

# Archival Services of State Libraries

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*Tennessee State Library and Archives*

A glance at the agenda for this assembly shows a close relation between the subjects discussed here and those included in *The Role of the State Library*, published in 1956. Furthermore, one must suspect that both programs were prepared by librarians without too much consultation with archivists. For example, of the 10 topics included on our agenda, 9 have to do with library problems while only 1 relates to archival matters. Perhaps this is to be expected, since the Library of Congress sponsors this assembly. Substantially the same ratio, however, holds in *The Role of the State Library*, which devotes 101 lines to strictly library activities as against 10 lines to the subject of archives. This, too, need cause no surprise; for in a large measure *The Role* was prepared by librarians. However natural these explanations may be, the heavy preponderance of library over archives may help explain why the archivists of the country viewed *The Role* with less than enthusiasm. In fact, the Society of American Archivists registered a formal protest against the proposed inclusion of archival services among the responsibilities of State libraries; and, so far as I can determine, this action by the Society reflects the almost unanimous view of its membership. Of course, I refer here to professional archivists as distinguished from such binominous persons as your present speaker.

It might be worth while to consider now the reasons given by the archivists for their stand. In their resolution on the subject, they recognized that the archival and library professions share the common objective of making information available effectively and economically. They held, however, that the professions differ basically in the nature of the materials with which they deal and the methods required for handling those materials. As a result of these differences, the archivists concluded, the "study of librarianship and library work experience, while pertinent, cannot provide adequately professional training and work experience for effective archival administration, disproving the library's exclusive right to jurisdiction in matters archival." The resolution undertook still

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further to refute the recommendation contained in *The Role* by pointing out that in 29 States the archival agency had no connection with the State library, as opposed to 14 States in which that connection did exist.<sup>2</sup> The resolution setting forth the archivists' views was transmitted to the National Association of State Libraries; and on October 12, 1956, a committee from that organization met with the Council of the Society of American Archivists. To quote from the Council's minutes of that date: "Open and friendly discussion ensued, with each committee member expressing his views and acknowledging the areas of mutual interest. The desirability of proposing a joint committee of the two organizations to foster a closer relationship was discussed."<sup>3</sup> The minutes of the Council for May 16, 1957, contain this item under the head of unfinished business: "The communication to the National Association of State Libraries had been sent, but there had been no reply to date."<sup>4</sup>

Of the two basic differences between the professions mentioned in the archivists' resolution, one appears at first glance to leave no ground for argument. I refer to the statement about the difference in the nature of materials and in methods of handling them. This seems to be based on the assumption that the archives handles manuscript records and materials while the library takes care of printed matter. But does that neat line of demarcation hold in departments of archives and history, where printed matter may be secondary but still have an important place in the holdings? In one State, I am informed, newspapers, session laws, printed journals, and the like belong in the library until they are 50 years old, after which time they go to the archives. In spite of these differences between the States, most of us are inclined to agree that there are basic differences between archival and library materials and between the methods of handling them.

You will recall that the archivists also maintained that "the study of librarianship and library work and experience, while pertinent, cannot provide adequately professional training and work experience for effective archival administration." It seems to one standing more or less on the sidelines that the archivists here have touched on a point that calls for thought. For example, none of our great library schools, so far as I know, offers any archival training. On several occasions in the past few years I have mentioned this fact to one of the library schools in our area and have suggested the desirability of adding a few courses on archives to its curriculum.

<sup>2</sup> *American Archivist*, 19: 371-372 (Oct. 1956).

<sup>3</sup> *American Archivist*, 20: 59 (Jan. 1957).

<sup>4</sup> *American Archivist*, 20: 386 (Oct. 1957).

The idea, though politely received, apparently fell on stony ground. It is hard to escape the conclusion that library schools have little or no interest in archival training and that, by and large, their graduates may be expected to reflect that attitude.

Archivists are quite concerned, and understandably so, over the prospect that the policies of a State library agency including the State archives may be determined by people of library training who have scant knowledge or appreciation of archives. There is a real danger, archivists believe, that under such conditions the archives will become one minor section of the several that make up the library organization. Such a result undoubtedly would hurt the work and prestige of both the archives and its staff. Of course, the library might suffer in the same way if policies were determined by a professional archivist who tended to overemphasize his own field at the expense of library functions. But the likelihood of such a situation arising is lessened by the absence of schools for archival training. It should be recalled, however, that in a few States, which readily come to mind, the archives hold enviable prestige in combined agencies administered by professionally trained librarians.

The final objection by archivists to consolidation of the two agencies deserves serious consideration. According to them, the archives has no organic connection with the library in 29 States as compared to 14 States where that connection exists — a ratio of more than two to one. It may be assumed that the 29 States had good reasons for separating or keeping separate the two agencies and that such an arrangement works to their satisfaction.

As a matter of fact, it is doubtful whether even the library functions are identical in any two States. To mention only a few examples, some State libraries serve the general reading public of their communities, others are primarily research centers, and still others are mainly law libraries. In some cases the State library is located in the same city with the State university. Obviously the functions of the State library so located must differ from those in such States as Tennessee, where the State university is some 200 miles from the capital. Looking at the dizzy variety of purely library functions, archivists think librarians should get their present household in order before demanding that the archivists be moved in with them. All this points up the fact that varying conditions in some States may dictate policies that would not apply in others. When we consider the rapidly growing tendency to impose conformity and uniformity from above, regardless of local conditions, some of us hesitate to join in the hue and cry, especially if our own fields of interest are at stake.

Another consideration enters into the question of consolidating library and archives. It was not mentioned in the archivists' resolution but seems to call for recognition. I refer to the tendency of archivists to become involved in the problem of record management, made acute by the ever-mounting volume of public papers. Here the archivists themselves seem to divide loosely into four schools of thought: the historically minded old school, to whom the destruction of any record is an act to be deplored; the efficiency experts, to whom the cutting of costs is paramount; those who seek to temper historical appreciation with a certain amount of realism; and, finally, those who look upon record management as something entirely apart from the function of the archivist. This is no place to discuss so intricate a problem, but we might question whether the development mentioned does not portend a still further divergence between the librarian and the archivist. Indeed, so sharp are the differences among archivists themselves on this subject that a few years back there was a question among some members of the Society of American Archivists whether that Society should attempt to encompass both record managers and archivists or should restrict its membership to archivists as more traditionally defined.

Up to now I have discussed largely the negative side of the question, and I must admit that the archivists have a strong case. It is my own judgment, however, based on experience, that the advantages of combining the library and archives in one agency outweigh the objections raised. This presupposes, of course, that those responsible for administering the several functions have a broad and sympathetic understanding of all interests and points of view involved. Without undertaking to set forth the advantages in the order of their importance, I shall suggest a few of them.

In Tennessee we have found in our combined agency a certain flexibility that can operate to the advantage of all. For example, there is flexibility in the matter of the budget. First, let me say that our extension and rural library program has a separate appropriation, so that these remarks apply only to the funds for the State library proper and the divisions of archives and restoration and reproduction. These funds are allocated by quarters to which we must adhere within reasonable limits. For the Archives, the cost of acquisition is nominal except when an especially important body of private papers needs to be purchased. The Archives Division, however, must on occasion spend abnormally large amounts for containers and other equipment or supplies. The library, on the other hand, has its quarters of extra heavy expenditures, as when

newspaper and periodical subscriptions must be renewed. The same is true of the restoration and reproduction division in the purchase of microfilm, paper stock, and the like. We find that by calling together the directors of the three divisions along with our budget officer at the beginning of each quarter we can usually foresee where our greatest demands will lie and adjust our expenditures to the best advantage of our total operation.

A certain flexibility of staff is also possible. Three years ago our Archives Division was faced with the necessity of preparing a large body of material for restoration within a limited time. Only by using temporarily a few staff members from the other divisions were we able to do the job on schedule. At present we are engaged in an extensive program of microfilming Tennessee newspapers. With the consent of our personnel department and division heads, we have been able to make certain transfers in staff for the duration of the project, to the benefit of all.

We have found too that flexibility in the use of space has been an important item. In planning our building, none of us could foresee the relative rate of expansion of the archives and the library. By designing the storage areas so that any part can house library stacks or archives vaults, as future expansion requires, we believe that the best interests of the State have been served. Other examples could be cited to show the advantage of flexibility in the use of space.

Our restoration and reproduction division is the pride and joy of our whole organization and has done much to make the general public aware of our valuable resources and of the way we seek to make them usable to present and future generations. In working for the other divisions it adjusts its schedules to the most pressing needs of each. As you know, restoration and reproduction are expensive, and it may be doubted whether this service would have been possible to us at reasonable cost had not all divisions been under a single management.

One great advantage of combining the Archives with the State library is the convenience it affords to the public, for the holdings of one complement those of the other. To have all in one building and under one management saves the time and effort of patrons and holds down operating costs. These advantages are all the greater when the library staff and that of the Archives work as a team — understanding each other's resources, possibilities, problems, and limitations and taking pride in the wealth of their combined holdings. Such teamwork can be had in spite of differences in the training and methods of archivists and librarians, and the resulting

*esprit de corps* is quickly detected and fully appreciated by patrons.

The union of Archives and State library in a single agency can be helpful in getting more adequate appropriations to carry on the work of both. Many people have asked what happened to cause the legislature of Tennessee a decade ago to appropriate 2½ million dollars for a State Library and Archives Building — a respectable sum for a State of our resources. Since that occurred before my connection with the State government, I can claim no credit for what was done. How did it come about? In my judgment, it resulted from the combined efforts of those who were deeply interested *either* in the library *or* in the archives but often not in both. When the combined influence of the two groups was brought into play, favorable action seemed to come easily. Had the two groups competed for the tax dollar instead of working together, we may question whether our building would have become a reality. We have found also that our annual appropriations show the same advantage of broad appeal. Our rural library program, for example, has greatly strengthened our position among legislators from the less populated counties, many of whom come to Nashville with little knowledge of either the State library or the Archives.

All of you are aware of two general tendencies in governmental organization, whether on national, State, or local level. One tendency is to create independent agencies to get certain desired results without being hampered by political considerations, bureaucratic red tape, or indifference. But an opposing tendency in almost every generation is to streamline governmental organization for the sake of better administration or economy. The effect of this latter tendency is to put several smaller independent agencies into one large department or, perhaps, to break up their functions and distribute them among several departments. It is unnecessary to mention here the disadvantages of being in a department so large or so constituted that our fields of interest receive scant support or have small voice in determining the department's policy. We may as well recognize, however, that the creation of splinter agencies invites drastic reorganization.

In conclusion, it seems to me that an agency concerned with the various functions indicated in *The Role of the State Library* offers advantages not to be found either in a huge department or in several small ones. Of course, these advantages are conditioned upon the ability of responsible people to work together in different but kindred fields, with broad understanding, mutual appreciation, and a spirit of teamwork.