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Article begins on next page
The Jazz Archives Fellowship: Professional Development and Diversity at the Institute of Jazz Studies

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Abstract. The Institute of Jazz Studies (IJS) started the Jazz Archives Fellows program in 2012 with two purposes in mind. First, the program focuses on improving diversity in the archives profession. Second, it provides a meaningful professional development opportunity for archivists in the early stages of their careers and for students in graduate programs who intend to become archivists. In addition, the IJS benefits directly from the fellows’ work to process a collection and create a digital project. This article presents a case study of the Fellowship with a focus on program design, values, and lessons learned, and includes recommendations for establishing similar programs.

KEYWORDS: Internships, diversity, archival education, early career archivists, case study.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years we have witnessed many conversations in different forums regarding the place and format of apprenticeships in archival repositories. Practical, hands-on learning is an essential element of archival education. Due to the difficult job market and the recession, the odds have been against those who seek to enter the profession. The lack of opportunities for
early-career archivists has become one of the most salient professional issues in the twenty-first century. How do we create meaningful, rich, and useful training opportunities while fostering social responsibility and diversifying the archives profession?

The Institute of Jazz Studies (IJS), a jazz research library and archives located in the Dana Library at Rutgers University–Newark, started the Jazz Archives Fellows program in 2012 with two purposes in mind. First, the program focuses on improving diversity in the archives profession. Second, it provides a meaningful professional development opportunity for archivists in the early stages of their careers and for students in graduate programs who intend to become archivists. In addition, the IJS benefits directly from the fellows’ work to process a collection and create a digital project. This article presents a case study of the fellowship with a focus on program design, values, and lessons learned. We start by describing the program’s goals and characteristics. Next, we review the literature about diversity in the context of archival education and best practices for archival internships and professional development opportunities, including an environmental scan of similar recent internship programs and their characteristics. We conclude with recommendations for establishing similar programs based on our experience.

JAZZ ARCHIVES FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Applying to be an IJS fellow is essentially the same as applying for a professional position. Although some other fellowship and internship programs require more involved applications, applicants to the Jazz Fellows program need only to submit a resume with three references and a cover letter explaining their interest in jazz and/or African American studies, and how the fellowship will support their professional development goals.¹ The fellowship is competitive—only three are awarded each year—with past funding from the Morroe Berger–Benny Carter Jazz
Research Fund and donor John Van Rens. Fellows receive a stipend for travel, meals, and incidentals during the two-week residency, with the IJS providing housing in a nearby hotel and covering the cost of some transportation and meals during the fellows’ stay. Although expanding the program to accept more applicants might increase its impact, doing so would require additional financial support. In addition, because of the small cohort size, participants currently receive more one-on-one attention.

The two-week residency includes a full schedule of work and activities, which includes arranging and describing archival materials, digital project work, field trips to nearby music repositories, and short career development sessions with library and university administrators. Fellows spend the majority of their time processing an archival collection and preparing a digital project, most typically a digital exhibit. At the end of the two-week residency, we solicit anonymous feedback from the fellows via an online form to improve the program based on their evaluation and observations.

Aside from the online survey, we have other assessment measures for the fellows program. The team of IJS and Dana Library faculty who administer the program also debrief each other after the fellows complete their residency. At this point in the program’s limited history, assessment is used solely for the purpose of improving the program. Questions we ask the fellows range from rating the value of each residency component (e.g., visits to other archives, processing project, meetings with administrators, etc.) to asking them to what extent they think the fellowship will affect their career path and professional development. In the debriefing meeting after the residency ends each year, the team discusses the participant feedback gathered in the survey as well as to what extent our own observations correspond to
participants’ perspectives. Based on all of this, we discuss possible adjustments and modifications for the following year’s program.

Planning for each year’s cohort occurs all year. The call for applicants goes out around mid- to-late November. Announcements are circulated to library schools, email lists, via Rutgers University Libraries' (RUL) publicity channels, and via the IJS's social media and mailing list, which helps distribute the information to archivally-related blogs and similar professional news outlets. We also arrange for the fellows to get tours of other performing arts repositories about six months in advance of their arrival, and work closely with RUL administration to manage the program’s budget, which is approximately $10,000. The program is coordinated by the IJS special projects consultant, who arranges meetings for involved staff to plan and prepare for the fellows and serves as the main contact for the program. In addition to the special projects consultant, the team includes three IJS archivists and its associate director as well as Dana Library’s digital humanities librarian, digital applications developer, and its administrative staff. The special projects consultant and associate director handle all administrative details, including the call for applicants, budgeting, hotel reservations, transportation, and finalizing the itinerary. IJS archivists select a collection for the fellows to process and ensure that all necessary supplies are on hand. Once the fellows arrive, the archivists work alongside the fellows to process the collection and create the finding aid. Similarly, the digital humanities librarian and digital libraries applications developer work with the fellows to create a digital exhibit using materials from the archives.

The fellowship starts near the beginning of June so that current library school students who wish to participate can better arrange their schedules to accommodate a two-week residency. Although some potential applicants may unfortunately not be able to take time off
from a current position to participate, one of the strengths of the program is its short duration. Unlike many internships and similar opportunities for professional development, the IJS fellowship lasts for only two weeks, during which time all living expenses are paid. We do this deliberately to support participants who might not otherwise have the means to benefit from the program. One drawback, however, is that we may be limiting participation by those with family commitments, in addition to those who are unable to take two weeks off from their current position for the program. However, numerous fellows have been able to manage both during the two week period, completing work assignments remotely while still participating fully in the program. We have not yet hosted a fellow with his/her family, although we would certainly try to accommodate such a request.

In terms of identifying a collection for the fellows to process and use in a digital exhibit, considerations include selecting a collection of manageable size, with items in a variety of formats that have significant historic value and that can be legally published online in a digital exhibit without raising copyright concerns. We also ensure that there is ample processing space to use for the duration of their residency. Because the fellowship occurs after the end of the spring semester at Rutgers–Newark, demand is low for group meeting space in Dana Library, which allows the group to work in the same space without interruption.

We ask that fellows who have a personal laptop bring it with them and install a text editor for creating an EAD finding aid for the collection they will process. Because not every fellow is able to bring a laptop, we reserve the IJS laptop for use during their stay. Not all fellows have experience in marking up an EAD finding aid by hand, but taking a collaborative approach to finding aid creation has enabled both newcomers to hand-code EAD and those with more
experience to learn together and directly from one another. Participant feedback has indicated that this collaborative learning is a program’s strength many fellows have appreciated.

APPLICANT PROFILES

Still in its infancy, the IJS Archival Fellowship has attracted 97 students and recent graduates in its first three years: 30 in 2012, 39 in 2013, and 28 in 2014. Given that the IJS Fellowship requires applicants to be enrolled in a graduate program or to have recently graduated from one, only 58% of the applicants were students at the time of their application, with recent graduates comprising the remaining 42%. All candidates held at least a bachelor’s degree, and all except one had earned or were pursuing a graduate degree in library and information science or public history. The breakdown of the applicants’ undergraduate majors reveals a strong humanities background (see Table 1):

Table 1

Only 33 of the 97 applicants earned a second master’s degree. As Table 2 indicates, subject areas include:

Table 2

Given the broad application requirements of the IJS fellowship program, it clearly attracts applicants with expertise in a variety of subject areas other than music, and fellows are able to translate their experience broadly in the field, given its practical, hands-on focus.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Archivists have long recognized the need for diversity and pursued various initiatives with that goal in mind. In her 2007 Society of American Archivists' (SAA) presidential address, Elizabeth
Adkins points out that archivists have been concerned with diversity in the profession for over thirty-five years and outlines three major themes relating to diversity in the archives: diversity of the archival record, diversity of archivists, and diversity of SAA. Her address provides an excellent snapshot of the diversity landscape in the archival profession from within the last decade, and more recently, Mary Caldera and Kathryn M. Neal underscore Adkins’ points and summarize how archivists today frame diversity in the field.

At the IJS, the Fellowship program includes both a focus on the diversity of the archival record as well as on the diversity of archivists, vis-à-vis the broader professional discussions on diversity in the archives. By virtue of our location at Rutgers University–Newark, and our institutional home at Rutgers University Libraries, the fellows experience a work environment in which diversity is paramount. Rutgers University–Newark is recognized as the most diverse campus in the United States, and this diversity is reflected in the faculty and staff of the Dana Library and the Institute of Jazz Studies. This diversity is an asset of the Institute’s program that may be difficult to replicate in other locations. For instance, we spoke to the archivist at Yellowstone National Park about the diversity component of their "archives blitz," a similar fellowship program hosted by the National Parks Service in 2014 and 2015. At Yellowstone they were unable to focus on diversity as much as they would have liked, because they were primarily focused on being able to recruit enough participants for the program to succeed.

Because we market the fellowship program widely, including via organizations that share the goal of increasing diversity in the library and archives professions, we make every effort to encourage budding archivists from all backgrounds to apply. Once the fellows arrive, they are tasked with arranging and describing a collection that documents jazz history, rooted deeply in African American culture, thereby giving the fellows the opportunity to further diversify the
historical record. They experience first-hand what it is like to work in an archives that specializes in preserving and providing access to records that document underrepresented communities.

Since the time of Adkins' address, authors have more recently pointed out that the manner in which diversity has been/is being considered tends to normalize the dominant majority. This normalization gives rise to a binary otherness that can serve to burden those outside of the majority with addressing the “problem” of diversity, as measured against the standard of “whiteness.” April Hathcock addresses this directly when she writes, “Rather than being framed as a shared goal for the common good, diversity is approached as a problem that must be solved, with diverse librarians becoming the objectified pawns deployed to attack the problem.” Anne Gilliland-Sweatland suggests reframing the paradigm so that emphasis shifts from encouraging “diversity,” often a binary model, to an “archival multiverse,” which better embraces pluralism.

We agree that a binary consideration of diversity is harmful and that awareness of hegemony, along with deliberately and transparently embracing a multiplicity of experiences, is essential to improving equality and bringing more voices to the archival table. In this case study, when we use the word diversity, we expressly do not mean to normalize the dominant majority and “other” the minority by making diversity an “issue.” Instead, we use the word “diversity” to embrace all viewpoints and experiences, as a fundamental value undergirding the very existence of the Jazz Archives Fellows Program. We hope it will ultimately help support this vision of equality, directly through its impact on the fellows themselves as well as through its reputation in the field as a model for fostering more inclusion in the archival profession.

Alongside the need for greater diversity in the archives, archivists have recognized the related need to increase professional development opportunities for early-career archivists. SAA's former president Jackie Dooley spoke directly to the need for more professional
development opportunities in her presidential address, following her “listening tour” with SAA membership and a number of vocal, controversial, frank, and sometimes angry exchanges occurring in social media, blog posts, and email listserv messages. These exchanges often focused on the ethical implications of internship programs and volunteer positions, and participants in the discussion expressed significant frustration at the limited nature and extent of open positions in comparison with the large number of job seekers; the employment value of archival education; as well as at the limited diversity in the field and the lack of archivists of color.

The issue had initially come to a head in the fall of 2012 when a disagreement about an internship guide promoted by SAA led to a heated exchange between elected SAA leadership and a group of early career archivists concerned about employment prospects and the impact of unpaid internships on new professionals. These concerns, in part, led to the establishment of the SAA Students and New Archives Professionals (SNAP) Roundtable earlier in 2012. It is within this context that we are considering the Institute of Jazz Studies’ Jazz Archives Fellows program, as it seeks to embrace both diversity and early career development in an equitable manner.

Existing literature on archival internships presents four clear themes: archival education, case studies, return on investment, and basic guidelines or best practices for internships. Archival education is by far the most prominent. Many graduate curricula require internship experiences, and some even make arrangements on behalf of the students. This kind of internship is out of the scope of this case study, given that the Institute’s Jazz Archives Fellowship is a standalone program, as defined in the literature. However, internships are an integral component of an archivist’s education, whether as part of a graduate degree or as standalone training.
opportunities, as they enable a guided foray into archival practice in which students apply theory and concepts learned in the classroom. SAA has even issued a best practices document that supports this perspective: “[i]nternships engage graduate students in professional-level work that supplements formal archival education and core knowledge, strengthens or introduces new skills, encourages collaboration and teamwork, and helps to develop their understanding of how archival theories and methods are applied in practice.”

The literature also touches on the experiences of different repositories with their particular internship offerings, as with Asher and Alexander, who write about finding a path to diversity through their internship. Alternatively, in case studies by Dahl, as well as by Kopp and Murphy, the objective was to recruit potential MLS students by offering paid work and mentoring opportunities to undergraduate students in order to prepare incoming MLS students and future archivists via internships. More recently, Rothbart summarized her experience as part of a team of archivists charged with arranging and describing a large collection for the Yellowstone Heritage and Research Center in Montana. IJS’s offering lies within these types of internship opportunities, and while focused on current students and recent graduates, the objective is similar: to offer aspiring archivists an opportunity to work in a thriving music archives under the guidance of experienced archivists.

The return on a repository’s investment, a third theme in the literature, is not as prevalent as the other themes, but anyone thinking of offering an archival internship should certainly consider the financial and operational impact of launching such a program. Time spent preparing for and administering the program should be weighed against the outcomes and their value to the institution and intern. Leonard makes an excellent point suggesting that “work projects must be
selected carefully in order to offer the intern either broad acquaintanceship with a range of archival duties or depth of experience in specific and delimited professional functions."\textsuperscript{19}

Lastly, the majority of authors agree on a basic level of guidelines that can yield a successful and productive experience for both the intern and the site supervisor. These include:

- Matching intern expectations with repository needs
- Providing opportunities for the intern to immerse herself or himself in the day-to-day operations of the archives
- Avoiding excessive busy work, as ultimately the project to be completed must be comparable to what professional archivists face in their work
- Compensation for the time and effort spent working at the archives should be in the form of course credit or a stipend
- The internship must be supervised by a professional archivist and must never replace the work of an archivist within an organization
- Communicating openly and frequently throughout the internship ensures a good experience for all parties involved

These best practices mirror the ones that were formally adopted by SAA in 2014 thus asserting the importance of a well-planned and thoughtfully designed internship experience in the training of future archivists.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The Institute of Jazz Studies’ Jazz Archives Fellowship is not the first standalone offering of its kind. The Association of Research Libraries (ARL) sponsors several significant programs that address the lack of diversity in the library and archives field. However, these programs
differ from the IJS Fellowship in several ways. ARL programs provide tuition waivers and stipends, an internship in a research library for the duration of the award, as well as travel and registration support to attend professional conferences. While the IJS Archives Fellowship also focuses on diversity, it is smaller in scope and focuses on building a more narrowly defined skill set in the management and preservation of performing arts collections, as opposed to providing more general work experience and professional development. Bastian and Webber define independent internships like the Jazz Archives Fellowship as opportunities “offered by corporations, universities, government archives, and historical societies,” which are “generally paid and often competitive.” Bastian and Webber continue by stating that “[t]he growing number of internships advertised each year attest to their increasing popularity,” suggesting that the IJS Fellowship is among many offerings available to students and recent graduates outside the aegis of their academic programs. To better quantify and understand what kinds of similar opportunities have been most recently available, we examined the SAA-sponsored Archives & Archivists (A&A) Listserv between 2012 and 2014. Table 3 shows the number of internship announcements by year categorized by repository type.

**TABLE 3**

Of the three-year period, 2013 had the most opportunities at 27, followed by 2014 at 22, and 2012 at 15. Museums and independent archives (defined as archival repositories within institutions such as non-profit organizations or performing arts venues) represent almost one half of all organizations offering the kind of “independent internship” identified by Bastian and Webber.

These offerings were similar in the type of work applicants were expected to complete, including accessioning collections, archival arrangement and description, preservation
assessment, rehousing, reformatting and digitization, creation of finding aids and EAD, creating metadata for digitized materials, and developing exhibits. Reference activities were rare among the position descriptions, most likely due to the nature of the work, in that more extensive knowledge of the collections is required and probably unattainable at an internship level. One internship listing, however, was entirely focused on reference and reading room activities. Similarly, another one dealt entirely with marketing and social media, in which the intern was expected to develop a social media strategy for the repository in addition to setting up accounts on sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and others. These two exceptions aside, the postings for internship offerings from the past three calendar years suggest that existing archival institutions generally require interns to complete routine archival work.

Financial compensation for this type of work has been thoroughly discussed on the A&A listserv, and by looking at the broad range of relatively low hourly pay rates, one can empathize with the frustration expressed by many participants in this discussion. Hourly pay for the internships offered between 2012 and 2014 ranges from $0 per hour or graduate school credit to $16 per hour, with a median of $15 per hour for 2012, and $10 for 2013 and 2014. Taking all of this information into account, existing opportunities do not adequately compensate interns for the level of work they are asked to complete. These opportunities are essential to acquiring the hands-on training that the literature highlights as necessary for a solid grounding in archival practice. In addition, at least a third of the opportunities listed in the three years are unpaid, which places a burden on upcoming archivists who wish to launch their careers. There is a disconnect between the advocacy for treating our students and early-career professionals fairly, and what archival repositories are offering in the real world.
CONCLUSIONS

Although the A&A listserv advertised a number of professional development opportunities for early career archivists, the IJS Archival Fellowship is unique in many ways. Fellows work as a cohort directly alongside the Institute’s archival faculty and Dana Library’s digital humanities librarian, respectively, to arrange and describe a collection and develop a digital exhibit or similar digital project. Working as a cohort offers the fellows an opportunity to practice critical archival thinking in the company of other archivists with varying degrees and types of experiences. In the session “Archival Education: Outcomes and Opportunities” at the 2014 Society of American Archivists’ annual meeting, presenters agreed that collaborative assignments, opportunities for experience in the field, management coursework, and building presentation skills were essential elements for improving critical archival thinking skills. The IJS Archival Fellowship offers a unique combination of programming to foster exactly this kind of learning. In addition to the unique group dynamic, the sessions with library and campus leadership and visits to area performing arts repositories contribute to a rich learning environment for the fellows.

Since starting the Fellows program in 2012, we have made several improvements based on our experience and feedback from participants. First, we have learned the importance of selecting manageable projects. For example, in 2014 we selected a collection that was so large that we had to work on two Saturdays just to finish processing it and were only able to create a Microsoft Word document finding aid because we ran out of time for encoding the EAD version. By selecting a smaller, more manageable collection in 2015, we were better able to provide the fellows with down time on the weekends, during which they could work on their schoolwork or other projects, and we completed the EAD finding aid with the fellows’ involvement.
We have also learned to encourage equal participation from all fellows and foster a group-friendly atmosphere so that each person feels that he/she is contributing equally. This is particularly important in view of our goals for encouraging diversity and empowering early career archivists from a variety of backgrounds. One way we have accomplished this was through discussion with the fellows about group dynamics and leadership, in which fellows considered the role they have typically played in a group project and how this might factor in to their work during their residency.

Participants have indicated that they would prefer to get “homework” in advance of their arrival. They felt that this would better prepare them for quickly writing the finding aid and curating the digital exhibit. We plan to incorporate this suggestion with future cohorts, so that they are better aware of the content of the collection from the start, which will improve their efficiency in producing the finding aid and exhibit as well as help them with other archival tasks such as arrangement and writing a biographical or historical note.

Also based on feedback from participants, we have learned that two strengths of the IJS Archives Fellowship are the networking opportunities we provide along with the chance to visit other performing arts archives. During the fellows’ residency, we host a gathering of the Brick City Archivists and Friends, an informal local group of archivists in Newark, so that the fellows can meet them and learn about their collections. Tours have ranged from a behind-the-scenes look at Carnegie Hall and its archives to a tour of the Louis Armstrong House and Museum. These tours expose the fellows to a wide variety of similar archives and give them a fuller understanding of specialized archives. Fellows also meet with RUL administrators and Rutgers–Newark campus leaders. All of these activities give the fellows a chance to practice their
networking skills in a non-threatening environment and learn about working at an archives in an academic institution as well as in other settings.

Important considerations for archivists wishing to host similar programs range from dedicating their schedules to the fellow(s) or intern(s) during their residency, to planning how many people might be needed to help organize the program, which would obviously depend on the learning goals and available resources. Having a six-person team both to plan and run the Jazz Archives Fellowship program has been a tremendous boon at the IJS, and we would have to scale back the program without this extensive staff involvement. This is important for the IJS in order to meet the fellows’ educational goals.

For archivists who aim to support increased diversity in the archives through a fellowship or internship program, an important consideration is where the program would be hosted and the feasibility of creating an experience in a location that truly reflects a multiplicity of perspectives. Because of the demographics in some parts of the United States, archivists might find it particularly difficult to meet programmatic goals related to diversity, or they may need to work harder to ensure that participants engage with professionals from diverse backgrounds, that recruitment attracts participant with widely varying experiences, and/or that their residency includes significant immersion into an environment rich with diversity, for example.

Funding is another obvious consideration, and perhaps the most critical, especially in terms of diversity. At the IJS, we are fortunate to have support for this program from a donor who strongly values diversity. Without financial backing, a program such as the IJS Jazz Fellowship runs the risk of placing too much burden on participants, who are unlikely to be able to afford the cost of travel and lodging to participate. We do not recommend hosting a similar
program without being able to offer participants the support they need to attend, especially if programmatic goals include fostering greater diversity.

In conclusion, the Jazz Archives Fellowship is a mutually advantageous program that offers benefits both to the IJS and to the fellows. The fellows help the IJS reduce its processing backlog while at the same time create new access tools (i.e., the digital exhibits) that would otherwise not exist. The IJS provides the fellows with tangible products to share with future employers, hands-on archival experience, practice networking, the status of having been awarded a competitive fellowship, and an increased understanding of diversity in the archives.

Notes

1. In April Hathcock’s article on diversity and archival internships, she points out that an onerous application process can be a barrier to inclusion in archival internships for applicants outside of the majority or mainstream. However, the IJS process is equivalent to a job application and is less complicated than the programs Hathcock describes. April Hathcock, “White Librarianship in Blackface: Diversity Initiatives in LIS,” In the Library with the Lead Pipe, October 7, 2015, http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2015/lis-diversity/.

2. See http://ijsfellows.omeka.net/ for an example of a digital exhibit created by one cohort of fellows.


22. Ibid.

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<th>Major</th>
<th>Number of Applicants</th>
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<tr>
<td>History</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performing Arts</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>English/Literature</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications/Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts/Design</td>
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<td>Social Sciences</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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### Table 2, Second Master’s Degree Subject Areas

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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>Art/Art History</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journalism/Media</td>
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Table 3, Archives and Archivists Listserv Internship Announcements

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<th>2014</th>
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<tr>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent Archives</td>
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<td>Historical Society</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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