

[Ashley Cataldo](#), American Antiquarian Society

“From Weeding to Reseeding: Removing (and Restoring) Botanicals in Library Collections”

Abstract:

Current efforts to study and preserve biodiversity, like those at the Kew Herbarium, the Millennium Seed Bank, and the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, are intended to help us identify plants from across the world and provide access to a variety of seeds that might be viable as climate change progresses. But some preservation of botanical specimens is not so intentional. This presentation looks at how some special collections botanical specimens were subject to accidental preservation and then near destruction when removed from their original newspapers, books, autograph albums, herbaria, journals, and letters in special collections libraries.

In discussing examples drawn primarily from the collections of the American Antiquarian Society (AAS), this paper explores the challenges of preserving and conserving individual specimens that were seen as rubbish by holding institutions. Throughout the talk, I will address the following questions: How do we catalog and preserve botanicals that have been removed from collections, an action that often occurs during the digitizing process? How do we locate traces of long-lost botanical specimens in collections? How do we catalog albums or journals that contain botanicals? How do our conservators preserve botanical specimens that remain in books and manuscripts? How do we handle specimens that have been separated from the volumes and paper in which they were pressed? And finally, how do preservation practices related to loose botanicals potentially lead to other kinds of waste production?

Bio:

Ashley Cataldo is curator of manuscripts at the American Antiquarian Society. She is responsible for selecting, cataloging, and making accessible the Society's collection of diaries, correspondence, and other papers. She served as assistant curator of manuscripts for four years and, prior to that, held a variety of positions at AAS, including cataloger of books, reference assistant, and digital expediter. Ashley has published articles on early American bookbinding and seventeenth-century manuscript and book culture and is interested in the intersection of information studies and the environmental humanities.