

reflection on the many ways photography shaped, propagated, and enabled imperial aspirations.

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NOTE

- ¹ Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1.

Keepers of Our Digital Future: An Assessment of the National Digital Stewardship Residencies, 2013–2016

By Meridith B. Mink with the assistance of Samantha DeWitt, Christa Williford, and Alice Bishop. Foreword by Abby Smith Rumsey. Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources, December 2016. 89 pp. Open Access PDF. Freely available at <https://www.clir.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/10/pub173.pdf>.

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The need for archives to equip themselves for the unique challenges of preserving digital resources has been recognized for some time.¹ However, understandings of what “stewardship of digital resources” entails in practice is still evolving and has become an active area of research over the past ten years. Despite initiatives such as Digital Preservation Outreach and Education (DPOE), A Curriculum Framework for Digital Curation (DigCurV), Carolina Digital Curriculum Project (DigCCurr), and the Society of American Archivists’ Digital Archives Specialist (DAS) Curriculum and Certificate Program, no uniform view yet exists on what skills are required for effective digital stewardship across the archives and heritage sector. This is reflected in higher education courses in information science in the United States and the United Kingdom, where coverage of digital stewardship skills vary. Many archives are themselves at an early maturity stage when it comes to preserving digital resources and will need to acquire an understanding of how available skills and frameworks translate into their local contexts.

In recognition of gaps between organizations’ need for digital stewardship and the availability of professionals with the right skills to take on this work, the first National Digital Stewardship Residency (NDSR) was launched in 2013. The goal of the NDSR pilot was to build a new generation of practitioners who could lead in the area of digital stewardship. The pilot was designed around a discrete nine-month project that enabled recent graduates to acquire hands-on skills in an

organizational context while undertaking further training and networking activities. Since 2013, another six NDSR initiatives have been funded through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). In total, at the time this review was written, fifty-seven residents have completed placement projects that address digital stewardship across over fifty participating host organizations. This makes the NDSR projects unique and worthy of close study, as they provide substantial data on what digital stewardship entails in practice—both in terms of the skills required of new professionals and the requirements of host organizations themselves.

Keepers of Our Digital Future: An Assessment of the National Digital Stewardship Residencies, 2013–2016 was commissioned by the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR). A recent assessment of the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) Skills for the Future Programme evaluated a similar large-scale trainee cohort model.² However, *Keepers of Our Digital Future* is to my knowledge the only study to look at a placement program dedicated specifically to the development of digital skills in the heritage sector. Meridith Beck Mink acted as lead researcher on the CLIR study and authored the final report. Mink holds a PhD in the history of science from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and has a background in data curation. Mink's research methodology involved background analysis of previous NDSR assessments, an anonymous survey of former residents and project supervisors, followed by interviews and site visits with current residents and their supervisors.

The assessment was commissioned to evaluate how and if the NDSR residencies are an effective model for training new professionals. Mink and her colleagues do conclude that the model was successful in equipping residents to work in digital stewardship, but they also recommend a centralized, coordinated NDSR program that can standardize and better support the residency experience (p. 47). The first section of the report describes in great detail the complexity and variations across the first six residency initiatives, still leaving the reader uncertain about their structure and administration. A second read was required to better understand the set-up and administration of the initiatives. This complexity seems to support the research team's own recommendations around why more standardization of future NDSR projects is important to make the experience easier to navigate for future residents.

Most striking in a second reading is the joint learning in which both the NDSR residents and their host organizations partook. The residencies differ from traditional archives placements, where graduates work within clearly defined and standardized processes. Instead, graduates often learn alongside their host organizations and begin to establish new processes and ways of working. While this frustrated some residents, who felt that the host organizations were not able to provide enough support, it also enabled them to show leadership in an area still uncharted by many organizations. Supervisors often expressed that

the residents' mere presence in their host organizations was a highly effective internal advocacy and educational tool (p. 17). In this manner, the residencies functioned as mirrors, reflecting gap areas around digital stewardship in their host organizations. While internal advocacy was not the original goal of the NDSR initiative, the report makes clear the material benefits of having digital stewards working within an organization.

What further stands out in the report is how the current positions of several former residents involve exactly these skills—project management, internal advocacy, and business change. The report mentions that many of the residents are now in roles where they lead and implement new projects and processes. For organizations involved in preserving digital collections, vision and leadership are core skills to move organizations forward and impact change.³ Because of the evolving nature of digital stewardship and the maturity level of many organizations, the experience of working in uncharted territory and without well-defined processes is often part and parcel of the field. Drawing on the career trajectory of former NDSR residents should inform higher education curricula to prepare graduates for working effectively in such environments.

This type of information also makes Mink's report significant to archival practice. *Keepers of Our Digital Future* provides unique and substantive data on the types of skills and job trajectories of early career professionals who work in digital stewardship. As observed in a previous study by former NDSR residents Blumenthal et al, many competency studies on digital stewardship are based on job advertisements or training curricula.⁴ As numerous organizations start the process of addressing digital stewardship gaps, it is possible that a discord exists between what skills organizations are asking for when recruiting new staff and what digital stewardship involves in practice. Continued monitoring of the NDSR residencies has the potential of not only informing further development of higher education training, but also aiding organizations in successfully recruiting staff with the right skills. Such data could further be used to triangulate findings from and to continue to develop current professional frameworks for digital stewardship such as DigCurV and the DAS Curriculum.

It is still early for the NDSR initiatives, and Mink's report reflects the more immediate impact of the residencies. Of immense value would be revisiting the NDSR professionals and their host organizations over the coming ten to twenty years to capture their long-term implications. Questions central to explore include the impact that residencies have had on host organizations. While most supervisors interviewed for the report expressed that hosting a residency project had a positive impact on their organizations' maturity in terms of caring for digital resources, the impact a few years on is not yet known. A longitudinal study could look at how and if host organizations continue maturing and

improving their processes for preserving digital collections after residents have left the organizations and which factors influenced this.

Last, continued study of NDSR could diversify how professional competency frameworks look at digital stewardship. The *Keepers of Our Digital Future* report does not distinguish different types of specialist practitioner roles that come under the umbrella term “digital steward.” However, as reflected in the variety of NDSR residency projects, many niches exist within digital stewardship. Following the residents in their future career development would further clarify the different specialist career trajectories within digital stewardship and digital archives. The recommendations from the report to create a centralized knowledge information source about past and current NDSR residencies could do much to underpin such future research. I hope that the NDSR host organizations and former residents continue to collaborate and inform what is known about skills for digital stewardship in years to come.

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- ¹ Margaret Hedstrom, “Digital Preservation: A Time Bomb for Digital Libraries,” *Computers and the Humanities* 31 (1998): 189–202; Neil Beagrie, *National Digital Preservation Initiatives: An Overview of Developments in Australia, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom and of Related International Activity* (Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2003).
- ² ECROYS, *Evaluation of HLF Skills for the Future Programme: A Report to the Heritage Lottery Fund* (London: Heritage Lottery Fund, 2017).
- ³ Winston Atkins, Andrea Goethals, Carol Kussmann, Meg Phillips, and Mary Vardigan, *Staffing for Effective Digital Preservation: An NDSA Report, 2013* (Washington, D.C.: NDSA, 2013), <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gdc/lcpub.2013655113.1>.
- ⁴ Karl-Rainer Blumenthal, Peggy Griesinger, Julia Kim, Shira Peltzman, and Vicky Steeves, “What Makes a Digital Steward: A Competency Profile Based on the National Digital Stewardship Residencies” (paper presented at the 13th International Conference on Digital Preservation, Bern, Switzerland, October 3–6, 2016): 112.

Feminists Among Us: Resistance and Advocacy in Library Leadership

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Just because librarians have been classed as feminized professionals does not mean that feminist theory or praxis exists on the job. That’s a main premise of *Feminists Among Us: Resistance and Advocacy in Library Leadership*, published as