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# The American Archivist



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Volume 41

Number 4

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- 
- 373 Photographs as Historical Evidence: Early Texas Oil  
WALTER RUNDELL, JR.
- 399 The Challenge of Preservation in a Pluralistic Society  
NICHOLAS V. MONTALTO
- 405 Government Historical Offices and Public Records  
ANNA KASTEN NELSON
- 413 Accessioning Public Records:  
Anglo-American Practices and Possible Improvements  
HAROLD T. PINKETT
- 423 Appraising Machine-Readable Records  
CHARLES M. DOLLAR
- 431 The Archives of Violence  
RICHARD MAXWELL BROWN
- 445 Reviews
- 461 Technical Notes
- 469 The International Scene: News and Abstracts
- 483 News Notes
- 493 Forum  
Report on the Reader Survey

## REVIEWS

- 445 Cook, *Archives Administration: A Manual for Intermediate and Smaller Organizations for Local Government*, reviewed by Frank B. Evans
- 446 Fleckner, *Archives and Manuscript Surveys*, reviewed by Francis X. Blouin, Jr.
- 447 American National Standards Institute, *American National Standard for Bibliographic References*, reviewed by Sylvie J. Turner
- 448 Commission on Federal Paperwork, *A Report of the Commission on Federal Paperwork: Final Summary Report*, reviewed by Meyer Fishbein
- 449 Jimmerson et al., eds., *Guide to the Microfilm Edition of Temperance and Prohibition Papers*, reviewed by John J. Rumbarger
- 450 Lundeen, *Preserving Yesterday for Tomorrow: A Guide to the Archives of the Lutheran Church in America*, reviewed by Nancy Nell Stanley
- 451 France, Archives Nationale, *Correspondence à l'arrivée de la Louisiane*, volume 1, *Inventaire des Archives Coloniales*, reviewed by Sister Marguerite Brou, O.P.
- 452 Viola, *The Indian Legacy of Charles Bird King*, reviewed by Margaret Connell Szasz
- 453 Rundell, *Early Texas Oil: A Photographic History, 1836-1966*, reviewed by Sharon Fawcett
- 454 Patterson and Dougall, *The Eagle and the Shield: A History of the Great Seal of the United States*, reviewed by Virginia C. Purdy

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### FROM THE EDITOR: *Report on the Reader Survey*

Answering questionnaires is one of the banes of modern life; consequently the high return (54 percent) from the *American Archivist* Reader Survey was gratifying. Here are some of the highlights of the results.

Readers chosen at random were asked first to indicate which of the regular features of the journal they read "regularly," "sometimes," or "never." The percentage of the respondents reading each feature "regularly" is as follows: news notes, 67 percent; reviews, 65 percent; SAA proceedings, 60 percent; articles, 59 percent; technical notes, 54 percent; bibliographies, 42 percent; "Forum," 41 percent; and "International Scene," 19 percent—but another 65 percent said they read this feature "sometimes."

The largest portion of the questionnaire consisted of a list of topics in which readers could register the degree of their interest by checking columns headed "Much," "Some," or "None." Archivists are apparently most interested in articles or features about the traditional elements of archival practice, i.e., arrangement and description, and reference and access. Appraisal and acquisitions policy also rank high along with education and training. The computer is not yet beloved by respondents: more than 20 percent of them indicated no interest in either automated control of records or machine-readable records. Topics relating to the management of archival institutions arouse no great interest, particularly those involving public relations. In this latter group, however, more than half of the respondents want to read more about programs for training researchers at the college and adult level and about publications. The problems of specialized archives are not especially popular; less than a third of those replying indicated "much" interest in federal, business, or religious archives.

Not everyone responded to every category. The fact that twenty skipped the "FOI" question may have been the fault of the questionnaire. Perhaps the words "Freedom of Information Acts" should have been written out.

Forty-eight respondents added handwritten comments commending past editorial policy, describing widespread use of the journal in archives training, and expressing complaints about schedule of publication, physical format, quality of prose, and other problems. There were a number of pleas for help for small archives with limited resources and inexperienced staff. Some urged the introduction of more controversy and more critical reviews to stimulate discussion.

The stereotypical old-time preacher could find subjects for a whole year's sermons in the interpretations that might be made of these results. Perhaps the concern with basics can be attributed to the number of new archivists in the Society, a healthy sign of a growing profession. We of the editorial staff will bear the results in mind as we plan future issues of the journal. We will soon introduce a new department, "Shorter Features," which will carry brief articles of the "how-we-do-it-in-our-shop" variety in a partial attempt to meet the need for exchange of ideas on basic problems; submissions of no more than five hundred words are invited. We will seek more material about subjects in which interest has been noted; we will try also to make more interesting some of the

subjects in which interest is currently low. We will welcome comments from readers to let us know how well we are succeeding.

Anyone wishing to receive a full tabulation of the interest responses from the *American Archivist* Reader Survey should send a self-addressed envelope to the Editor, *The American Archivist*, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C. 20408.

VIRGINIA C. PURDY, *Editor*