

Pauszek, J. (2025). *Worker writers: Community archiving in action*. National Council of Teachers of English.

Review by D-Jay Bidwell

In academic archival studies, the historical record has long favored institutions of power: the state, the university, the corporation, and the elite. When working-class lives enter these spaces, they are frequently mediated through the lens of records created by others, including court documents, union records, and economic data. In *Worker Writers: Community Archiving in Action*, Jessica Pauszek delivers a powerful, methodologically innovative counter-narrative that shows that the community of working-class writers should not only be included in those spaces of power, but their work should be available and easily accessible for study by students and scholars or for anyone who may be interested in their work.

By documenting her decade-long collaboration with the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP), Pauszek shows working-class people as more than just subjects being studied. Instead, she presents them as people who create knowledge, tell their own stories, and preserve their own histories and experiences. Moreover, Pauszek's goal with this book is to "highlight the valuable work done by the FWWC/FED and the collaborative process we navigated through the moments of precarity, to foreground community values, community representation, and archival access for working-class communities" (p. 4).

Pauszek asserts her ethos in the preface, where she provides a detailed account of her family's working-class lineage. She connects her family's stories that have always been connected to labor, but Pauszek also connects them to stories of literacy. She asserts, "my family never saw themselves as having permission, intelligence, or knowledge to write and publish their stories—despite making the ink for publishing, printing the worlds and images of other people, or writing every single day" (p. xxiv). Here, Pauszek sheds light on her father's many years working in a commercial print shop, where he printed those words and images of the elite. Furthermore, Pauszek's use of narrative style and storytelling throughout the book helps capture the passion and dedication of her and her colleagues' efforts to preserve and share the work of voiceless and overlooked working-class writers.

Although archival work is nothing new in academia, this book centers on Pauszek and her journey of immersion in archival construction. When she first started, she found a lack of scholars who built archives within communities. What's more, she discovered that there were few examples of any archives that centered on working-class writings by any community members. When Pauszek began thinking about creating an archive of working-class writings, she was a novice at developing one. The questions she started with were, "Where are working-class writers and writing represented? Where is working-class community writing stored, preserved, perhaps even taught?" (p. 5).

One important step in her journey is Pauszek's highlighting of her identity as an American graduate student from a prestigious university traveling abroad in London. She notes that "the short story is that in 2013 I traveled to England as a graduate student with the goal of researching working class community writers. It was the first time during my graduate education that I had seen similarities to my own upbringing" (p.

6). She continues throughout the first chapter to talk about the struggles the FWWCP faced, including the organization's bankruptcy and a struggling membership base.

Pauszek explores the history and significance of the FWWCP in chapter two. She builds on her argument that the work of the working-class community should not be viewed as mundane personal narratives but rather as work that creates community and constructs culture. She further shows how members of the FWWCP used writing to document workplace experiences, family histories, migration stories, and community struggles that were often absent from mainstream media and institutional records.

Chapter four is where Pauszek really gets into the creation of the archive. She does an excellent job of comparing and contrasting what a typical scholar might encounter during archival research and what she and her colleagues experienced. For example, in most instances, the archival research will be conducted at an institution, and the collection they request is set up for them to review. By contrast, Pauszek's experiences included no institutional setup, and she talks about not only the emotional and academic labor but also the physical labor of transporting the materials they collected from one available space to another. These are just further examples of whose work is chosen to be preserved and available for research and whose is not.

The book brings something new to the conversation in community literacy by bridging archival studies and working-class community activism. Pauszek does not simply analyze working-class texts from a distance; instead, she foregrounds collaboration with community members, emphasizing co-curation, shared authority, and participatory archival design. Furthermore, Pauszek pushes the notion that those who lack access to or privilege in entering elite spaces, such as attending a college or university, are not good enough to participate in showcasing their work. It would seem that those who take up elite spaces are concerned that allowing working-class writers into their private spaces would overshadow them.

Worker writers: Community archiving in action makes a meaningful contribution to Working-Class Studies because it combines archival research, literacy studies, and community collaboration to demonstrate how working-class histories are created, preserved, and sustained. The book offers not only a study of worker writing but also a methodology for conducting ethical, community-centered research that acknowledges the material realities of labor, precarity, and collective memory. It also serves as a very inspirational narrative for those who want to create something that can help those on the margins of elite spaces.

Reviewer Bio:

D-Jay Bidwell is a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate in the Rhetoric, Theory, and Culture program at Michigan Technological University. His research focuses on technical and professional communication, usability, accessibility, and disability studies, with an emphasis on how these areas intersect in theory and practice. He is particularly interested in teaching accessibility in TPC classrooms and preparing students to design inclusive, user-centered documents and digital environments. His work is grounded in social justice and equitable design for individuals with disabilities. He also teaches composition and technical communication courses, emphasizing usability testing and accessible design practices.