

## Women in Archives: Ms. versus Mr. Archivist

By MABEL E. DEUTRICH

IN COMMENTING on the number of career women seeking top-level executive jobs in business, economist Eleanor Schwartz stated: "In the first third of this century, women fought to gain equality at the ballot box; in the middle third of this period, women fought to gain acceptance as wage earners capable of both working and rearing a family at the same time. And, in the last third of this century, women appear intent on dispelling all forms of discrimination directed toward them simply because they are female."<sup>1</sup> No one can be oblivious of the movement of American women to be freed from certain social, economic, and legal restrictions imposed by prejudice or outmoded custom. The inclusion of this panel on the program is an indication that our Society of American Archivists is aware of the movement and is interested in knowing the status of women in the archival profession. The fact that the Committee for the 1970's—almost all male in composition—included sex among the factors that should be considered by nominating committees and that it took a strong stand against any kind of discrimination is another indication.<sup>2</sup>

As in other professions, archivists seem to have given little thought to the interests of women until very recently. Until 1968 women in the Society appear to have been mentioned only three times in the *American Archivist*—and all three by the dean of our profession, Ernst Posner. At a luncheon in observance of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Society, past presidents who were present spoke briefly. At that time Dr. Posner stated in part: "My own memory of

The author is the director of the Military Archives Division of the National Archives. She is a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists and chairs its ad hoc Committee on the Status of Women. Her paper was read November 2, 1972, in Columbus, Ohio, at the SAA annual meeting.

<sup>1</sup> Eleanor Brantley Schwartz, "The Sex Barrier in Business," *Atlanta Economic Review*, June 1971, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Philip P. Mason, "The Society of American Archivists in the Seventies, Report of the Committee for the 1970's," *American Archivist*, 35 (April 1972): 198.

our Society goes back to the year 1939 when I attended the first meeting in Annapolis, having just arrived from the Old Continent. Boy! Was I impressed by the number of archivists, by the free and easy intercourse between big shots and small fry. And how I was impressed when a lady—it was Jean Stephenson, a humble female—got up in one of the discussion periods and talked on her feet, and talked sense!”<sup>3</sup>

In presenting the nominating slate at the 1951 annual meeting, a slate which included a woman for the office of treasurer and another as member of the Council, Posner, who was chairman of the nominating committee, stated that the committee had “felt obliged to pay some attention to geographical distribution of the membership, to the types of activity represented, and to the large and increasing number of women members.”<sup>4</sup> It was a good thing that some thought was given to proportionate representation, because women certainly had not been conspicuous as officers and Council members. The ratio for this period (1937–51), as measured by years of service, was 24 women to 111 men. And thank goodness we had the popular and capable Margaret C. Norton and Helen L. Chatfield, because they accounted for sixteen of the twenty-four years of service performed by the women. (For a complete breakdown of service, see Table 1.)

The third mention of women in the Society was made in Posner’s presidential address in 1956, at which time he announced that women comprised 33 percent of the Society.<sup>5</sup> In this address and in an article by Frank Evans and Robert Warner published in April 1971,<sup>6</sup> some analyses of the composition of our Society were made. Except for information on number, however, no analysis was attempted on the roles played by women in comparison with men.

In this paper an attempt will be made to give salient facts concerning Ms. versus Mr. Archivist. Most of these facts have been gleaned from information contained in the *American Archivist* and in a sampling of replies to the “SAA Membership Directory and Profile Questionnaire,” distributed to members late in 1970.<sup>7</sup> These facts,

<sup>3</sup> SAA, “Proceedings of the Society’s 25th Anniversary Luncheon,” *American Archivist*, 25 (April 1962): 235.

<sup>4</sup> SAA, “Minutes of the Business Meeting, October 15, 1951,” *American Archivist*, 15 (January 1952): 84–85.

<sup>5</sup> Ernst Posner, “What, Then, Is the American Archivist, This New Man?,” *American Archivist*, 20 (January 1957): 5.

<sup>6</sup> Frank B. Evans and Robert M. Warner, “American Archivists and Their Society: A Composite View,” *American Archivist*, 34 (April 1971): 157–72.

<sup>7</sup> Initially, SAA members were asked to send the completed questionnaires to F. Gerald Ham, then secretary of the SAA, by April 30, 1971. Currently, new members send them to Robert M. Warner, the present executive director. The question-

TABLE 1  
SAA OFFICERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS

	Officers		Council	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
1937	3	1	4	1
1938	4	0	3	2
1939	4	0	4	1
1940	4	0	4	1
1941	4	0	4	1
1942	4	0	4	1
1943	4	0	5	0
1944	2	2	5	0
1945	2	2	5	0
1946	3	1	4	1
1947	3	1	4	1
1948	3	1	4	1
1949	3	1	4	1
1950	3	1	4	1
1951	3	1	4	1
1952	3	1	3	2
1953	4	0	3	2
1954	4	0	4	1
1955	4	0	3	2
1956	4	0	3	2
1957	3	1	3	2
1958	3	1	4	1
1959	2	2	4	1
1960	2	2	4	1
1961	3	1	4	1
1962	3	1	5	0
1963	3	1	8	0
1964	4	0	7	1
1965	3	1	7	1
1966	3	1	7	1
1967	4	0	7	1
1968	4	0	8	0
1969	4	0	7	1
1970	4	0	7	1
1971	4	0	7	1
1972	4	0	6	2
Total	121	23	173	37

SOURCE: Compiled from the *American Archivist*.

therefore, are by no means either comprehensive or definitive. With only a few exceptions, they do not cover nonmembers of the Society.

naires used by the writer are those "A" through "M" (438 questionnaires) on deposit with Secretary Ham at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

The figures are subject to some question. The writer was usually able to distinguish between males and females, but she sometimes had to make arbitrary decisions when respondents checked more than one box although they were asked for a single response. For example, when asked to check the one term that best described the position, several checked two.

If it is true that the lower-salaried archives employees generally are not members of the Society, that class has been pretty well excluded from this preliminary survey. Furthermore, some suggested reasons for the facts or figures are occasionally given, but the real answers must await a systematic study.

One of facts that can be ascertained is that women have been members of the Society from the beginning—28 percent of the 200-plus founding members were women.<sup>8</sup> During the next two decades they increased to 33 percent,<sup>9</sup> and, as the Society has increased to date to 1,300 individual members, this percentage has held.<sup>10</sup>

As far as education is concerned, it appears that roughly 90 percent of both men and women members of our Society have at least a bachelor's degree. Eighty-four percent of the women have the bachelor's or master's degree compared with 64 percent of the men; however, 25 percent of the men have doctorates compared to only 7 percent of the women. (For a more detailed breakdown, see Table 2.)

TABLE 2  
EDUCATION OF ARCHIVISTS

	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
No degree listed	28	10	14	9
Bachelor's degree	57	20	48	32
Master's degree	127	44	78	52
Doctor's degree	74	25	10	7
Other (Associate, etc.)	2	1	0	0
Total	288	100	150	100

SOURCE: Data tabulated from a sampling of 1971 SAA membership directory and profile questionnaires.

When replying to the SAA questionnaire as to how they described their positions to the public, almost half of both men and women tagged themselves as archivists. Only 11 percent of the men and 4 percent of the women considered themselves to be "administrators."

<sup>8</sup> Tabulation made from the SAA, "Proceedings, Providence, R.I., December 29-30, 1936, and Washington, D.C., June 18-19, 1937," pp. 6-11.

<sup>9</sup> Posner, "What, Then, Is the American Archivist," p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Evans and Warner reported 28 percent (p. 161), but, as indicated in their discussion of salaries (pp. 162, 164, and 166), the returns from which they based their survey were from "the upper echelons of the profession," a place not occupied by many women. A tabulation by F. Gerald Ham of all SAA membership directory and profile questionnaires received by June 18, 1971 (587 returns), revealed that 31 percent of the members are women; the tabulation from the sampling used by the writer showed 34 percent.

On the other hand, 47 percent of the men and 35 percent of the women stated that they occupy administrative or supervisory positions. This response is understandable; there are many levels of administrative work, most of which are well below an "administrator." But what is somewhat more difficult to reconcile are the answers given when the members were asked to indicate which programs they supervised or were responsible for in contrast with actual performance of the work. According to these answers almost two-thirds of the programs assigned to men involve "overseeing" and one-third "doing" functions, while the women stated their assignments were roughly half and half. (See Tables 3-6.)

TABLE 3  
ARCHIVAL POSITIONS HELD

	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Archivist	131	48	61	45
Manuscript curator	12	4	21	15
Oral historian	4	2	—	—
Records manager	17	6	7	5
Historian	19	7	6	4
Librarian	20	7	21	15
Administrator	31	11	5	4
Information specialist	5	2	1	1
Audiovisual specialist	3	1	1	1
Teacher	10	4	4	3
Editor	5	2	—	—
Field representative	1	—	—	—
Technician	2	1	—	—
Other	14	5	10	7
Subtotal	274	100	137	100
No information given	14		13	
Total in sample	288		150	

SOURCE: Data tabulated from a sampling of 1971 SAA membership directory and profile questionnaires.

An analysis of these replies—in the case of the women, 4 percent are administrators, 35 percent occupy administrative or supervisory positions, and 54 percent are involved in overseeing programs—makes it quite obvious that most of this supervision is at the middle management or lower levels. A less favorable picture of the status of women in the archival profession is revealed by a comparison of the number of women versus men occupying archivist positions in the National Archives and Records Service and the number who head state archival institutions. In the National Archives no

TABLE 4  
DESCRIPTION OF ARCHIVAL WORK PERFORMED

	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Primarily archives	56	20	37	27
Primarily manuscripts	16	6	18	13
Primarily archives and manuscripts	49	17	34	24
Primarily records management	30	11	5	4
Primarily archives and/or manuscripts and records management	33	12	11	8
Historical agency work	20	7	5	4
Primarily teaching	16	6	4	3
Primarily library	11	4	11	8
Editing	8	3	2	1
Graduate student	2	1	1	1
Retired	6	2	3	2
Other	30	11	7	5
Subtotal	277	100	138	100
No information given	11		12	
Total in sample	288		150	

SOURCE: Data tabulated from a sampling of 1971 SAA membership directory and profile questionnaires.

TABLE 5  
TYPE OF POSITION

	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Administrative/Supervisory	128	47	46	35
Professional	128	47	78	59
Technical	6	2	3	2
Other	10	4	6	4
Subtotal	272	100	133	100
No information given	16		17	
Total in sample	288		150	

SOURCE: Data tabulated from a sampling of 1971 SAA membership directory and profile questionnaires.

woman has ever occupied grades GS 16 or 17, the two highest grades below the Archivist of the United States. The first woman to receive a GS 15 was Elizabeth Drewry, who held this grade while she headed the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. Upon her retirement, there were none until about a year ago when two women in the

TABLE 6  
ARCHIVAL PROGRAM FUNCTIONS:  
SUPERVISION/RESPONSIBILITY AND PERFORMANCE

	Male		Female	
	Supervision/ Responsibility	Performance	Supervision/ Responsibility	Performance
Records appraisal and disposition	117	94	51	49
Collecting institutional records, personal papers, and manuscripts	108	88	56	57
Repair and rehabilitation	71	27	46	31
Arrangement or processing and description	149	93	82	83
Reference service	126	99	60	77
Photoduplication and microfilming	97	15	39	13
Administration of nontextual records or collections, as follows:				
Cartographic	51	8	20	11
Still pictures	71	20	38	24
Motion pictures	40	9	13	4
Sound recordings	48	13	23	14
Historical editing and documentary publication	38	38	12	16
Exhibits	56	33	28	28
Oral history	39	31	20	19
Records center operations	42	11	10	5
Total	1,053	579	498	431
Percent	(65%)	(35%)	(54%)	(46%)

SOURCE: Data tabulated from a sampling of 1971 SAA membership directory and profile questionnaires. Respondents reported *each* function they perform. The total figures, therefore, exceed the number of questionnaires.

National Archives proper were promoted to this grade. In fairness to NARS, it should be noted that the number of GS 16 and 17 positions is very small—there are currently only five.

Today women are in charge of only six of the state archival insti-

tutions.<sup>11</sup> This represents a giant step backward. In 1947 women were in charge of thirteen of the state archival agencies; men headed twenty-nine of them.<sup>12</sup> By 1954 the number of women had increased to fifteen, while the men had increased to thirty-two.<sup>13</sup> What are some possible reasons for this retrogression? Could it be because, in the earlier years, an archivist was considered to "be some old fossil who croons over ancient manuscripts like a miser over his gold,"<sup>14</sup> and that this picture did not appeal to many men? Or could it be because this profession, like librarianship, was then thought of as "a woman's profession and of the librarian as a little old woman fussing about overdue books and insisting on silence?"<sup>15</sup> Whatever the reason, during the past two decades, more and more of these positions have been occupied by men.

An area in which the women generally make a disappointing showing is in the writing of publications. This is particularly significant because it appears that authorship, at least until the last five or six years, could be controlled by the women themselves. One need only to scan the News Notes of the *American Archivist* for the period of 1941 to 1948 to be aware of the editors' pleas for articles. In fact, the situation became so acute that a Committee of Archival Research was appointed in 1943 to solicit articles. The report of that committee for 1948, when it was terminated, shows that women responded handsomely to the appeal.<sup>16</sup> Although the editor from that time on had more copy available than previously, he continued to make pleas for more and better articles.<sup>17</sup> Thus it would appear that women, if they had so desired, could have had more articles published in the *American Archivist*. It must be remembered, however, that the bulk of the articles that have been published con-

<sup>11</sup> This information was compiled from SAA, State and Local Records Committee, *Directory, State and Provincial Archivists and Records Administrators, 1971*, pp. 1-66.

<sup>12</sup> Lester J. Cappon, "A Directory of State Archival Agencies," *American Archivist*, 10 (July 1947): 269-77. At the time this directory was compiled, seven states either did not have an archivist or did not supply information; in one state the position was vacant. Alaska and Hawaii have been included in this and the following (1954) figures.

<sup>13</sup> SAA, "Directory of State and Territorial Archival Agencies," *American Archivist*, 17 (July 1954): 209-19.

<sup>14</sup> Dunbar Rowland, "The Adaptation of Archives to Public Use," in Appendix A of the "Thirteenth Report of the Public Archives Commission," December 30, 1912, *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1912*, Washington, 1914, p. 272.

<sup>15</sup> Richard H. and Irene K. Logsdon, *Library Careers* (New York, 1963), p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> *American Archivist*, 12 (January 1949): 67-68.

<sup>17</sup> Karl L. Trever, "The American Archivist: The Voice of a Profession," *American Archivist*, 15 (April 1952): 148, 152-54, and "RSVP," *American Archivist*, 19 (April 1956): 99; F. Gerald Ham, Report of the Secretary, 1968-69, *American Archivist*, 33 (January 1970): 120.



sist of papers given at annual meetings—and not very many women were asked to give them. On the other hand, based on the sampling of data in the membership directory and profile questionnaires, which covered all publications including finding aids, one would have to conclude that the men are indeed more prolific writers than the women. Two-thirds of the women listed no publications of any kind as compared with two-fifths of the men. For those persons listing publications, i.e., those listing one, two, three, or more than three publications, in each case, the percentage of men exceeded that of the women. (See Table 7.)

TABLE 7  
PUBLICATIONS BY ARCHIVISTS

	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
None listed	124	43	99	66
One	28	10	11	7
Two	32	11	10	7
Three	37	13	9	6
More than three	67	23	21	14
Total	288	100	150	100

SOURCE: Data tabulated from a sampling of 1971 SAA membership directory and profile questionnaires.

A closely related area is the awards program of our Society. No woman has ever received an award. The closest we have ever come was in 1961, when Lucile Kane was given "honorable mention" for the Waldo Gifford Leland Prize.<sup>18</sup> Since this and the Gondos Memorial Award are for publications and it has already been conceded that the male archivists are more prolific writers, it should be expected that more awards would go to them. But all of them? Have there been no quality writings by women in the last dozen years?<sup>19</sup>

When in 1958 the Society decided that certain of its members should be honored by election as Fellows of the Society, women

<sup>18</sup> News Notes, *American Archivist*, 25 (January 1962): 114-15.

<sup>19</sup> In the opinion of the writer, the chief difficulties here are in the ground rules and the method of administering them. No consideration is given as to whether a publication is prepared as an official work assignment or on the author's own time. The eligibility period (one year) is too short; it should be a minimum of two years. Under the present procedures an archivist may produce a book or other substantive publication on his own time but have to compete with a volume produced on official time, sometimes with the assistance of other employees and editors. The following year an article may win the prize. Finally, it does not appear that there presently is any assurance that all publications are considered.

fared somewhat better. In that year, 38 men and 8 women were elected to the rank of Fellow.<sup>20</sup> Twelve were selected the following year, but only one of these was a woman and, very significantly, in three of the intervening years—1962, 1965, and 1971—no woman was selected. In all, however, 27 women and 112 men have attained this honor.

The number of women who have delivered papers at the annual meetings has already been mentioned briefly. Two were on the program at the first meeting; they were, of course, Margaret C. Norton and Helen L. Chatfield. Miss Norton participated again at the second meeting along with three other women whom the program committee managed to locate, but by the third meeting, apparently none could be found. Although no count has been made of the persons on the programs at all the meetings, there was at least one more meeting, the fifth, where no woman was on the program. Generally there were one to three but now and then five or six. With the increase in the number of sessions in recent years, there has been, of course, an increase in the number of women on the programs. (For the number at the last five meetings, see Table 8.)

TABLE 8  
PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS:  
SAA ANNUAL MEETINGS, 1967-71

	Male	Female	Total	Percent Women of Total
1967	73	10	83	12
1968	66	6	72	8
1969	57	5	62	8
1970	56	13	69	19
1971	77	16	93	17
Total	329	50	379	13

SOURCE: Summarized from data compiled by Andrea Lentz for the 1972 SAA Program Committee.

This numbers game could be continued, but it must be evident by now that women are not represented in our Society in proportion to their membership. As for the status of women in the archival profession, this, as stated earlier, can be accurately determined only by a comprehensive survey. I would like to close, therefore, by offering some of my own thoughts and opinions.

I have no doubt that there has been some discrimination against

<sup>20</sup> News Notes, *American Archivist*, 21 (January 1958): 98-99; 22 (January 1959): 123-24.

women by some of the men, but women also discriminate against women. They often hold women back by their own attitudes toward women in management positions. If women wish to play a more active role, they must be more aggressive; they must write more articles and participate more fully in committee assignments. If they wish to become officers or members of the SAA Council, they must do a little campaigning—just as the men do.

Traditionally, most women have done little organizing for their own cause, but the young women of today—and some of the older ones—are finally doing just that. Will the Ms. Archivists organize for their cause? They just might! In discussing the last annual meeting of the American Historical Association, one writer stated that “Clearly this was the Year of the Women at the A.H.A.”<sup>21</sup> Will the SAA have a “Year of the Women”? It just might!

<sup>21</sup> J. Anthony Lukas, “Historians’ Conference: The Radical Need for Jobs,” *The New York Times Magazine*, 12 March 1972, p. 42.