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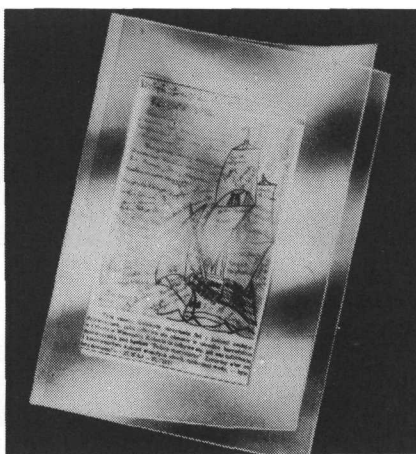
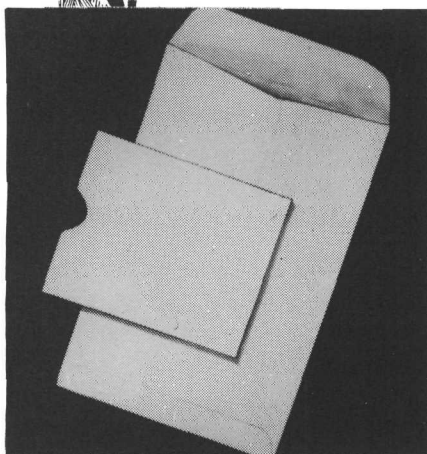
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The Forum

TO THE EDITOR:

Ben DeWitt's article on the archival uses of computers provides an informative update on the status of applications in the states and Canadian provinces. His findings can be usefully compared with a similar survey conducted by SAA in 1973.

Questionnaires requesting information about disposition programs for machine-readable records and archival automation were sent by the Committee on Data Archives and Machine-readable Records to all state and provincial archives and to selected business, church, and university archives. At that time only eight states, Ontario, and the Yukon Territory had given any substantial attention to automated records. These archives were also studying the potential of automation for archival controls.

Of the sixty-two firms which received questionnaires, seven noted important ADP applications that presumably generated information of long-term value. Several university archives; the Church of Christ, Scientist; the Church of the Latter-day Saints; and the Methodist Commission on Archives and History expressed an interest in preserving valuable machine-readable files.

Copies of the report were distributed to interested SAA members. I will

be glad to honor some additional requests.

MEYER H. FISHBEIN

National Archives and Records Service

TO THE EDITOR:

Alan Calmes's article ("Practical Realities of Computer-based Finding Aids: the NARS A-1 Experience," the *American Archivist*, April 1979) was a first step toward clarifying the economic realities of the use of computers in archives. However, some important points were not covered.

It would seem crucial, when discussing cost, to discuss efficiency also. Such questions need to be addressed as whether the data entry staff has been managed to work at peak speed, whether procedures optimize efficiency of input, and whether the specific computer or programs used are a significant drain on efficiency. As far as I know such an efficiency audit of the A-1 system (people, procedures, programs, and equipment) has never been done. There is clearly nothing that Alan Calmes, as a writer, could have done about that lack of hard information.

Along the same lines, a thorough analysis of computer costs was lacking. Taking the cost of the computer and dividing it by the number of series

completed is not really a satisfactory solution. For instance, the computer was only used during normal working hours. Clearly the hardware cost per series would have been much less if data was also entered all night long. In fact we do not even know if the amount of data entry during the hours of use was anywhere near the computer's capacity. If the hardware could, for example, handle 50,000 series per year instead of the 6,000 offered, then the only thing the figures in this article point to is the necessity for paying for only as much computer as your project will really be able to use. However, that may indeed be a very worthwhile message to all planners of future computer systems.

In the absence of any data on efficiency, I believe that all the cost conclusions of the article must be taken so loosely as to be essentially valueless. In the interest of the profession I would urge the Society of American Archivists to try and get the National Archives or some other institution with an operating computerized finding aid system to do a serious cost analysis including an efficiency study. Only then will we begin to be in a position to evaluate the potential of computerized finding aids.

CHARLES GELLERT

National Archives and Records Service

TO THE EDITOR:

When architectural drawings are discussed, the problem of archival processing is usually ignored. Congratulations to the *American Archivist* for helping us along this unlighted path with the fine short article "Architectural Cataloging," by Cathy de Lorge (*AA*, April 1979).

Writing for the easiest understanding, Ms. de Lorge sets forth a formula which is simple yet obviously tried and refined. The system features attention to the records group, an aspect of special importance to architectural collections, given the divergent types of material which usually comprise such holdings.

Obviously, the selective nature of the OHS collection policy is possible because a well-oiled processing program affords complete control over materials presently held. Those with architectural drawings in our holdings, which is almost everyone, can certainly profit from the two minutes of easy reading this article provides.

MICHAEL E. WILSON

*Assistant Archivist,
The Rosenberg Library
Galveston, Texas*

TO THE EDITOR:

I want to congratulate you on the new look of the *American Archivist*.

The cover is especially attractive with the perspective view of one end of the Public Record Office in Kew, England, and the related article on pp. 223-26 gives an excellent descriptive account of this attractive repository.

HERMAN RALPH FRIIS

Bethesda, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

The new format of the *American Archivist* is very attractive. Keep up the good work.

ROBERT E. SCHNARE

*Chief, Special Collections Division,
U.S. Military Academy Library*

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . I was pleased to note the revised publication criteria for the International Scene in the *American Archivist*. The changes, eliminating most acquisition announcements, will produce a more lively and useful feature for readers of the journal.

May I congratulate you and your colleagues on the new layout and content of the *American Archivist*.

MICHAEL SWIFT
*Director, Archives Branch
Public Archives of Canada*