

Awards and Scholarships

Mark A. Greene Award for First-Time Meeting Attendees

By Jenny DeRocher



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As a young professional who has worked at La Crosse Public Library Archives (Wisconsin) for four years, this was my first time attending a MAC Annual Meeting. I grew up in the Madison area, but earned my MLIS in Boston, and it was a surprisingly strange experience to attend a professional conference so near my hometown. It was as if I was looking at Madison under a new, archival gaze. In reflecting on the driving themes of each conversation, session, and keynote speaker at MAC, I noticed that Indigenous and queer folks were often centered throughout the conference as we together discussed archival practices, such as reparative description and collecting efforts. It was a bolstering experience for me to be surrounded by folks who have the same professional values as myself. I admired this clear intention of those who organized and designed sessions on these topics. I look forward to attending MAC in future years and to see where leaders in our profession push us to redefine our roles as recordkeepers and educators who can center decolonized and queer-informed practices.

One event that was particularly helpful in my own growth was the First Nations Cultural Landscape

Walking Tour of the UW–Madison Campus. This was led by Omar Poler, an enrolled member of the Sokaogon Chippewa Community who serves as the American Indian curriculum services coordinator in the Teacher Education Center at UW–Madison. This was the first event I attended on May 5, and it shaped the next two and a half days of the conference for me.

As the tour began, Omar asked each of us where we were from. After hearing that I was from La Crosse—a city that occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, like Madison—he tailored sections of the tour to me. He described the many attempted removals the Ho-Chunk faced, something that happened more than once over 100 years because the Ho-Chunk resisted by returning to their homelands each time. When he described the 1863 removal to Crow Creek Reserve (South Dakota), he asked us to imagine what it must have been like to walk from South Dakota back to Wisconsin in the wintertime. He looked at me and described the rolling bluffs surrounding La Crosse in the Driftless area, where many Ho-Chunk had to cross to reach their ancestral lands spanning across what we now think of as southern Wisconsin. Throughout the tour, Omar shared with us the primary sources he read in archives around the state. These sources gave him information on what the landscape looked like before colonization in the 1800s as well as details on what happened during the removals, reminding those of us on the tour of the power we hold as people working in archives.

This tour had particular impact because it was an example of how I, as a white archivist located in Wisconsin, might act to decolonize my programming and outreach, which are a large portion of my job at a public library archives. I guide walking tours regularly, host a monthly History Club, organize panels and lectures, and work closely with students year-round. I also write blogs, newspaper columns, and social media posts, and I create exhibits. My undergraduate education was in public history, which drives me to make history more accessible. Typically, that means telling the thousands—millions—of stories that can be found within our archives and inspiring folks to interact with primary sources themselves.

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The First Nations Cultural Landscape tour led by Omar Poler emphasized the importance of engaging with—and teaching from—decolonized frameworks. He helped me redefine my intentions behind the land acknowledgment I read before my programs and question the way I frame local history. He inspired me to ask my local Ho-Chunk neighbors (I use this word literally—the Ho-Chunk Nation Three Rivers House in La Crosse is across the street from the main library branch where I work) about what they wish our community knew about their history and

to find ways to incorporate this into my walking tours. Because their history is ultimately our shared history; La Crosse's history—no matter the topic—is entangled in our occupation of Ho-Chunk land. The removals, three of the eleven boarding schools that were located in Wisconsin, and the racist mascotting of Indigenous peoples by the city and the local sports teams are all part of the ongoing cultural genocide. In this way, the impact of this local history is entangled in our very identities and needs to be discussed for our communities to work on reconciliation.

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