

Transcript of Interview of Jennifer Greene by Tory Schendel Cox

Interviewee: Jennifer Greene

Interviewer: Tory Schendel Cox

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Location (Interviewee): Evansville, Indiana, United States of America

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Transcriber: Kathryn Jue

Abstract:

In response to COVID-19, the Evansville Museum of Arts, History and Science launched the mini-series, "Cultural Insights: Interviews in the Creative Sector," to highlight colleagues and professionals working in the same or similar field of museum professionals. Jennifer Greene, University Archivist, Prof. of Library Science, David L. Rice Library, University of Southern Indiana shares her COVID experience, including the digital platforms the archives are taking.

Tory Schendel Cox 0:04

Hi, my name is Tory Schendel Cox. I'm the Virginia G. Schroeder Curator of Art at the Evansville museum. And today in our telecast, we have Jennifer from USI. And I'm gonna hand it over to you, and thank you for your time.

Jennifer Greene 0:15

Tory, thank you so much for asking me to participate in this, I think it's a great way for us to share knowledge about who's in the area, and what kinds of great things we're doing. I am the University Archivist at the University of Southern Indiana. We are a University and Special Collections archives. We have regional collections, we have a course university collections, we have a special collection for Communal Studies. So intentional communities, people may have heard of New Harmony down the road. So we focus on collecting materials on these groups, although we actually now collect on contemporary groups. So what's happening in that movement today. All together, we have around 1200 collections out at USI. Um, split between the four areas. We have a digital gallery online, which I would encourage anyone to go see. You can just go to the USI homepage and go to the library and you'll get a click a link there to the archives. We've got i don't know i think somewhere around 40, 45,000 items online. They range from newspapers, to photographs, to documents, and I think we're up to about 600 oral histories. And all those you can all access online, you can download them, use them for any kinds of projects or research. I've worked with the Evansville Museum a lot to give them images for their displays. And I love it because it's so much fun. We're currently in the middle of our big spring promotion. It's called March Madness. This is our fourth year. And what it is, is it's a tournament to determine the coolest artifact in the area. And this year we had eight institutions participate including the Evansville museum and the James John Audubon Museum, Newburgh Museum,

Working Man's Institute, USI Anthropology, art collection at USI. And of course, the archives as well probably left Oh, and University of Evansville, that's still going on. So I'd encourage people to go and vote or in the Final Four now, amusingartifacts.org really easy to remember. We'd love people to participate everywhere. This isn't just for campus. This isn't just for Evansville, this is for whoever wants to participate across the area. Normally, all of the artifacts are on display at the archives. But as we're all on lockdown mode. We don't have that kind of experience with the tournament this year. But I have to say, people have really stepped up. And they've been voting online, we have more votes this year than we did last year. So go team, yay. But you can go to amusingartifacts and learn about all of the artifacts that were in the tournament, as well as the institutions that contributed the items. We're trying to stay busy, we're still offering references and assistance to people through the library website. So we're still here, and we're still working at it. I love to do local presentations, I do a lot of different little history presentations on the area. I just saw the one that Tom Lumber did for the museum on the Ohio live on the Ohio. Amazing, I'm getting ready to put one out that's going to be a little more detailed on Riverside Avenue. So we'd like to get out there and teach people not only about the local history, but all the wonderful resources that are available too.

TC 3:55

So is there anything, when it comes to local history, that's your absolute favorite to focus on?

JG 4:00

Oh my goodness. I don't know about my favorite, but and this might get me a lot of dislikes. But my least favorite is the 1937 flood. [Reaction noise] I know. I know. I know, like everybody's fascinated with the flood and I get it I was too. When I first started dealing with the flood, I was just mesmerized, but now having dealt with it for 12 years. I'm like so done with the flood. But, uh, you know, I just recently got a collection from the Coliseum for the Grand Army of the Republic, which was the veteran's organization in the post Civil War era. And so I've had a lot of fun digging into those, we want to create a database of members. Um. And not only the men, which is the GAR, but we have membership records on the Women's Auxiliary. So there's the Daughters of the Union of the veterans of the Civil War. So that's three types and the Worker Women's Relief Corps. So we're going to build databases so we can figure out just how involved our community was. We know that there were at least two reunions at the end that were the blue and the gray. So, um, there's also this marvelous furniture that's at the Coliseum in the GAR room, and I'm hoping to find out through the minutes where that furniture came from.

TC 5:28

Mmm-hmm

JG 5:30

So that's been a lot of fun, kind of digging into that. I do teach Indiana history at the university. And I do spend, I'll admit it, more time on Evansville than I probably should in some ways. But it's been really interesting, you know, you think you know, your home's history. But when you really start to study it, you realize all these things that I just wasn't even aware of.

TC 5:53

Mmm-hmm

JG 5:54

So I have a lot of fun bringing that to students as well. And the public. Like I said, I'd love to go out. I am a member of southwestern Indiana Historical Society. We do regular presentations at Willard Library. And again, not just Evansville, but Southwestern Indiana. We want to learn about our region, our area and where we came from. So I'm always supportive of those kinds of programs.

TC 6:18

Absolutely. So roughly how many public tours do you offer a year?

JG 6:26

Well, the archives is open to the public, everyday, except right now. So people are welcome to come to the archives on campus, I encourage people to come in the summertime when it's a little bit easier to get on and off campus. I probably do somewhere around three or four public presentations a year just kind of varies on what I'm offering and what kind of organizations are looking. I was hoping to do some things for Preservation Month, which May is National Preservation Month. I'm also part of a group called Preservation Alliance of Evansville, that's hoping to create more historic districts in Evansville. But with all of what's going on, I don't know that too many events are going to happen for Preservation Month. But I am working with a couple people, maybe we can get something we can at least put online to kind of keep the momentum going.

TC 7:21

Absolutely because that's important right now is content is continuity. [Laughter]

JG 7:26

It is. And I, you know, I miss, I miss my office, I miss my office. But I miss my students, and I miss meeting with my staff. There were so many projects we were going to do this year with

students that simply are now not going to happen because they physically would have to be on campus to work in the archives. So, um, that's very disappointing. But, uh, you know, I I don't think this is going to be forever. And I think that we're soon get back to playing with the artifacts

TC 8:03

Mmm-hmm

JG 8:03

-we used to. But, but like I said things continue. I'm working with students all the time. And public requests for that matter. People who for the first time are using the digital gallery, and they're not sure how to manipulate it. And they click on my email and they send me a message. I meet with people on zoom. I talk to people on the phone to help them learn kind of what could be our new normal.

TC 8:31

Yeah, that's where the silver lining of this pandemic, um, is happening right now. It's because we are now focusing on making our collections accessible through that digital platform that we may or may not have had the time to do originally.

JG 8:45

Yeah, yeah. I mean, even the National Archives is getting ready to dump a huge release of digital material, which, quite frankly, it's about time. [Laughter] You know, Library. Congress, of course, is a great resource. Digital Public Library of America is a great course, resource. Here in Indiana. We have Indiana Memory, which has a statewide digital gallery. You know, there's a lot of really great ways to learn about history. Wabash Valley Visions and Voices is another fabulous resource out of Indiana State University. Um. So there's really a lot out there for people to discover if they're willing to take the time to dig into it.

TC 9:32

Absolutely. Can you tell us actually some of your student projects that you have?

JG 9:37

Oh, well, right now we have a student working with Deaconess Hospital. This has been going on for are we in our second year or third year I think? We had students go down and help organize their archives. Their hospital goes back to the early 1900s, maybe the very late 1890s. So they organize their archives, created finding aids for all of the different areas. Um. And then now

we're, um, digitizing. So we've been scanning a lot of their historic photographs and regular photographs helping them to build a digital database. They've been around now 150 plus years. So, um, that's been a great project of students not only get experience working in archives, and dealing with the digital platforms, which is today's world, they also get paid, which is really nice. I have another student who has been working with Civil War documents, we had a collection of general orders that were sealed since 1862, 63, 64. And I had never unsealed them because I didn't have a place to keep them unfolded. Once they were unfolded, they had to stay. And also they were very fragile. So I had to learn how to hydrate documents. And a friend of mine at the clerk's office, Amber Goeing and she helped me with that she came out we experimented with it. So I had a student helped me rehydrate all of these documents, um, and then press them. And now they're all in the course of being inventoried. She's had some interesting discoveries. She said, there's a you can almost look at the AWOLS, the up and down of the AWOLS of people being reported missing. After battles. The desertion rate, right if the battle went badly, and the desertion rate is high, if the battle went, well, it's low. She said, there's one gentleman that apparently just can't keep his equipment. And there's like six requests for canteen, a canteen, a canteen and the commanders had it with him. Anyway, so even for just these general orders, which really are just reports, there was just statistical reports about troop movements, and equipment, that kind of thing. You still get a personality of who these people were. So we've had a lot of interesting projects. We've worked on displays at Haynie's Corner with students and with faculty in the History Department. We do displays on campus whenever we can. I have a vintage clothing collection that I do a presentation on, people love to see the vintage clothing, it's 100 years and it comes from a local family. So that's that's a lot of fun to get those items out. So in fact, I had took a bunch of theater students and we did a photoshoot at the right time. Using some of the clothes from the 1920s.

TC 12:43

Wow.

JG 12:45

Yeah, it was a lot of fun. My colleagues all went you let them do what? [Laughter] Yep. I did! We had great fun, but it's a way to again, make history alive, relevant now. And those students, those theater students were like those went in their portfolios, the pictures, and they were like we learned so much, right? So it's just a great way to kind of bring things alive.

TC 13:12

Oh, man, I, you know, it's funny. You mentioned that I live in the neighborhood. And I went on a walk I think I actually sold that photoshoot because I was trying not to disrupt -

JG 13:23

You might have, you might have, we had so much fun. The donor showed up. I went and picked up the donor she's Everdine Gordon is her name. She's in her I don't know, late 80s, early 90s. I went and picked her up and brought her down to the Wright's Home and she got to hang out with the girls while the she was going on. At one point she started playing the piano and I can run [unintelligible] like no, no, no, no. You can't. You can't do that [Laughter]. Um, but I was great fun. And again, it just kind of shows that we don't have to take history so seriously.

TC 14:01

Right.

JG 14:01

I think that sometimes people think oh, history is just a bunch of dates, and names. And no, it's so much more. It's people it's personalities. It's, it's how it still affects us today.

TC 14:14

And it just like you said, having fun with it. Because when I first started the Art History training for my career, um, art was always put on a pedestal and so are these time periods. And the more you dove into it and look at the primary sources. We're putting these people these time periods on a pedestal and there's no need because they felt the same motions we do today.

JG 14:38

Exactly.

TC 14:39

Similar sarcastic viewpoints and thoughts just maybe a little bit more eloquent and how they say it. [Laughter] But it's so similar. And once I was able to humanize that these were just people,

JG 14:51

Right.

TC 14:51

- prominent, but just people. It just made it more fun and accessible to me,

JG 14:57

You know in my Indiana History class when we get to the turn of the century, I have them read the Booth Tarkington book, *The Magnificent Ambersons*. And we talk about how technology, environment and social customs change. Just in the course of this one family, we only really see one generation of this family. And I tell 'em, it's a story of Indianapolis. So keep that in the back of your mind, too. But then, we, you know, they always come to the end of it, and they're like, wow, I mean, this is a fictional book, but, but it's not. All of these changes really took place in the span of about 40, 50 years. So, uh, uh. You just never know where you can dig up history.

TC 15:43

Absolutely. [Laughter] So is there anything else you'd like to share with us today?

JG 15:48

Um, well, nothing except that everybody be safe, and stay positive. It's not always easy in these times. Feel free to reach out to me again, if you can just go to the USI website. There's a link there to library, and then you can see a link to the archives. And please vote amusingartifacts.org. [Laughter] Thank you, Tory.

TC 16:12

Oh, absolutely. Jennifer, thank you for your time. Again, this is Evansville Museum recording, and keep posted. But thank you so much. We'll see ya.