scanning, cataloging and publishing images on the Archive's website, to helping a researcher locate materials for a project.

In your time at Providence so far, what projects have you worked on?

Of the projects I've worked on so far, one of the most interesting and informative has been creating a finding aid for the photographs in the Sisters' individual collections. It's provided great insight into the history of the congregation, which compliments my personal interest in Pacific Northwest history. Additionally, when cataloging images of individual Sisters, I learn a great deal about the different aspects of their work. Also, due to my background in audio-visual archiving, I've taken a special interest in the film and video collection, specifically trying to get a better

understanding of their content and condition. All these disparate aspects of the collection can be a challenge, but I enjoy the work and look forward to gaining a greater understanding of it in the future.

Arabella Matthews

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pects of the job and found arranging and describing to be immensely satisfying. In Boston I worked for a few years in the archives at the Kennedy Presidential Library. Back in my hometown of Seattle, where I had always hoped to return, I worked several shorter-term positions, including at the Chihuly Studio and the Museum of Flight. Most recently I was working for Iron Mountain's media and archive services as a contract archivist on several large-scale digitization projects for larger clients. I focused on women's history in undergraduate, and Pacific Northwest history in graduate school, so I'm very excited about the collections here at Providence Archives.

What is your favorite aspect of archival work?

I find working with archival materials to be extremely exciting all around, but I think most archivists feel that way on some level! I am very passionate about providing access to the collections, and having things centralized and easy to find. I also enjoy working directly with researchers, talking to them and helping them sort through what they're looking for. But by far my favorite aspect of archival work is the little glimpses into the everyday lives of people I otherwise wouldn't get to see. Being able to touch the details of history through things that maybe weren't at the time precious, like everyday papers and pieces of ephemera, is very special.

In your time at Providence so far, what projects have you worked on?

So far, I've spent a lot of time making inventories of some of the institutional collections. This has been a great way to get to know the variety of the collections and the materials they contain, and to give me an overview of the history of the Sisters and their works in the west. Recently, I've been working with the very large collection for Providence Alaska Medical Center, which has a large amount of Alaskan and other materials unique to the region. Seeing the materials related to major events such as Alaska being granted statehood, and the 1964 earthquake as they relate to the hospital and the Sisters was especially fascinating. I've also been answering reference requests, which allows me to use the collections the way a researcher would, and learn more through that avenue. I'm looking forward to more thoroughly processing some collections soon!

Flag

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The 4.3 x 5.5-foot, 48-star flag is folded neatly into a compact triangle with, contrary to tradition, the red and white stripes visible on the outside rather than the white stars on a blue field. It was originally owned by a man named H. Donald Smith, a navigation officer who served on the *USS Arizona* battleship from April 1941 to October 2, 1941. Prior to transferring to the naval hospital at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii for treatment, he asked his chief quartermaster to fly a set of “steaming colors... from the gaff at the mainmast” of the *Arizona*. In naval and maritime contexts, “to fly steaming colors” means to display the national flag from the gaff (the horizontal or angled pole that extends from the mast) of a ship while it is at sea.



The history buffs among you will know that just two months after Smith left the *USS Arizona* with his flag, Pearl Harbor naval base was attacked by Japanese aircraft. On December 7, 1941, the *Arizona* was hit by several armor-piercing bombs, one of which triggered a massive explosion that killed 1,177 of the ship's 1,512 officers and crewmen. Today the sunken wreck of the battleship remains a memorial to those who lost their lives on that day “which will live in infamy.”

The aftermath of this devastating event and of the United States' entry into World War II is well known, but the story of Smith's life is less clear. Presumably the flag remained in Smith's possession until sometime around March 1960 when he gave it to Charles H. Williams (c. 1885-1965), a benefactor to the Sisters of Providence community. Charles had a long history with the sisters having attended Providence Academy in Vancouver, Wash., in the 1890s. Recollections from Charles describing his time at the Academy and his personal memories of Mother Joseph of the Sacred Heart are a valuable source of historical information for Providence Archives.

Though how the two men knew each other is unknown, Smith's gift was intended for Providence Heights, which was a religious formation college founded by the Sisters of Providence in 1961 in Issaquah, Wash. The col-

lege had a collection of fine art and historical displays, including Mother Joseph's trunk and items from Providence Academy, for the educational benefit of the student novices at the school. In a 1965 letter to Sister Judith (Teresa Lang), dean of Providence Heights, Mother Mary Loretta, superior of Sacred Heart Province, wrote, “Remember the flag we received as a gift for our ‘future’ Sister Formation College; the one that had been flown on the *USS Arizona*? Here it is with the supporting papers. May it be treasured for the memories connected with it and stir all who see it to pray for peace for the Family of God all over the world!”

Unfortunately, the college closed after only a few short years and in 1973 the flag made its way to Providence Archives where it stayed, nestled in a plain cardboard box, for 52 years until Jessica recently rediscovered it.

While the historical significance of being one of the last flags to fly on the *Arizona* meant that it was a special object worthy of preservation, the flag's ties to the Sisters of Providence were tenuous and so it didn't align with the Archive's collection scope. Last spring, Jessica set about finding the flag a better home, and the National Park Service's Pearl Harbor National Memorial in Honolulu felt like the perfect fit. The donation process was slow as the Memorial was impacted by staffing issues, but after several back-and-forth emails and waiting for a collection advisory committee to make a recommendation to the park superintendent, the Pearl Harbor National Memorial finally accepted the flag in April 2025. I then carefully packed up the flag and shipped it across the Pacific Ocean. The whole process was long, yet gratifying knowing the flag is now safely preserved and appreciated within its proper historical context!

Drama in Yakima!

Brian Drischell

During a recent photograph rehousing project, some very striking oversize photos came to my attention. They depict a series of plays performed through St. Joseph Academy in Yakima around mid-century. But these didn't look like student plays; the artful costumes and sets, along with the professional photography, placed them on a higher level. There is also a remarkable consistency of the photos themselves. The scenes are all captured seemingly in the same space with the actors bunched together within a closely cropped frame. They are not scenes from an actual performance, but more likely staged to be used as promotional images. They date 1939-1960, and the play selection goes from contemporary to period piece to literary classics. In their own way, they tell a story, solely through expressive faces and bodies caught in motion. But the photos don't tell the whole story, and

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Drama

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in one case they actually confuse the situation.

After some initial record research within the collection, it was discovered that the plays at St. Joseph Academy had been an annual event since at least the mid-1920s and that they were routinely performed not at the school, but at Yakima's historic Capitol Theater, the largest performing arts venue in the Pacific Northwest when it opened in 1920 with a capacity of 1500. The female roles were filled by students at St. Joseph and the male roles by students of Marquette, located just across the street (even some graduates of the schools performed as some of the older characters). There is also documentation for some of the years indicating how financially successful the plays were for St. Joseph.

Turning back to the photos, I discovered some discrepancies for a certain title: *The High Ground*, performed in 1953. An ambitious choice for a student production, the play follows a condemned young woman who is forced to take refuge in a convent during a flood, and the sister who uncovers her innocence. The confusion arises when a second set of photos with the same title are discovered, but do not show the same actors or scenes. Which ones were correct? After discovering both yearbooks and play programs within the collection, it seemed a sure bet that

corroborative evidence could easily be had. But it quickly became clear that these documents from 1953 were never received by the Archives. But what about St. Joseph scrapbooks or news clippings from that year? Again, nothing. And online research proved fruitless as well. There are only two pieces of evidence that point to the first, oversized photos as being the ones correctly identified. First, the handwriting on the back appears to be contemporaneous to mid-century (in fact, the entire batch of oversized photos are written in the same hand) whereas the writing on the second set is relatively new. Secondly, the oversized images better match the synopsis of the play. Neither are wholly conclusive, but will have to suffice for the time being. The full story on these productions is still ripe for discovery.



Promotional image for
"The High Ground," 1953

Providence Archives
4800 37th Ave SW
Seattle WA 98126-2793

Manager
Peter Schmid

Senior Archivist
Arabella Matthews

Visual Resources Archivist
Brian Drischell

Artifact Collections Curator
Jessica Long

Assistant Archivist-Technical
Pam Hedquist

Telephone: 206.937.4600
Fax: 206.923.4001
E-mail: archives@providence.org
www.providence.org/phs/archives

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