

# College and University Archives: 1962

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IN the summer of 1949 the Committee on College and University Archives of the Society of American Archivists conducted a survey of institutions of higher learning to determine the number and type of archival programs in operation. The survey was limited to 150 colleges and universities representative of differing sizes, classes, and geographical locations. The results of the 1949 survey were reported by Committee Chairman Dwight H. Wilson as follows:

## 1949 Survey

- 56 have archives and archival programs.
- 15 preserve most of the official records, but have no unified archival program.
- 11 keep some records (usually trustee and faculty minutes, and publications).
- 7 are now studying the problem with a view to establishing archives.
- 14 have scattered records and are interested in establishing archives.
- 12 are totally uninterested in archives.
- 35 have not answered at the writing of this report.<sup>1</sup>

In commenting on the 1949 survey Dr. Wilson recognized that the inquiry had itself aroused an interest on the part of many universities and colleges in their archives. "Already many of the conceptions . . . are changing," he wrote. "One of the most interesting facts revealed . . . was that administrators are beginning to *plan* for their archives."<sup>2</sup> In 1961, therefore, the committee decided to follow up the earlier survey with a new one designed to deter-

\*The author served as chairman of the Society's Committee on College and University Archives from 1958 to 1962. He presented the results of the 1962 survey at Rochester, N. Y., on Sept. 30, 1962, at a session of the 26th annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists.

<sup>1</sup>"Report of the Committee on College and University Archives," in *American Archivist*, 13: 63 (Jan. 1950).

<sup>2</sup>"Archives in Colleges and Universities: Some Comments on Data Collected by the Society's Committee on College and University Archives," in *American Archivist*, 13: 346 (Oct. 1950).

mine trends in archival programs operating in 1962—13 years later. About 200 colleges and universities were added to the 150 sampled in 1949, making a total of 350. As in 1949, the institutions were selected on the basis of geographical location, class, and size.

The questionnaire method we used was somewhat ineffective, for officials of colleges and universities, swamped with similar inquiries, often answered our questions too hurriedly or without proper investigation. An official of one university, for instance, which established an archives more than a decade ago, replied that his institution had no archival program. Moreover, we had no replies from many institutions and only curt responses from some. For the most part, however, we received splendid cooperation. In fact, the large number of letters appended to the returned questionnaires reflected genuine interest in and concern for systematic preservation of institutional records. Following the format of the 1949 questionnaire, we attempted to obtain data on the following:

1. Does your institution have any program for preserving the valuable, but not current, records of its various divisions and offices (*e.g.*, archives, storage by individual offices, library, etc.)?
2. Name of person in charge and official title.
  - (a) Where does his position fit into the administrative structure of the institution (*e.g.*, president's office, library, etc.)?
  - (b) Is the position a full-time appointment?
  - (c) How large is the staff?
3. What types of records are kept permanently?
4. Does your institution collect and preserve private collections of manuscripts (*e.g.*, papers of prominent families, governors, senators, scientists, business firms, etc.)?
5. If you have no archival agency—
  - (a) Are you planning to establish one?
  - (b) Are you interested in what other institutions have done in this field?
6. Any further comments.

Of the 350 institutions to which questionnaires were sent 268 responded. The replies revealed the following facts:

#### *1962 Survey*

- 113 of the institutions had archival programs with full- or part-time archivists.
- 70 of the institutions designated the library as the depository for archival materials, although they had no systematic program to collect records of enduring value.

54 of the institutions left it to the individual offices to preserve their records.  
31 had no program whatsoever to preserve their institutional records.

Over half of the institutions reported that they collected historical manuscripts—the papers of political figures, prominent citizens, business leaders, and others—in addition to the official records of the institution. It was impossible to determine from the replies the extent to which persons designated as archivists had responsibility for both archives and historical manuscript collections, but this combination exists in many institutions.

As was the case in the 1949 survey, the replies to the questionnaires revealed some startling misconceptions about the nature of archives. Some college officials obviously do not recognize the inherent differences between archives and historical manuscripts and have confused the two in administering them. In many institutions, the development of sound archival programs has suffered because the emphasis is placed on the acquisition of historical manuscripts.

The survey revealed that librarians have often been appointed archivists of their institutions. It will not surprise any informed person that such appointments have not *always* resulted in sound archival programs. As a matter of fact, irreparable damage has been done by those librarians who believe that archival material can be handled and administered according to standard library procedures. This problem was brought into sharp focus by the library cataloger of a large southern university who reported with great pride the rearrangement of archival materials according to a modified Dewey decimal system. The records from the various campus offices had been intermingled without regard to their provenance!

The survey indicated also that widespread confusion exists as to the scope of a modern institutional archives. Many officials answering the questionnaire seemed pleased to be able to report that a room in the library or some other campus building had been set aside for valuable records, even though no archivist had been appointed to supervise them or to decide what records merited permanent preservation.

The responses to the question, "What types of records are kept permanently?" were provocative. One college president reported that "only those records created prior to 1900 are kept permanently." Another wrote that his institution kept "all the records that would be needed for writing a comprehensive history of the university." In the same vein, another wrote that there was no

longer any need to retain the records—or have an archives—because a comprehensive history of the institution had been published. One respondent defined his permanent records as “anything put out by or about the institution past or present”; and one president wrote that his institution kept “the types normally expected.” Many of the administrators failed to appreciate that there are several values to be considered when appraising records.

The struggles of many informed persons to establish archival programs were brought out by the questionnaire. One faculty member wrote, “Our program is fairly primitive though I am doing my best to bring some order to it. I am head of the English Department and am archivist simply because I am interested.” The head librarian of a large eastern university described a situation all too common:

I have tried for a number of years to pressure the several University administrations to become interested in the proper preservation of all official records of the University. So far I am afraid it has fallen on relatively disinterested ears since the general burden of developing an educational program has had to take precedence. Administrative officers of the University such as deans seem to consider the official records of their particular offices as private property. Any advance on an archives program at this time has been done on a personal basis by the Librarian and interested individuals.

But to balance the dismal picture given by some of the responses, many institutions reported some real success in their campaigns to establish archival programs. Significantly, 133 colleges and universities reported that they were seriously considering the establishment of archives programs, and 23 of these informed the committee that they would establish their programs in the immediate future. A number of presidents reported that not only had special quarters been allotted in forthcoming building plans but that budgets had been approved for archives staffs and supplies. Moreover, many university and college officials countered with their own questions about how an archives should be established and administered.

One of the questions most often asked was, “How can we obtain a trained archivist for our institution?” This problem our Society must face. We can encourage institutions until doomsday to adopt archival programs, but unless trained archivists are available to fill the positions nothing will be accomplished, or, as has happened too frequently in the past, unqualified persons will be appointed—and the damage they have done and can do makes many wonder

if it isn't better to defer the initiation of a program until a trained archivist becomes available.

This survey, although far from complete or profound in its detail, gives a broad picture of what is happening in colleges and universities today. There is a growing concern on the part of college and university officials about the problem of preserving records of enduring value. There is, moreover, an increasing awareness of the need to establish formal archival programs. The 1960's and 1970's will witness, I am convinced, concerted action in this direction by all major educational institutions in the United States and Canada. We have an obligation to influence the appointment of qualified archivists for these institutions and to assist them in the proper management of their archives.

## APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

*The Society of American Archivists*

(To be mailed to the Secretary, Dolores C. Renze, 332 State Services Bldg.,  
1525 Sherman St., Denver 3, Colo.)

Date ....., 19.....

I enclose check (\$10) for initial payment of dues, which include a year's subscription to the AMERICAN ARCHIVIST, and understand that dues hereafter are payable a year in advance upon the anniversary date of this application.

Name .....

Preferred Mailing Address .....

Official Position (if an individual) .....

Business Address .....

Official Representative (if an institution) .....

Introduced by .....

*The Council desires for the records of the Society the following information. Use an attached sheet if necessary.*

1. Formal training in archives, historical manuscripts, records management .....

2. Experience, professional or non-professional, before present position .....

3. Special interests in respect to archives and manuscripts .....

4. Brief biographical sketch, incl. date and place of birth, education, research and publications, etc. ....

For institutional members: Give date of founding, character (State, private company, etc.), size, and significant collections .....