Shorter Features

MARK S. STEINITZ, *Editor*

THE SHORTER FEATURES department serves as a forum for sharply-focused topics dealing with the use and management of archives. Contributors are particularly encouraged to prepare papers discussing specific archival problems encountered at their institutions and the solutions devised. Generally, papers for this department should run 500 to 1,000 words in length, without footnotes. Articles should be addressed to: Mark S. Steinitz, Shorter Features Editor, the *American Archivist,* National Archives Building, Washington, DC 20408.

The Deaf and Archival Research: Some Problems and Solutions

LANCE J. FISCHER

BEING DEAF and having researched historical topics at archival institutions, I know first-hand the problems that the deaf face when doing research at archives. As an archivist, I also know what my profession can and must do to help alleviate those problems.

The first step is to develop an awareness of the dilemma of the deaf. To do this, archivists should take advantage of the assistance offered by the National Center for Barrier Free Environment.* Located on the campus of Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C., the center operates an extensive clearinghouse for information related to the elimination of those obstacles that prevent the handicapped from leading normal, productive lives. In striving to make the benefits of society more accessible to the deaf, the center cooperates with government agencies, private firms, and rehabilitation officials. To increase staff sensitivity to the deaf, archives managers should arrange special workshops that examine the problems of the non-hearing.

Perhaps the most effective method of breaking the communication barrier is to provide interpreting services. Without sign-language skills or the services of an interpreter, an archivist

*See also Technical Notes, for items about the center and about a telephone for the deaf–ED.

usually must confer with a deaf researcher by exchanging written notes. This remains true when the deaf researcher is a proficient lip-reader. In an initial meeting with an unfamiliar individual, a skilled lip-reader will generally be able to grasp only about 30 percent of what is spoken. Note writing consumes an inordinate amount of time and often does not adequately allow the archivist to grasp the deaf researcher's objectives, suggest approaches, arrange interviews with other staff members, or order records without causing considerable confusion and misunderstanding. Repositories should either recruit individuals proficient in sign language, or pay for the training of a few interested staff members. Also, an institution should maintain a telephone listing of local interpreters for the deaf. A free regional directory of interpreters can be obtained by writing to Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., PO Box 1339, Washington, DC 20013.

The purchase of teletypewriters helps significantly to bridge the hearing barrier. Without this instrument, the deaf researcher cannot consult with an archivist by telephone and is forced to obtain information through the time-consuming method of writing a letter, or by the more costly alternatives of visiting the archives in person or hiring a researcher. Information relating to types and models of teletypewriters can be obtained by contacting Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc., 814 Thayer Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Visual aids also assist the deaf researcher. Often, however, archives lack sufficient visual aids because it is assumed that researchers will speak with consultants. Moreover, those visual aids that are available are usually inadequate for the deaf. For example, *A Researcher's Guide to the National Archives* (General Information Leaflet No. 25, revised 1975) assumes that researchers will converse with reference archivists about the records. All instructions and procedures necessary to do research should be written down and made easily available for the deaf. Some pamphlets might have to be rewritten. An excellent example of detailed yet clearly written research instructions can be found in *Lest We Forget, A Guide to Genealogical Research in the Nation's Capital,* compiled by June Andrew Babbel and published by the Potomac Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Archives might also provide special, interpreted, orientation programs, such as introductory courses in genealogical research, to familiarize the deaf with archival facilities. Although one hopes that archives will voluntarily begin to implement more fully the suggestions in this article, it should be remembered that section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that no program or activity receiving federal financial aid can refuse to serve handicapped individuals who would qualify for those services if they were not handicapped.

Though some barriers might be eliminated, an archives should not immediately expect a significant increase in the number of its deaf researchers. Archives will have to publicize the steps taken to accommodate the deaf. Yet, having learned that special services exist, more of the non-hearing population will begin to use archival institutions. Many deaf are eager to demonstrate their skills as genealogists and scholars and will greatly appreciate the efforts of archives on their behalf.

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The Donor as Archivist

TIMOTHY STROUP

MANY ARCHIVES COLLECT the papers of living individuals and existing institutions. Yet few producers of documents have comprehensive systems for organizing and preserving their papers, and most use archivally inadequate office supplies. Some large donors, usually institutions, already have appropriate professional advice. But often the records management of the average donor is a hit-or-miss accretion of specific responses to problems as they arise. Future archival headaches are caused by past and present carelessness in the generation and preservation of documents. Consequently, the archivist's self-interest dictates that he assume an active role as counsel to the donor.

Confronted with the donor of a continuing collection who lacks competent records management advice, the archivist should begin a thorough process of consultation and make concrete proposals to the donor in several areas.

First, content: without encroaching on the substantive functions of the donor, or individual privacy, is it possible to increase the current collection of information so that historians will have a fuller record from which to work? For example, if the donor is a school or business, are adequate records now being kept, with complete demographic data, on all students or workers? Are the forms for this purpose standardized, and do they cover the range of information that will be useful to researchers? Such questions raise the ethical problem, as yet largely unaddressed, of the boundaries between the archivist as observer or recorder and as participant seeking to increase the data available for the future.

Second, organization: Are the current records organized in the most logical manner to avoid duplication and facilitate retrieval of documents? This is important to the donor, but the archivist who eventually receives these current files will also profit from simplicity, transparency, and orderliness of the organizational scheme. Do the categories of the records correctly reflect the functions and activities of the donor? Do the donor and the archivist know the types and, particularly, the location of all relevant materials?

Third, maintenance and disposition: how, in physical terms, are the records being kept? Are there safeguards against natural disasters? Is every piece of paper retained and, if not, what is discarded and by what criteria? Ideally, both donor and archivist should agree explicitly on a plan for retention and disposal of records. Any standard text on records management will provide samples of records retention schedules. (For example, Wilmer O. Maedke, Mary F. Robek, and Gerald F. Brown, *Information and Records Management* [Beverly Hills, California: Glencoe Press, 1974], p. 78.) Such schedules group records by categories, assign a specific retention period, and give instructions about disposal (whether by destruction or transfer to the archives). Devising a schedule may have the beneficial effect of predisposing the archivist to greater selectivity about what is retained. Too often, unconscious decisions—that is, those that are made by default of conscious judgment—are extremely conservative from the standpoint of weeding, yet extremely liberal from the standpoint of storage costs. Archival administration requires compromise, and sensible compromise requires forethought.

Finally, there is production: few archivists are advising their donors about

the technical defects of the supplies in use, defects most clearly demonstrated by the limited use, outside the profession, of archivally sound supplies. Two examples suffice: Hollinger's acid-free carbon sets (individual units of carbon and copy paper) were discontinued for lack of demand (see the technical note, "Last Call for Permanent Carbon Paper," in the January 1978 issue of this journal, page 63); and Xerox's archival-quality photocopy paper has had a disappointing volume of sales. If archivists could persuade donors to use supplies of the quality of those, then manufacturers would produce the better products. Archivists who lament the widespread use of pressure-sensitive cellophane tape should urge donors to avoid it wherever possible, and should present the donor with some samples of the archival tragedies that result from its indiscriminate use. Donors should be alerted also to the dangers of staples and paper clips.

It is unrealistic to expect the transformation of the donor into an archivist; but the donor can, in some respects, be made to think like an archivist or at least to facilitate, rather than hinder, the archivist's work. Archivists must do more to guide donors so that their current practices will not cause later archival grief. Short-term caution obviates long-term atonement.

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Sources of Funds to Meet NHPRC Matching Grants

CHARLES F. DOWNS II

WITH PUBLIC INTEREST in and use of historical records at unprecedented levels, the need to preserve and make available noteworthy documents has never been greater. At the same time, double-digit inflation and government cost-cutting have reduced the funding available for records projects. Consequently, an increasing number of public and private institutions have financed record programs through matching grants offered by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

What are matching grants and how are they funded? In such a grant, NHPRC provides 50 percent of a project's total budget beyond cost-sharing, if the rest of the funds come from new non-federal grants, gifts, or appropriations. Applicants sometimes confuse matching grants with cost-sharing and with combined grants. Resources, such as office space and supplies, and professional consulting contributed by the applicant, are considered part of cost-sharing responsibilities required in nearly all projects. Matching funds, however, must be in hard cash. In a combined grant, the commission supplies outright the difference between the project's total cost and the amount furnished by the matching process.

Although matching grants have accounted for only about 8½ percent of the total cash value of all records program funds the NHPRC has dispensed since its creation in 1974, the commission favors them because they generate funds not otherwise available to records projects. Matching grants have ranged from $900 to $38,021, with the average matching grant amounting to about $9,390. Of the thirty-two matching grants offered by the commission by the end of 1978, twenty-nine were

met with matching funds by the applicants, three are pending, and none have lapsed. Between 1974 and the end of 1978, the commission awarded $272,235 in matching grants, with another $35,209 offered and awaiting confirmation of the availability of matching funds by the recipients.

The sources from which matching funds have been raised to meet NHPRC grants are known, since the commission requires that grant recipients reveal them as a condition for payment of the grants. The author examined NHPRC records program grant files for the period 1974 to January 1979 to compile the following table identifying nine types of sources. Although the placement of any given donor in one category rather than in another might be arguable, these categories were suggested by the raw data and enabled representative figures to be computed.

In most cases the records programs examined in this survey enjoyed constituencies with a special interest in or connection with the records. Because most records projects seeking NHPRC matching funds involved non-federal records, funds were usually raised at the local or regional levels, with contributions only rarely coming from national non-sectarian organizations. Despite the variety of available sources, in nineteen of twenty-nine cases all matching funds came from one general type of source, and in fourteen of those instances all funds were obtained from a single donor. Only three applicants received funds from more than two different types of sources.

Applying to the commission with matching funds in hand improves the chances of applicants for receiving favorable consideration, since it demonstrates both local support for the project and the fund-raising ability of the

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCES OF NHPRC MATCHING GRANT FUNDS

Type of source	$ amount	% total	# instances*
Charities, foundations and trusts	81,630	28.9	11
Non-federal government	47,955	17.0	6
(state)	(24,567)	(8.7)	(3)
(local)	(23,388)	(8.3)	(3)
Applicant institutions	44,961	15.9	2
Private donors	39,941	14.2	7
Businesses and corporations	22,075	7.8	4
Associations and alumni	15,822	5.6	5
Banks	15,750	5.6	3
Undifferentiated multiple types	7,493	2.7	1
Miscellaneous: dues, booksales, etc.	6,608	2.3	2

*Each instance is one type of source in one case.

applicants. Conversely, the offer of a conditional NHPRC grant motivates fund raisers and helps to obtain other contributions. The assurance that funds will be used locally and that each dollar donated will bring in a dollar of federal funds often proves an effective combination for attracting prospective donors. Many applicants look beyond matching the commission grant to creating their own continuing fund-raising programs that could help support operations long after the exhaustion of their original matching grant. An NHPRC matching grant also can act as a seal of approval, both for the worthiness of the project and the competence of those involved. Local donors with little conception of archival principles and needs usually find such national approval impressive and reassuring.

Fund raisers are only beginning to exploit the opportunities offered by NHPRC records program matching grants. Not only do matching grants provide alternative possibilities for funding projects, the publicity engendered in fundraising often increases public awareness of the need to preserve and make accessible records that document America's past. In that sense, the rewards of a matching grant can frequently transcend a particular archival project.

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