

PUBLICATION POLICIES FOR ARCHIVAL AND HISTORICAL AGENCIES¹

OF THE MANY problems facing the archivist those involving policies and practices of publication are certainly not the least important. What materials are worth publishing? According to what rules are they to be copied and arranged? What kind of introduction is needed, and how long should it be? How copious should the footnotes be, and in what form? How are publications to be financed and distributed? All of us have had to face these and other similar problems, but I am yet to hear of anyone who has completely solved them.

Following the suggestion of the chairman of the Program Committee, I am basing this paper largely on the work of your Committee on the Publication of Archival Material, of which Dr. Randolph G. Adams, Dr. Solon J. Buck, and Dr. Luther H. Evans are members, and of which I am chairman. Every member of the committee has actively participated in its work, and therefore a large part of the contents of this paper is to be credited to members other than the chairman, and especially to the member who is presiding at the present session.

Your committee has been faced with the usual problem of trying to carry out a program in spite of the fact that its members have been separated from each other, busy with other duties, and without funds for its purposes. The committee was appointed in 1937, at the time when the Society's other committees were being set up. An attempt to lay out a program was made in December, 1937, at a joint meeting with the American Historical Association Committee on Historical Source Materials, with Dr. T. R. Schellenberg as chairman, but nearly all the time of the joint session was devoted to the problems of the other committee and little was accomplished by this one. In July, 1938, however, a meeting of the committee, attended by all the members except Dr. Adams, was held and an illuminating discussion resulted in the formulation of a plan of action.

The first annual report of the committee, dated October, 1938, read in part as follows:

"The program formulated by the committee may be divided into two parts: (1) immediate and (2) deferred.

¹ A paper read at the third annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists at Annapolis, Maryland, October 13, 1939.

1. Immediate. Two undertakings the committee can and ought to go into at once:

a) The stimulation and aid of the publication of archival material. Throughout the country are vast quantities of such material which ought to be made available to the public in published form, and the committee should promote such an accomplishment in every way possible. Nonarchival or partly nonarchival manuscript collections ought to be included in this phase of the committee's work.

Moral encouragement ought to be given to such publication, especially on the part of certain nonofficial agencies which are not likely to undertake this work without some prodding. More important, however, financial aid should be sought. The Society of American Archivists at present has no funds for such a purpose, but aid might be secured from the federal government, from the states, from local governmental units, from the foundations, or from private individuals.

b) Standardization of form in the publication of archival materials. This needs to be done for lists and guides, for calendars, and for full texts of documents. Through the Historical Records Survey the committee has been able to secure for this purpose the services of Miss Porter Cowles of the University of North Carolina Press, who has undertaken the task with enthusiasm. If her work can be continued for a reasonable period of time, it is hoped that the result will be a manual of style for the publication of source materials.

2. Deferred. There are a number of activities in which the committee might engage at a later date, should the Society so desire. The committee might deal with publications on archival economy and practices and with administrative reports of archivists. It might also make recommendations for the Society's own program of publication and for the program of the Society's constituent agencies. For the immediate present, however, the committee considers it best to limit its work to a program which may perhaps be accomplished within the near future."

Your committee has continued its activities during the past twelve months, and its work is summarized in its current report, dated September, 1939, as follows:

"The one tangible accomplishment of your committee during the year has been a report by Miss Porter Cowles, of the University of North Carolina Press, on the inventories of county records now being prepared by the Historical Records Survey." Miss Cowles made her

study of these inventories in co-operation with the chairman of the committee. Her report pointed out certain inconsistencies in form and made suggestions for standardization. While doing this work Miss Cowles was a member of the staff of the Historical Records Survey, of which Dr. Luther H. Evans, a member of the committee, is national director.

It had been hoped that Miss Cowles, after completing this task, would be able to go ahead with the preparation of a manual for the publication of documentary materials, but her regular duties were too heavy for her to undertake this. Your committee hopes, nevertheless, that such a manual can be prepared within the near future.

Your committee is glad to offer its services in an advisory capacity in attempting to solve the publication problem which archival agencies throughout the country are frequently called upon to face. If these problems can be referred to the committee, it may be able to offer assistance, while at the same time, by dealing with specific problems, it will be better able to reach general conclusions. A note offering the services of the committee in this field might well be published in *THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*.

Your committee in its report last year set forth for itself the immediate object of attempting to stimulate the publication of archival materials. There is now a tendency on the part of a majority of its members to believe, however, that this problem needs rethinking in the light of new techniques. Formerly it was a question of printing or nothing. Now, however, these cheaper methods would seem to make unnecessary the printing of certain large bodies of source materials which nevertheless ought to be reproduced in some way. Probably only documents of wide general interest should be printed. It is understood that this pertinent topic is to be the subject of a paper at the Annapolis meeting. Until the problem has been more carefully thought out, probably no large program to stimulate publication ought to be undertaken.

It would be well if information could be assembled on what is being done at present in the field of documentary publication. A useful undertaking would be the circularization of agencies throughout the country on this subject, and the compilation and occasional publication of lists of projects.

You have noted one radical difference between the 1938 and 1939 reports. The first recommended an immediate active campaign to stimulate documentary publication. The second, however, states

that this subject needs reconsideration and recommends that "until the problem has been more carefully thought out, probably no large program to stimulate publication ought to be undertaken." The paper which follows will, I understand, develop this topic more fully.

Looking back over the first two years' work of the Committee on the Publication of Archival Material, I feel that only very little of a definite nature has been accomplished. At the same time, however, the foundation for future progress may have been laid and our thinking may have been clarified.

As I now see it, some of the projects in this field which ought to be undertaken within the next few years are as follows:

1. The preparation and publication of a thorough and comprehensive manual to cover in a practical way the copying, editing, and publication of documentary materials. Useful work along this line has already been done. Miss Grace Nute's helpful bulletins on the care, cataloguing, and copying of manuscripts have been a real contribution. I understand that the Beveridge Committee of the American Historical Association is now compiling a manual for the use of the persons who edit its publications. The office of the director of publications of the National Archives is constantly formulating rules for editing and the like, and within the near future it may prepare a manual primarily for its own use. Efforts of this kind need to be co-ordinated, so that the Society of American Archivists and its members, together with all who are engaged in archival work, can have at their disposal a suitable manual. Such a publication could be of considerable aid in copying, arranging, and editing, and could do a great deal to standardize form. Of course form is not all-important, and substance is nearly always more essential. But we could improve and standardize the form without in any way detracting from the substance. The first edition of such a manual might leave something to be desired, but it would at least give us something to shoot at, and later editions might represent considerable improvement.

2. Closely connected with the first point, there is a need for a manual for the preparation of calendars, inventories, and guides in connection with archives and manuscript collections. Here various existing publications will be useful, and the experience of the Historical Records Survey, together with its published inventories of county records, church records, and manuscript collections, will need to be studied. If time, energy, and money are not to be wasted, some careful thinking needs to be done as to what material is worth publishing

in full, what needs calendaring, and for what collections guides alone will be sufficient.

3. An American manual of archival administration will fill a real need. Such manuals are already available in various foreign countries, but none of these solve certain of the problems which archivists in the United States are called upon to face. The standard manual of Great Britain, indeed, represents a point of view in some respects so different from our own that in certain matters it can actually hinder us more than it can help. Our governmental set-up is so different from the British that, if we are to follow the principle of *respect pour les fonds*, our archival problems will likewise be different. A realistic treatment of the administrative problems of those who handle federal, state, and local archives, together with manuscript collections, will be most welcome.

4. Archival agencies throughout the country should be encouraged to publish administrative reports. Such reports should contain notice of important accessions to collections, lists of publications, and other information about the agency and its work. The systematic exchange of such administrative reports by enabling us to keep in better touch with each other, would undoubtedly prove an asset.

5. As is suggested above, the Committee on the Publication of Archival Material, or some other agency, might well circularize archivists throughout the country for information on accomplishments and plans in the field of documentary publication. This information might be compiled and occasionally published, preferably in THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST.

6. The services of your committee in offering advice or on publication problems, as suggested above, could hardly fail to be of value. In some instances even where its services had not been sought the committee might take the initiative and lay out long-range programs of publication.

7. With all the reconsideration of our problems which the new techniques make necessary, the present speaker believes, nevertheless, that a larger volume of publication is needed for many agencies and for many areas. Various depositories publish either nothing at all or else very nearly nothing. Some of the states of the Union—South Carolina for example—have been notably backward in putting their early records into print. Various series of the federal government ought to be published. Of course we should not plunge in and publish indiscriminately. But it would seem unfortunate to relax our

efforts toward increasing the amount of documentary publication merely because new inventions and new techniques are forcing us to reshape some of our ideas on the subject.

The various steps in the program outlined above will involve time and labor, and we are all busy. But we do not have to try to accomplish everything at once. And if we keep attacking these problems, now on one side and now on another, in the long run we are obliged to make progress. Certainly the field is a wide one, and efforts made therein promise a large return.

C. C. CRITTENDEN

North Carolina Historical Commission