

# Up-and-Comers: News for Student and New Archivists

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## Take an Archival Journey with Mariah Isbell, MLS Student at Indiana University

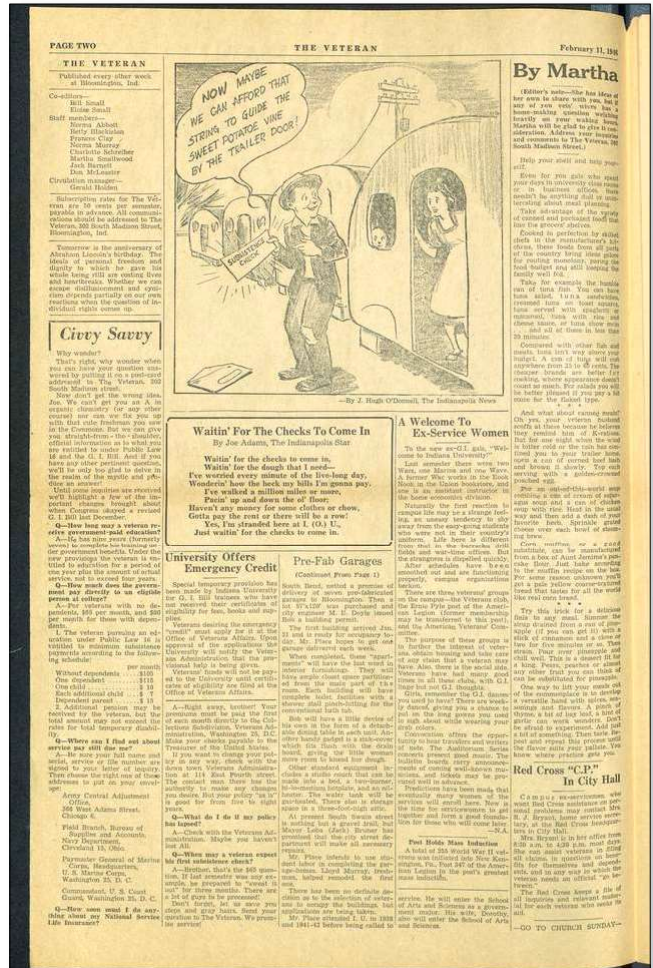
My journey to enrolling in a master of library science program was an unusual one. I have a bachelor of science degree in psychology from Georgia College and State University, and when I tell people about my background, they are always puzzled as to how the two go together. Honestly, I was not sure how the two would fit together and how a psychology degree would be useful for an MLS degree. However, once I started the program, I began to understand more about how psychology and library science actually do have a connection, and that connection I found was with archives.

I have always had an interest in people—how we think, our behaviors, our motivations. With archives, that interest grew more into questions such as: How did people think in the past? What are other communities' and cultures' stories? Why is their social and societal impact important enough to be preserved, and for whom is it important?

The first job I was hired for at Indiana University was as a processor for the University Archives (Indiana University Libraries University Archives). I knew nothing about archival work, and my only understanding of a processor was based on what the job description detailed. I did know that I wanted a job that would grant me experience working in an archive, in this case an academic archive, and I knew that I would need that kind of experience early on in my graduate career.

I like to think that the collections that I was able to work on and process were very diverse, and the information covered introduced me to a wide history of Indiana University that I would have not known otherwise.

The first collection that I worked on was an independent student newspaper called *The Veteran*. *The Veteran* was a monthly newspaper created in the 1940s, designed to give veteran students, and their spouses, information about events and news happening at Indiana University that was specific to them. For instance, the newspaper mentioned a lot about the trailers that the students lived in, any



Volume 1, no. 1, February 11, 1946, *The Veteran*, Collection C713, Indiana University Archives, Bloomington.

social clubs that they could join, and general thoughts and concerns about how the students felt they were integrated with the rest of the student body. One of my favorite columns from this newspaper was called *By Martha*, which was written by one of the co-editors of the newspaper, and directed toward the wives of the veterans. *By Martha* featured opinions and advice on cooking, gardening, childcare, and general topical questions written to the newspaper. I enjoyed this collection because I got to learn about the life of veteran students at Indiana University and visualize where on campus they used to live. At one point, I became so invested, that after work I would walk around

campus and try and identify where everything was. The community of trailers where some of the veterans lived was called Woodlawn Terrace, which was on Woodlawn Avenue, which happens to be across from the SICE building. There were also some barracks on the field next to what is now Wells Library, and trying to imagine everything enthralled me. I was able to process this collection, but I did not complete the EAD markup for it, as that was something that I had never done before, let alone, done from scratch. When I finished this collection, I felt internally validated that this was indeed something that I am able to do, and it wasn't as daunting as I thought it was going to be.

The next two projects that I was able to work on in the fall of 2019 involved updating finding aids, rehousing files, and adding a series to an already existing collection. The first was rehousing and updating the finding aid for the Henry H. H. Remak papers. Additional boxes needed to be looked through and added to the rest of the collection. If I remember correctly, the boxes I was adding were overlooked before, which is understandable because it was a large collection that already contained about 100 boxes. Remak used to be a faculty member at Indiana University in the German Department, and he also taught literature classes. He was involved in various campus committees and national organizations, and even served as a high administrative official at IU. I created an inventory spreadsheet for the boxes I was sorting through, and from that we discovered that a lot of the items that in his collection, could and should be with another collection, the National Endowment for the Humanities at Indiana University collection. Numerous restricted materials ranged from gradebooks, graded student papers, and evaluations for Remak's student teaching assistants. From the collection, I really got an understanding of who he was, his involvement at IU, and his larger educational commitments as well. At one point, I thought he was writing some of his notes in another language. I thought the notes could be in German because he was from Austria, and I told my supervisor. She looked at it and said, "No, it's definitely in English." His handwriting was not legible at all to me, and it's hilarious that I thought it was in another language. It was like that on a lot of small notes, but at least someone else would be able to read it. Once I figured out where all the items needed to be rehoused, whether they would be with the Remak papers or

with the NEH collection, I was then able to work on the finding aid. Due to the restricted materials, I had to recall some boxes from Remak's papers as well as some boxes from the NEH collection. Working on the finding aid was simple as I was either adding in a line, or renaming a line to make up for the additional items. I did struggle with it here and there, as sometimes I thought I was typing in the right section and then when I would go to preview it, what I typed wouldn't be there. That happened a few times, and I just needed to pay more attention to what I had just typed and the other lines around it. Working on the Remak collection did help me become more comfortable with EAD and working on finding aids.

The next project that I worked on was adding a series to the Michael Molenda papers. The series I added was called "games." Molenda was a faculty member in the School of Education, made many educational games, and used games in his profession. There were about 10 games, and I created a series for them and added them to the scope and content note. This was a quick project, as it didn't involve as much work as the others did. The games were quite interesting, and I even recognized one that I had played before in a team-building meeting.

The fourth project that I worked on could technically be considered a rehousing and finding aid update project, but the original collection had a final total of three boxes and I was working with nine additional boxes. Because of the volume of the boxes, it really seemed like I was starting a new collection processing project from scratch. There were also issues with the finished finding aid that didn't make sense to me, mainly the series that were created for it. The new boxes added new material that wasn't in the original collection. It became inevitable that this collection would be completely reworked. This collection was the Indiana University Latino Cultural Center records, and the last and first time records were added was in 2004, so the nine additional boxes made a lot of sense. I like to consider this collection the one that I became the most involved with and learned the most from because the documents in it ranged from administrative history, to events, to publications. Not only did I learn a lot about the Latino Cultural Center, known commonly to students as La Casa, but also I learned a lot about the history of being a student of color at Indiana University.

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**Meredith Lowe, Assistant Editor**

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I am very thankful for this because being in a graduate program for only two years, there is no way that I would learn much, if anything, about this history of the school had I not worked in the University Archives.

This collection helped me figure out how to better process items, but I also learned that each collection is different in how items could be processed. Originally, after I had surveyed the collection and made an inventory, which was very long because I was going item by item, I would start with the first series and subseries and go through all the boxes looking for items and folders that belonged to that series. That's going through 12 boxes and about 10 to 15 different subseries and series looking for items. After I did that for the first series, I realized what a waste of time doing all of that was. From then on, I went through each box, and when I came across an item that belonged to a certain series I placed it to the side and made piles. That was easier to do, and it was less time consuming. Trial and error. Once I physically arranged everything, I labeled folders and placed items aside for weeding or destruction. I also started working on the finding aid. I opted to work on the Word document for the finding aid instead of going

straight into the EAD, because I didn't want to be too overwhelmed and wanted to make sure that I was confident with what I was putting together.

The description side of working on this collection was rather difficult, and on various occasions, I would leave work annoyed that I couldn't find the answers that I needed. What also frustrated me was that the previous finding aid administrative history was very long, and it seemed to have details that, when compared to an administrative history written today, would be unnecessary for a researcher to read through. However, I wanted to keep most of the story but just clean up some of the details and shorten it. Again, this was difficult because there were titles for administrators who assisted in the development of La Casa and other cultural centers at Indiana University, cultural centers that no longer exist. I remember finding that very frustrating, because I wanted the administrative history to be correct and to fill in any holes that weren't there before. This difficulty was not the fault of the collection and its materials, but my lack of understanding of university organizational structure. On the other hand, a positive outcome was that during my search



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for information on the administrative history, I used various resources suggested by my supervisor that I would not have thought to use before. I rewrote and added all the scope and content notes and made them very simple. Then I had everything listed in an arrangement for the series and was finished. I submitted it to my supervisor for approval before I could start on the EAD part, and then I got my next project.

It was around late February and early March 2020, and this project would become my last in-person project with the University Archives. The project that I was assigned was the Indiana University Little 500 scrapbooks. The Little 500 is an annual spring event at Indiana University and involves teams of four bicycles racing in relay-style around a track for 200 laps, or 100 laps in the women's race. I had never heard of the Little 500 before I came to IU, and it seems to be a very popular and historic event. What was unique about this collection was that these were scrapbooks. I had never worked with scrapbooks before, and there was no better collection to start with. There were over 100 boxes for this collection as the Little 500 dates back to 1951. I did not have to have all of these boxes recalled, but just a few here and there so that I could understand the history and note any changes that happened over the years. For example, women were technically not allowed to race in the Little 500 until the 1980s, but they could race in the mini 500. I found this event fascinating. All the work that went into making it happen was amazing, and the fact that organizers captured that history consistently for nearly 70 years is incredible.

Because pandemic stay-at-home orders were starting to develop and be enforced, I wasn't able to complete this project. I also planned to go through all the boxes that I needed to gather an understanding and history of the event, enough to start an administrative history, but I wasn't actually able to start work on the finding aid and other descriptive sections. I am thankful that I was able to work on this project, even given my limited time, because now I have experience working with materials other than paper.

By late March and early April 2020, everything had transitioned to online learning and working. Luckily, I was able to stay with University Archives and work remotely on projects that were not the primary focus when we were working in-person. Some of the assignments and projects that I have been able to work on involved transcriptions, such as the diaries of William Raimond Ringer, a very interesting young man who attended IU from 1916 to 1921. Other projects involved creating or editing Wikipedia pages for collections in the archives, creating blog posts, working on Libguides, and outreach. A current project that I am working on involves outreach to student groups and developing a way to let them know that their materials can be archived, potentially, with University Archives.

While this experience with University Archives has been an interesting one, I am very thankful for the array of projects that I was able to work on and the people I have been able to work with. This experience left a great imprint on me and made me more well-rounded with the types of archival experiences I have had.