Archives-Based Digital Projects in Early America

By Molly O'Hagan Hardy

The use of quantitative methods to analyze the past in history departments coincided with the introduction of machine-readable cataloging to replace the card catalogs in libraries in the middle of the twentieth century. The more recent application of computational tools and methods to humanities scholarship relies on a similar return to the archives, so that scholars can apply new methodologies to old records and deduce and understand anew. Recent digital humanities work productively challenges the professional specialization that separated scholars working in libraries from those working in academia. The scholarship of historian Charles McLean Andrews and bibliographer Jacob Blanck, conducted before these professional divides were solidified, is in many ways comparable to digital humanities’ reliance on critical classification systems and on inclusive models of scholarly production. In a world of collaboration, transparency of process reigns supreme as methodology has become a subject of scholarship. This article, based on the 2018 WMQ-EMSI workshop, “Archives-Based Digital Projects in Early America,” offers a state-of-the-field report on how scholars working in academia and in libraries are remediating the early American historical record through digital tools and methods.