Wider Use of Historical Records

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In the past few years, archivists have become increasingly concerned with making original records available to a larger body of potential users, a concern that has been manifested in the recent establishment of an ad hoc Society of American Archivists Committee on the Wider Use of Archives. This session discussed exhibit programs, the use of archival materials in the classroom, and the cost effectiveness of archival outreach programs.

HOWARD L. APPLEGATE:

This conference will attempt to offer some priorities for funding from among a variety of archival and manuscript projects. There are worthy projects in each of the seven areas of concern, but there is not enough money available from all sources to do all things for all archivists. Some meritorious proposals, therefore, will not be funded. This is a working paper which suggests that the greatest archival priority should be those projects that include elements of archival outreach.

Archivists and manuscript curators should be important professionals in the significant process by which new ideas and concepts of American history and culture are transmitted to all segments of the population. Archivists must be active and assertive, taking leadership in an area in which leadership is desperately required. Archivists must assume a new role in American scholarship and humanities, that of promoting noncredit adult education.

The task of disseminating the new concepts of American history and culture is a significant one and should not be taken lightly. The staffs of archival and manuscripts agencies must be sensitive to the educational needs of a variety of constituencies and must accept archival educators as equals. Archival agencies with outreach programs usually have most of the following five areas: exhibitions, interpretation of exhibitions, teaching materials, teacher training, and adult education.

Professionals in museums, libraries, historical societies, and archival and manuscript institutions must recognize that their responsibilities are to all constituencies of society. Under this concept, one of the major tasks for the professional is the dissemination of learning dependent on the collections that they care for. Thus, archival and manuscript curators must understand that they personally, and their institutions, have a great popular function at least as important as the serious scholarly function. This change, unfortunately, cannot occur overnight. This change is dependent on many variables including the responsiveness of the managers of American foundations.

The time is ripe for new guidelines by which foundation managers should review all archival and manuscript proposals. Not only should the granting agency be concerned with the project's validity and impact on the state of the humanities and on the development of scholarship in a particular field, but the agency must also

have a concern as to how the results of the grant work or research will be transmitted to the public in the form of outreach. Archival proposals with two or more public education components offer more value than do other types of archival projects. The greatest priority must be given to archival agencies that have assumed outreach responsibilities or whose proposals provide for quick dissemination of research or project results. Other archival projects, however meritorious, should be given a much lower priority.

RICHARD H. BROWN:

It is a truism that needs no repeating that American education has seen profound changes in the last decade and a half. These changes have resulted from altered views of how people learn, where they learn, and what they might most profitably study. The changes have led to the development of new types of educational institutions, to bold alterations in existing institutions, and to awareness of new possibilities in functional link-ups between different kinds of institutions. The changes have significant implications for those who deal with archives and manuscript collections and who represent institutions once thought to be at least several steps removed from education as such. They challenge the traditional narrow view of the functions of these institutions, and offer rich opportunities to all of us for expanded service.

What are some of the new uses we can make of archives and manuscript collections, how can we capitalize on them, and what are some of the problems attendant on doing so? Obviously these vary from institution to institution, depending on a host of factors such as size, constituency, location, definition of purpose, and the nature, quality, legal status, and condition of its collections. Let me list some of the possibilities, in what is essentially an ascending order of complexity and of significance.

The new styles of teaching and learning, and new interests in particular types of history study, have produced a need and market for packaged archives and manuscript collections at virtually every level of American education. We need projects to provide these. Projects to prepare collections of this type would generally be relatively low-cost, requiring chiefly the time of specialists to select, edit, and arrange or structure the materials—in short, development time. Production and dissemination, whether by commercial or noncommercial routes, will ordinarily pay for itself through sale of the materials.

We need projects to bring teachers at all levels to archives and manuscript collections to learn how to use these collections, not only for research but for teaching. These might range from summer institutes of six to eight weeks duration to after-school and Saturday in-service training programs. They might also involve fellowships for teachers preparing curriculum materials for classroom use. The most effective way of using archival and manuscript collections to train teachers is to set the teachers to the task of developing curriculum materials for their own students.

We have the opportunity also to develop seminars and other programs that will bring students themselves to the repositories. The first of these uses the repository as a source for new teaching and learning styles; the second turns it at least partially into an educational institution. The development of seminars and other educational programs may be relatively high in psychic cost to the staff who see their role

as limited exclusively to collecting and preserving archives, but it is low in financial cost.

The development of archives as research and educational institutions goes hand in hand with and leads to the development of new types of institutions that offer a wide scope of new uses for archival and manuscript repositories. The seminars which make the Newberry Library an educational institution, for example, are all research seminars, based on the library's collections; otherwise they would have no business at the Newberry. They are closely associated in a variety of ways with the major research centers that we have developed to encourage the use of our collections.

Growth of this sort is not without stress and strain for an institution. The research centers in particular, are expensive; they require a lot of funding. But we have found the combined development to be both exciting and rewarding, and we think that in our case it makes us much better custodians of our collections than we would have been otherwise. The worlds of education and research are clearly changing, and as they do they create opportunities for much wider and different use of traditional institutions. These opportunities will clearly vary from institution to institution. To seize them is a worthy challenge.

ELSIE F. FREIVOGEL:

To the museum educator, the term museum education means the education of the public. To the archivist, archival education means the education of other archivists. In fact, as Applegate suggests, the archivist does not ordinarily perceive the education of the public to be his job. As a corollary, those few philistines who do view it as part of their jobs are not, by the average arranging, describing, and referencing archivist, viewed as archivists.

This accounts for our extraordinary capacity to ignore a public two-thirds comprised, in at least one major instance, of genealogists, avocational historians, and general users, and to refer to our only real client as the serious researcher. It accounts for the low priority of public outreach programs in our archival budgets, and for the tension which exists between the curators in the field and the museum educators. It accounts, most certainly, for the reasons why the bulk of your proposals deal with preservation, arrangement, and description, while very few deal with public programs. And by implication, it accounts for the reasons why we in the archives-museum education field ask you to consider public outreach a major priority.

If a public institution does not build constituencies larger than those of the academic researcher, the institution is doomed. One good reason for funding programs which reach a wide public is precisely that larger constituencies can be built which can then be approached for the support that increasingly we ask you to pay for. Certainly, we in the education field don't deny the importance of preservation, arrangement, and description in the archival budget. But those who pay for it must surely view it as money down a rathole, an invisible rathole, always half filled. If we spend money now on public programs—get support from you—we will be in a better position in the future to ask support of the people who use our services: the genealogists, the tourists, the schoolchildren, the makers of documentaries, the journalists, the freelancers, and the merely curious.

In sum, we must develop archival programs which respond to the needs of the majority of our constituents. This can be done while serving, and serving well, the

professional academic or professional researcher. First, no program showing how much and for what should fail also to show how. Thus, any funded conference seeking to encourage the use of primary sources would as a matter of course include instruction in the use of records, either in written form or *viva voce*, in workshops and panels. Second, no funded program should lack a multiplier effect, an audience that speaks to another audience and not only to itself. Thus we could consider symposia for librarians, shaping the content for presentation to their clients; packaged, illustrated lectures usable in classrooms, professional meetings, and professional training programs; standardized, transportable courses which address working research publics; and programs which encourage undergraduates to come to depositories as classes, to learn archival research techniques early, before they are graduate students. Finally, programs should have national impact, dealing as necessary with the records of an institution or a type of depository but emphasizing local uses as well.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY:

The discussion began with remarks about the relationship between archives and education. Richard Lytle objected to the notion that archivists are educators. He remarked that archivists need to be creative and innovative about the transfer of information, but that this does not mean that they are educators. Richard Brown raised the question of whether there is any difference between the transfer of information and education; he stated his belief that they are one and the same. Lytle responded that the distinction was between providing the information to users and the development of curricula for students.

Elsie Freivogel commented on Lytle's use of curricula as a distinguishing feature between the archivist and the educator. She noted that it was confusing to use the word *educator* in regard to wider uses of historical records and she agreed with Lytle that the concepts were not the same. Archivists should not try to impose curricula on schools, but they should be encouraging the use of archival materials. Hugh Taylor enthusiastically agreed with Freivogel and he spoke of expanding the horizons of genealogists to get them involved in family and community history. Taylor regarded the archivist's job primarily as preservation of records, but he hoped that archivists would also begin to get users interested in all types of records.

A number of participants had questions about expanding archival constituencies. Andrea Hinding raised a concern about the different types of individuals using archives. Should archivists equate academic historians with genealogists or with a class of gradeschool children? Hinding acknowledged that archivists must pay more attention to nonacademic users, but she warned archivists not to forget that academic historians create new knowledge and understanding of our historical past. Robert Warner and Charles Lee agreed. Warner reminded archivists that it would be better to serve a limited clientele well than to expand services to a point where the quality of archival service declined. Lee did not equate genealogists with historians but stated that he does respect genealogists as serious researchers.

Edward Papenfuse observed that improving archival services was an important but difficult problem. He remarked that the number of patrons using the Maryland Hall of Records had increased by nearly 50 percent during the previous year, but the number of staff members remained constant. Papenfuse added that he cannot afford to expand his services; intellectual control of his holdings is his top priority. He concluded that to bring researchers into the repository without providing sufficient

finding aids would only frustrate those researchers. This, he noted, was a disservice to all.

The panelists became concerned that the conferees were misinterpreting proposals for the wider use of historical records. Elsie Freivogel noted that Papenfuse and Warner seemed to be arguing that outreach programs could only be implemented at the cost of other archival functions. She emphasized that the panelists were not taking this position. She added that the panelists were saying that the profession should develop new constituents as every other profession does. The process is gradual. She acknowledged that most repositories don't have the funds to implement new programs, but in the long run outreach would pay for itself. Richard Brown remarked that archivists should think in terms of expanding their budgets. He added that the search for new funds is not easy, but it is not a strain on the budget. He argued that the strain comes in retraining scholars to think like archivists and archivists to think like scholars. Howard Applegate argued that outreach programs should be established slowly, incorporating such programs into long-term planning procedures. He added that outreach is something for the future, that it may take two generations to implement such programs.

Margaret Child then took the opportunity to explain the challenge grant program of the National Endowment for the Humanities. She noted that the purpose of the program is two-fold. First, it is to strengthen the ability of all kinds of cultural institutions to raise funds for general purposes. The second purpose of the program is to stimulate public outreach programs. She added that Congress is very interested in stimulating public interest in cultural organizations and she encouraged those present to get in touch with, for further details, the staff of the endowment.