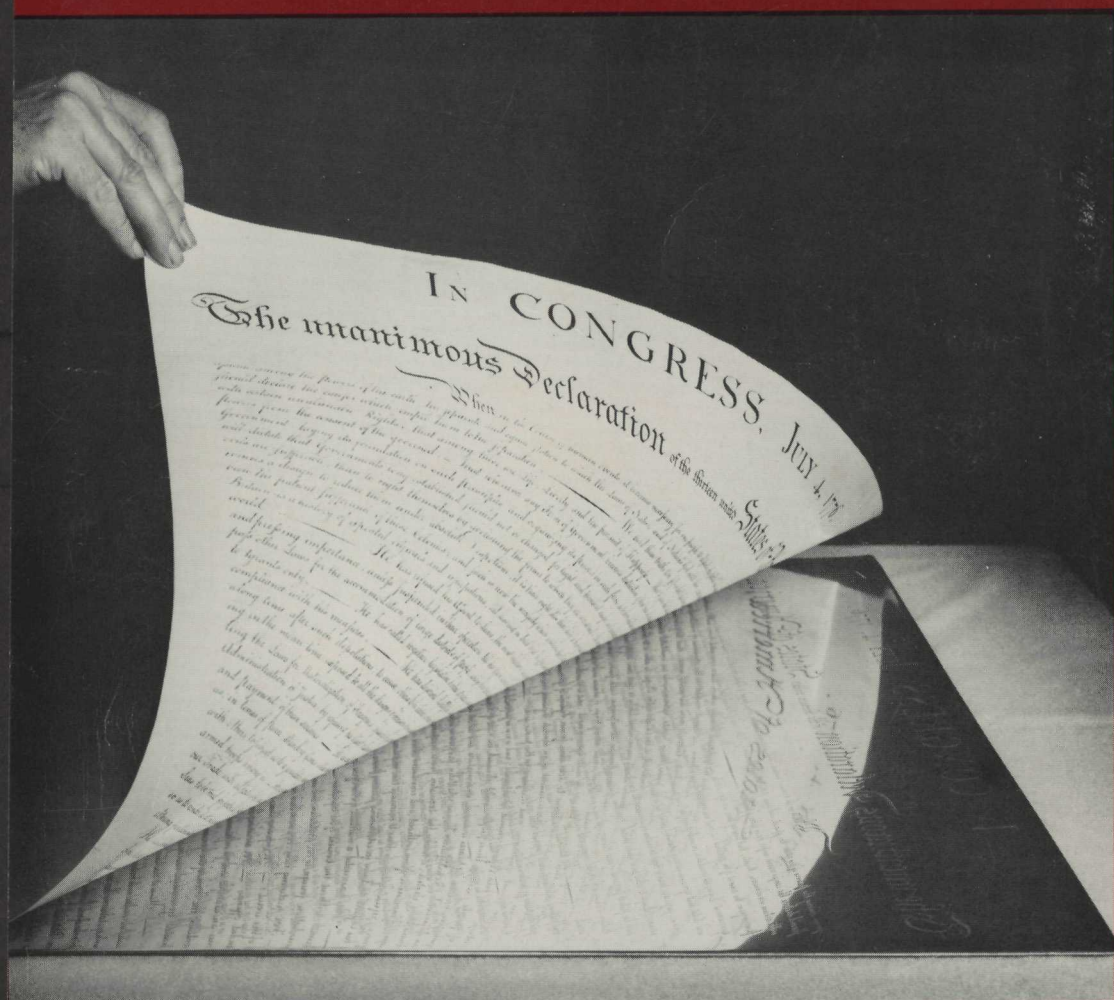


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Copperplate of the facsimile of the Declaration of Independence made by W. J. Stone in 1823, and engraving made from it in 1976. National Archives Building.

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The Forum

FROM THE EDITOR:

The new year brings to *The American Archivist* a new look and a few new departures in placement, content, and format of some of the departments.

Obvious among these departures is the relocation of *The Forum* to the front of the journal. Our reasoning in making this change was that many of the letters to the editor relate to questions raised in previous issues of the journal, becoming, as it were, a continuation of ongoing discussions and unfinished business. Further, when there are editorial comments like this one they will usually call the attention of readers to a special feature of the issue in hand—to something of interest in the pages ahead.

Taking the position that a major exhibit is a form of publication whether or not it is accompanied by a catalog, we have included in Mary Elizabeth Ruwell's *Reviews* department a brief critique of an exhibit. We will be pleased to learn of other exhibits that readers deem worthy of review. Exhibits reviewed should consist primarily of archival materials and should be of sufficient duration that one might reasonably hope to see a reviewed exhibit should he travel to its site shortly

after receiving his copy of *The American Archivist*.

The editor of *The International Scene*, Ron Plavchan, has developed a wide network of international reporters to keep us informed of archival problems and solutions in other parts of the world, problems and solutions interesting because of their similarity to our own and because of their occasionally exotic settings.

Ted Weir, editor of *News Notes*, in his introduction on page 103, has some comments about plans for that department. On his roster of reporters there are several new names replacing many who have served that department long and well.

VIRGINIA C. PURDY
Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

In the July 1978 issue of *The American Archivist*, pages 333–34, there is a review of *American Literary Manuscripts: A Checklist of Holdings*, edited by J. Albert Robbins. Although the reviewer is generally sympathetic to the aims of the volume, and to the need for such a publication, he fails to acknowledge the unfortunate implications of the preparation of this, the second edition

of a work to survey individual documents of individual authors.

The volume is incomplete and inaccurate. In addition, it is a drain on the time, energy, and resources of archivists and manuscript curators. Finally, as the reviewer notes, it is all but unusable because of the method of data presentation. In short, the volume is a disservice to scholarship.

The work is incomplete because it surveys only 600 repositories of some 8,000 in the country. Readers are given no hint as to what might be in the unsurveyed 7,400. It is also incomplete because it does not fully cover the repositories that have reported to it. The Latimer Collection in the Regenstein Library at Chicago has some 500 letters and manuscripts, most by Wallace Stevens, but the *ALM* is mum about them. It picks up the Berg Collection of English and American Literature at the New York Public Library, but it ignores the Division of Manuscripts, and thereby the core collections of many twentieth-century literary figures, including the massive H. L. Mencken papers.

The volume goes astray because it seems to waffle on a definition of "literary." FDR's supposedly "literary" manuscripts are listed in 125 repositories, JFK's in 54, but there are no listings for Coolidge, Hoover, Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, or Nixon. It did, however find two letters of undetermined nature of Robert Brown Elliott, and a few of Wanda Gág.

The *ALM* approach also flies in the face of archival theory and recent practice in that it considers the documents of an individual without reference to their context in a collection or record group. To say that the Library of Congress has 148 letters of John Greenleaf Whittier is useless unless one states in which collections, and per-

haps even which series, those letters may be found. And merely to quantify the holdings as so many manuscripts gives no indication whether these are orders to the cook, suicide notes, or the draft of "Supernaturalism in New England." The burden of qualifying these quantities rests with the archivist who will be receiving inquiries forevermore. The 1977 *ALM*, like its 1966 predecessor, will be a bane to manuscript curators for years to come. It has been a drain on scarce resources by requiring special service to special interests by demanding item-indexing on a selective basis, which is a luxury few curators can afford. One institution that I recently visited proudly showed off the card index it created for literary figures in response to the *ALM* survey, while across campus is a bulging warehouse full of unprocessed, significant collections, unavailable to a broad range of researchers hungry for sources. Archivists have more important things to do than to respond to requests for special information from special groups. Can we look forward to curators putting down their daily chores in the future to search every collection in their holdings for 2,863 botanists or 58,212 clergymen? If so, our priorities are askew.

The abominable form of presentation of the body of the work is immediately apparent. It is obvious that the editor abrogated his responsibility for clarity of presentation and left the job to two computer programmers. We are beyond the point where computerization automatically means a compromise with aesthetics, and the editor should have been more demanding or exercised more control. What information is contained in the volume is made almost impossible to comprehend because of the format. It looks, in fact, like a cross between a World

War II code book and a year-end stock market report.

It is to be hoped that when approached for cooperation in ill-conceived, highly specialized surveys in the future, archivists will resist, in order to spend their time profitably processing, arranging, and describing their collections, and then reporting them, as complete units, to the major union lists such as *NUCMC*. If professionals would put their efforts behind such general works it would be to the benefit of literature majors, botanists, and historians of religion alike.

FRANK G. BURKE
*Executive Director,
National Historical Publications and Records Commission*

TO THE EDITOR:

We were interested to read (*SAA Newsletter Extra*, August 1978, p. 3) that a survey of *American Archivist* users found that the most widely read section of the journal is "News Notes." This news is followed by the suggestion that "News Notes" should contain a much abbreviated accessions section.

Certainly a reduction in space would save money, but the accessions section is the quickest and most reliable guide anywhere to the current acquisitions of American and foreign archives. It is faster than *NUCMC* and more reliable than word of mouth. It stimulates collecting and encourages institutions to continue to publicize and process their acquisitions.

We question the idea of a reduced accessions section in "News Notes." If this were done, someone would have to decide which acquisitions were "major and unusual." For what group of users would this hold true? For many researchers, especially in state, local,

social, and urban history, the records of a single religious congregation, ethnic group, or district school could be more significant than the incredibly voluminous papers of some great statesman of national note who led us into Vietnam or World War III.

As long as readers are reading "News Notes," we hope the editors would keep the accessions section the important and helpful feature it is.

DAVID W. PALMQUIST
MARC J. STERN
*Bridgeport Public Library
Bridgeport, Connecticut 06604*

TO THE EDITOR:

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission has awarded a grant to the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse to collect and edit the *Papers of Carlos Montezuma*. This project will produce a comprehensive microform of the papers of Carlos Montezuma along with a two-volume letterpress edition of the most significant items. Information will be appreciated about letters or other documents originated or received by Carlos Montezuma. Please contact John W. Larnier, Jr., Editor, The Papers of Carlos Montezuma, 104 Main Hall, University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse, La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601.

JOHN W. LARNER, JR.
Editor, *The Papers of Carlos Montezuma*

TO THE EDITOR:

A group of researchers at the University of Toronto is preparing a new critical edition of the *General Correspondence* of Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715-71) and would greatly appreciate hearing from anyone who has or knows of letters or other manuscript

material by, to, or concerning either Helvétius or his wife, née Anne Catherine de Ligniville (1722–1800). Please reply to: Professor D. W. Smith, Chairman, French Department, 7 King's College Circle, University of Toronto, Toronto, M5S 1A1, Canada.

D. W. SMITH
General Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

Wanted by The Tippecanoe Battlefield, Battle Ground, Indiana, are

manuscript materials relating to William Henry Harrison; to Tecumseh, Chief of the Shawnees; to his brother, The Prophet; and to the Battle of Tippecanoe—to fulfill a National Endowment for the Humanities Planning Grant in anticipation of building permanent exhibits. Please contact the undersigned at: The Tippecanoe Battlefield, Box 225, Battle Ground, IN 47920.

D. CLARKE EVANS
Director, *The Tippecanoe Battlefield*

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