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"The Inaugural Austin Archives Bazaar: Cross-Repository Outreach in Central Texas"

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Abstract

Inspired by the successful [Annual Los Angeles Archives Bazaar](#) (now in its ninth year), and born out of the brainstorming of the [Archivists of Central Texas](#), the [Austin Archives Bazaar](#) took place on Sunday, October 19, 2014. This public outreach event featured 22 Central Texas archives showing off highlights of their collections. It also included archival film (with footage of Austin dating back to the 1910s), an oral history booth, a historical reenactment photography studio, a hands-on preservation station, and lightning talks by professional archivists, as well as food and drinks.

The Austin Archives Bazaar represents a new way of marketing archives to the general public in Central Texas. The organizing committee has not only secured the participation of 22 area archives, ranging from the giant Texas A&M University Libraries to the crowd-sourced Austin Fanzine Project, but they also created a coherent brand identity and marketing plan, including extensive use of online channels, including social media. Thus this event is not only an important addition to Austin's already-robust "festival scene," but also represents an unprecedented cooperative effort at increasing visibility across are repositories.

This article will provide an overview of the germination of the Bazaar; its early planning stages; how organizers secured funding and created their marketing plan; and an interview with Austin Archives Bazaar Chair, Jennifer Hecker, Digital Archives Access Strategist at the University of Texas Libraries.

Article

Inspired by the successful [Annual Los Angeles Archives Bazaar](#) (now in its ninth year) and the [Oregon Archives Crawl](#) in Portland, the [Austin Archives Bazaar](#) is the brainchild of Jennifer Hecker, Digital Archives Access Strategist at University of Texas Libraries. This game-changing event for Central Texas archives took place on Sunday, October 19, 2014. The all-ages, public outreach day featured 21 repositories showing off highlights of their collections to 400 attendees. It also included archival film (with footage of Austin dating back to the 1910s), an oral history booth, a historical reenactment photography studio, screen printing, a hands-on preservation station, and lightning talks by professionals and scholars, as well as music, food, and drinks. Speaking on her initial motivation to mount such an

ambitious archival event for the first time in Central Texas, Hecker said, "In a tight budgetary climate, outreach is of the first things to go. If we can do some of the heavy lifting of making this event happen, the repositories have a smaller job. Part of my goal was to provide a venue for outreach to happen." She continued, "This is not just about archives and repositories—it is also about archivists and the work they do. I want people to meet the people who do the work."

Born out of the work of the Archivists of Central Texas, the Austin Archives Bazaar represents a new way of marketing archives to the general public in Central Texas. The steering committee, led by Hecker, is comprised of seven professional archivists: logistics co-chairs Daniel Alonzo, Digital Archivist, Texas General Land Office, and Molly Hults, Archivist, Austin History Center; program co-chairs Lauren Kata, Archivist for Digital Access and Holdings Management, Archives of the Episcopal Church, and Carol Mead, Archivist, Archives of American Mathematics, the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History; publicity chair Madeline Moya, Curator at Texas Archive of the Moving Image; and sponsorship chair Kristy Sorensen, Associate Director of the Library and Head of Archives and Records Management, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, who has also acted as general secretary and uncredited steering committee co-chair. The Bazaar also benefitted from 28 volunteer workers, who helped with everything from social media to crowd control.

Twenty-one Central Texas archives sent professional archivists to the Bazaar, including: the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin; Archives of the Episcopal Church; Austin History Center; Austin Fanzine Project; Special Collections, Southwestern University; Catholic Archives of Texas; Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library; Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary; H.J. Lutch Stark Center at the University of Texas; Harry Ransom Center; University of Texas San Antonio Libraries Special Collections; Cushing Memorial Library and Archives, Texas A&M University; Alexander Architectural Archives, University of Texas at Austin; Teresa Lozano Long Institute for Latin American Studies (LLILAS) Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin; Travis County Archives; University of Texas Human Rights Documentation Initiative; Texas State Library and Archives Commission; Texas Archive of the Moving Image; Texas General Land Office; the Witliff Collections, Texas State University; and the Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries.

Speakers included Professor Janine Barchas of the University of Texas at Austin Department of English; Harrison Eppright, Manager of Visitor Services at Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau and docent for Austin's African American Culture Heritage District; independent filmmaker and director at Alpheus Media, Mat Hames; Professor Andrés Tijerina, Austin Community

College Department of History, and Co-Director of the Handbook of Tejano History Project; Professor Daina Ramey Berry, University of Texas Department of History and African and African Diaspora Studies and the George W. Littlefield Fellow in American History; and genealogist and historical researcher Teri Flack Genealogy, who works with the Austin Genealogical Society. "These speakers reveal how people use archives," says Hecker, "Not just for writing a book or a lawsuit, but as a documentary filmmaker and a genealogist."

Organizers not only recruited an impressive array of repositories and speakers, but also secured sponsorships from area repositories, archival vendors, and professional associations, together totaling \$5,000. This initial funding allowed the committee to book the Spiderhouse Ballroom, a hip event location in the heart of Austin; enlist a professional graphic designer; and purchase oral history booth equipment, now owned by the Archivists of Central Texas. This marks an important development, too, as the group can now repurpose this equipment for future Bazaars and related events. As an independent professional organization not tied to any institution, the Archivists of Central Texas are poised to use this event as a springboard for further organizing and outreach. This sponsorship tally doesn't include the many hundreds of hours of time donated by local archivists who are committed to making Hecker's original idea a fully-developed reality. Thanks to their dedication, the Austin Archives Bazaar will likely continue on a biannual basis, as well as provide an example of how to build cross-repository outreach momentum that may prove instructional to other local and regional archivists' groups.

The Bazaar, despite its recent gestation, also already has a coherent brand identity and marketing plan. This includes extensive use of online channels, including social media. Thus this event is not only an important addition to Austin's already-robust festival scene, but also represents an cooperative effort unprecedented in Texas with the aim of increasing visibility across area repositories. The decision to hire a graphic designer to create branding for social media, posters, postcards, buttons, and pens, has proven successful, with more than 200 people engaging with the event's [Facebook page](#) and reporting that they planned to attend, representing a 20% positive response rate on that platform. Through the Austin Archives Bazaar [Twitter account](#), organizers cross-promoted the holdings of participating repositories along with other relevant entities such as the Society of American Archivists and Society of Southwest Archivists (both sponsors) and Texas graduate programs in Information Science (the University of Texas School of Information is also a sponsor).

Hecker and the steering committee are optimistic about the potential for other events modeled on the Austin Archives Bazaar. Sacramento is already doing an [Archives Crawl](#) on the Portland model, and it seems likely that other cities will follow. The Austin committee decided on a bazaar rather than a crawl—wherein attendees go from repository to repository for open houses—because they liked the idea of people literally walking through the doors into an archives. “That can be a speed bump for a lot of people,” Hecker explained. “It’s intimidating for the public.”

Bringing 21 archives under one roof, with a casual, friendly atmosphere and fun activities for everyone from children to seniors may go a long way toward demystifying archives for the community of potential patrons beyond scholarly researchers and other conventional audiences. Attendees completed exit surveys and provided constructive feedback. “I didn’t realize how many archival repositories we have in Central Texas,” said one participant. Another reported, “When my husband and I walked in, we looked at each other and chuckled and didn’t even have to say why. Only in Austin could this type of event take place with such unique style: fun, informative, lively, fun, beer, great mix of people, unique venue, fun.” One attendee responded, “[The Austin Archives Bazaar made me feel] connected to the history/archives community in a fun, engaging way.”

On October 16, Austin City Council Member Kathie Tovo officially proclaimed October 19-25, 2014, as “Austin Archives Week.” Making remarks before the Council and to the public at the proclamation, Hecker argued again for the primacy of archives, saying, “We want to make sure everyone in the community is aware of our collections and how they may be of use. We want to dispel the idea that archives are dark buildings filled with moldy rooms of old papers and mean people who make you feel like you’re doing everything wrong. Archives are the foundation of democracy, and archivists work to preserve our shared cultural heritage. We’re here to work for *you*.”

If you’d like to check out some pictures and videos from the event, visit the Austin Archives Bazaar photoset on [Flickr](#).