

# The Mobile Archive Project--Call for Proposals

Proposals Due: September 21, 2021

Online Conference Date: November 10, 2021

**Keywords:** archive, nationalism, colonial America, translation, historiography

The Mobile Archive Project is an ongoing, flexible inquiry into the status of the archive in colonial and early American studies for our present day. In light of the global pandemic, plus economic fallout for universities and research communities sure to continue, the organizers take an open-ended approach to this project. We will convene in a series of online forums, hopefully with face to face meetings, towards the end goal of a published volume of essays.

We seek participants for **November 10, 2021** one-day webinar, hosted by the University of Siegen, Germany. Contributors will make short, five-minute presentations on any aspect of (or object from) the archive. For suggested topics and approaches, see the rationale below. Short presentations will be followed by responses from project team/section leaders. These are currently proposed, but not definitively set as: Archives of the Western Hemisphere, Teaching the Archive, Gendering the Archive, Minding the Gaps, Scholarly-Creative approaches.

The purpose of the opening webinar is to serve as a mutual introduction, and we hope, future trajectory for a continued collaboration. As the project evolves, we look forward to dedicated (and complementary conference projects), as well as continued online engagement. As we reflect upon the archive's role in past early Americanist scholarship, our goal also is to provide a forum for the mentoring of emerging scholars. Contributors should welcome this opportunity for collaboration across a broad geographic range and stages of professional development.

For participation in the November seminar, please send **proposals** by September 21, 2021 to [mobilearchiveproject@gmail.com](mailto:mobilearchiveproject@gmail.com).

Conference organizers: Thomas Hallock (University of South Florida St. Petersburg, USA), Marcel Hartwig (University of Siegen, Germany), Markus Heide (Stiftung Universität Hildesheim, Germany), Lenin Martell Gámez (Autonomous University of the State of Mexico, Mexico).

Sponsors: Society of Early Americanists, Stiftung Universität Hildesheim, University of Siegen.

## Rationale

The study of colonial America originated as a nationalistic, even patriotic enterprise. States, countries, municipalities, regions and other groups (often geographically defined) established cultural genealogies, showing the "starting point" of an imagined political unit. With the rise of hemispheric, comparative, and transatlantic studies, however, these etiological narratives have come under scrutiny. Old continuities, once taken for granted, have been complicated, deepened and enriched. The painful legacies of colonial violence--including enslavement, migration and removal--demand increased attention to how archival epistemologies carry colonial pasts into the present.

The attention to mobilities across time and space thus necessitates a critical look at one of the anchoring institutions in early American studies, the archive. Often established with a geographic basis, and usually bracketed by dates, the archival collection inevitably renders a given moment or object or angle of inquiry more relevant than others. Practicalities, of course, shape these decisions. Scholars travel to Pennsylvania to investigate Revolutionary Philadelphia, Massachusetts to

understand Puritan New England, and so on. But how did archival materials themselves travel? Letters were sent, objects changed hands, spaces were imagined, entire collections would migrate over time. This mobility belies the instability of any claim to archival “rootedness.”

The time is ripe for reconsideration. Digitalization has challenged the locational grounding of early Americanist scholarship. Where scholars have always been encouraged to make physical contact with a given scholarly artifact, funding to the physical archive has diminished; at the same time, online scans are increasingly accessible. Travel restrictions due to a global pandemic, meanwhile, have pressed the issue of remote access into the realm of necessity.

How then should scholarship follow suit? Limited travel, and the possibilities opened by online access, necessitate a break in old practices. While archival research has long been regarded as the driver of innovation, the access to collections has upheld institutional hierarchies. Gender, economic disparities, and geographic difference have played an overdetermined role in knowledge production. Increased attention to the living legacies of the colonial past, finally, demands greater attention to how our present-day past slips beyond set boundaries of space and time.

The inevitable restructuring of access and research challenges the role of the archive in a post-pandemic context. Will institutional access be restricted to digital environments only? What constitutes the allure of the archive, and how does it impact knowledge networks in historical and cultural studies? In what ways will material culture be accessible, and how will more unexpected connections unfold? Will future access remain bound to the monetization of digital resources and thus the purchasing power of research institutions? With renewed crossover between traditional and creative scholarship, how can silenced pasts be recovered alongside conventionally recorded and documented past?

Topics to be considered include, but are not limited to:

- Intersections of Nationalism and the Archive
- Hemispheric and transatlantic interventions on colonial archives
- Presentism and the colonial past
- Translation and circulation of scholarly traditions
- Digital v. on-site scholarship
- Archives and material culture
- Access and scholarly privilege
- Space and time in archival projects
- Futures of archival scholarship

Because of travel restrictions, and the uncertain economic future of humanities scholarship worldwide, conference plans must remain flexible. The Mobile Archives Project is organized to build from the core goals of an academic gathering (making connections, sharing knowledge) without being dependent on participants traveling to one central gathering place. A culminating, face-to-face meeting is, in fact, the ideal scenario; we simply cannot proceed toward that one single end.