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The Forum

FROM THE EDITOR:

Letters-to-the-editor are the delight of any editorial heart. Whether they praise or criticize, they show that people are reading the journal thoughtfully.

Because The Forum is now more visible, and because the first letter in this issue raises some serious questions, it has become important for us to state our editorial policy and procedures clearly:

- (1) Letters to the editor are welcome when they include pertinent and constructive comments or criticism of materials recently published in the *American Archivist* or observations on other topics of interest to the profession. They should not exceed 400 words. They will be printed in The Forum with minimal editing, primarily to conform to our style manual. When letters are more lengthy or when many letters on the same matter are received, the letters may be excerpted, as judiciously as we are able, or only selected letters may be printed.
- (2) A letter responding to or criticizing an article, review, news item, or another letter will be sent to the author of the piece discussed. If the author chooses to respond, his or her reply will also be printed, in the same issue if possible.
- (3) No attempt is made to balance

viewpoints. Readers who oppose opinions expressed in The Forum, or in any other part of the *American Archivist*, may avail themselves of The Forum to state their positions.

It is good to see that writing letters to The Forum is becoming one of the lively arts of the archival profession.

VIRGINIA C. PURDY
Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

Of the several changes made recently in the content and format of the *American Archivist*, the expanded and redefined Forum is surely the most welcome. The large number of letters to appear in the first three issues containing this section indicates that archivists are welcoming the opportunity to exchange thoughts with one another with a speed and directness that is uncommon in the literature of the academic professions.

The July Forum contains a disturbing note, however. Sister M. Helena Sanfilippo writes to express her opposition to the vote of the Nashville annual meeting to hold future annual meetings only in states which have ratified the Equal Rights Amendment. Her letter is followed immediately, and without editorial explanation, by a letter from Elsie Freivogel, which attempts to answer her objections di-

rectly. One wonders how Ms. Freivogel came by Sister M. Helena's letter in time to respond in the very same issue. Are all letters expressing points of view at variance with those of the officers, Council, or Editorial Board—or even letters that take exception to votes of the entire membership—submitted to the Ministry of Truth prior to their publication so that ideological deviationism may be held in check? Even though Ms. Freivogel graciously acquits Sister M. Helena of the charge of being “disloyal,” this method of editorial procedure seems highly improper. There would be no objection if, after reading Sister M. Helena's letter in print, any member of the Society were moved to respond. That it should all be arranged in advance so that the journal always has the last word seems inappropriate in the journal of a profession that seeks to encourage the free flow of ideas.

I have no desire to reopen the debate on the issue which so unfortunately divided the meeting at Nashville and which has already cost the Society some of its members. I hope I will not be considered disloyal by asking for a justification of this peculiar circumstance. But The Forum can be the place for the open exchange of opinion only if even the suggestion of editorial heavy-handedness is avoided.

JAMES M. O'TOOLE
Archivist, Archdiocese of Boston

TO THE EDITOR:

James M. O'Toole would have every reason to be disturbed if the *American Archivist* were to adopt a policy of seeing that “ideological deviations are held in check.” I should like to recount the circumstances of my letter in the July issue in order to allay his fears.

As a member of the Editorial Board of the *American Archivist*, who happens to work in the same building with the editorial offices, I often see material before it appears in the journal. I had been intending for some time to write a letter pointing out the difference between tactics and principle on ERA. When I saw Sister M. Helena Sanfilippo's letter, it prompted me to do what I should have done sooner or later anyhow. Sr. M. Helena's letter provided a vehicle for these comments, though it was perhaps misleading for neither Virginia Purdy nor me to explain the circumstances.

I might also add that it would be difficult to express “points of view at variance with those of the officers [and] Council” on the subject of ERA and annual meeting sites. A perusal of the Council minutes in the October issue will demonstrate that there was little consensus on the subject among the leaders of the Society last year. My letter was intended only to provide some organizing principles for further discussion.

ELSIE FREIVOGEL
National Archives and Records Service

TO THE EDITOR:

The archives profession is now enjoying a state of creative development in which its members are defining their basic methodology in the Basic Manual Series; are sharing methodological information that pushes forward the frontiers of the profession, in the *American Archivist*; and are sharing new educational and technical information in the *SAA Newsletter* and the many excellent regional and local publications.

This expansion of the professional pool of knowledge is abetted but not dependent on the recent infusion of

Ph.D.'s from history and other subject disciplines. Many of those who have contributed to this pool in the past have had "extensive training in related research fields and a continuing interest in research and publication," quoting from Richard Kesner's letter-to-the-editor from the July 1979 issue.

I hope that the archival profession develops its own status symbols and standards of excellence, and does not fall into the trap of allowing the new Ph.D.'s in our midst to define them for us. What is excellent in one profession does not necessarily transplant perfectly into another profession, no matter how related the two may be.

ELEANOR MCKAY
Mississippi Valley Collection
Memphis State University

TO THE EDITOR:

Ms. McKay was kind enough to send me a copy of her letter raising certain objections to my own missive appearing in the July 1979 issue of *AA*. It appears that Ms. McKay has misinterpreted my intentions. While it is true that Ph.D.'s are now entering the archival field in greater numbers, the profession as a whole is neither dominated by them nor any other subgroup. Indeed, the largest influx of new SAA members has come from the growing number of training programs around the country. I mentioned these developments in my earlier letter to point out just a few pools of talent from which the archival profession will draw an expanding and increasingly diverse membership.

Whatever their background and training, many of these people as well as their more senior colleagues will seek an outlet for their creative professional activities. I suggested and continue to support the notion that the

American Archivist ought to serve as a forum for scholarship in the archival field. Ms. McKay apparently views archivists with Ph.D.'s as a class apart. This is most unfortunate. Those who have "hands-on" research experience, irrespective of the degrees they hold, can undoubtedly help the rest of us in dealing with patron needs and in appraising modern collections. In this context, "status symbols" have no meaning or relevance, but our "standards of professional excellence" will certainly benefit from close cooperation where each may contribute according to his or her training and experience. The *AA* will, it is hoped, continue to serve as one of the mediums of exchange for such "excellence."

RICHARD M. KESNER
Director, Archives of Appalachia,
East Tennessee State University

TO THE EDITOR:

The world of information retrieval is undergoing revolutionary changes. The new era that David Bearman sees in his review of the *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States*, in the July 1979 issue of the *American Archivist*, is to be encouraged. Fully automated on-line access to manuscript and archival material will probably be a reality in the future. However, budgetary restraints and other practical considerations prevent this from being available now. Those of us who are providing access to manuscript collections are attempting to supply as much information as possible with the resources we have. The *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections* is the major tool providing access to manuscripts at the collection level. We hope to see further improve-

ment in it, and we expect it to continue to be a model as well as part of an automated future. The access by subject, name, and place in NUCMC is, by consensus, valuable. To write an epitaph for NUCMC and for printed guides is both premature and impractical.

HARRIET OSTROFF

Editor, National Union Catalog of
Manuscript Collections

TO THE EDITOR:

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference published the Mucci articles originally in their newsletter, the *Mid-Atlantic Archivist*, over a period of 2½ years. We had had a Technical Notes column before, and it was well received. So when the Mucci articles came in we began to publish them. The results were surprising, to me at any rate. First we gained a large Canadian subscription. Then, ten or twelve bookbinders across the country subscribed. Finally, orders for specific issues started to come in from Europe and Australia. We were at this time considering a publication series. Since the demand for the articles was apparent, the Publication Committee decided to make the material more readily available as a separate publication. This step had the added advantage of taking us through a publishing routine so that we could set up a procedure for publications.

To be sure, the manual has flaws, some of which Ms. Aronsson has generously overlooked. We did, of course, discuss the level of the publication and had several thoughts about it. The articles as a series were clearly beyond many archives as in-house operations. However, some archives are now beginning to set aside some working time to achieve minor repairs in their var-

ious collections. These archivists are aware of their technical limitations, but they are also aware of their ability to make some contribution to the preservation of their collections. We hoped the manual would help them.

Another point we considered was the accessibility of the information. Information on paper restoration processes is apparently not often published. During the past few years there has been much discussion of conservation as a concern. Aside from the *Abbey Newsletter* though, not much of a practical nature has been available. True, the information is technical, but it is seemingly not easily available even to people working in the same field. Hence brisk sales of ca.550–600 copies so far to libraries and archives in this country and abroad. We hope that the manual will be a step in the direction of improved communication and technique in this field. . . .

It should not really be a surprise that MARAC would publish a book on conservation at this or any other level. The by-laws provide that the organization was established to “promote cooperation and exchange of information among individuals interested in the preservation and use of archival and manuscript materials in the mid-Atlantic area; to disseminate information on archival research and methodology; to provide a forum for matters of common concern; to become a clearinghouse for and active participant in joint ventures and cooperative projects; [and] to cooperate with other organizations having similar objectives.”

As a conservator, Mucci was a member of MARAC while he lived in the area, along with archivists, historians, records managers, librarians, and other interested people. Certainly this book will not meet the needs of all . . . , but we do feel that it is a valid contribution

to different people with different levels of use, and so we're happy to publish it. Since the venture has been successful and we see that we will be able to continue, perhaps we will continue in the vein Ms. Aronsson suggests.

MARY BOCCACCIO
Archivist, University of Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

I read the waspish review of Paul Mucci's *Paper and Leather Conservation: A Manual*, in the July issue of the *American Archivist*, with concern. Surely the author, his work, and the archival profession does not deserve this treatment in the pages of the *American Archivist*. It seems to me that any learned contribution to our field is useful and should be accepted in the spirit in which it was offered.

Assuming as the reviewer does, that the manual is too rudimentary for the specialist, let us concentrate on the other criticism, that it is too technical for the novice, and by this she means the archivist who is not by profession a conservator. To quote the reviewer: "I do not, however, recommend this book to archivists seeking an introduction to the conservation of paper and leather. Some of the techniques Mucci describes require a level of expertise beyond that which can be acquired by reading a brief manual." Firstly, who ever said that reading a brief manual would assure a level of expertise? Yet, what the reviewer gives as an illustration of this very complicated bit of technical prose that she says Mucci engages in is really not so complicated at all. She writes: "Even though Mucci implies, in the first few chapters, that repairing paper is a relatively uncomplicated process, his introduction belies this assumption." She continues to quote Mucci: "Paper is resized after it has been cleaned, washed,

neutralized, and buffered and washed again. Any mending that needs to be done would follow resizing." Then the reviewer continues, "Furthermore, he recommends the purchase of nearly \$300 worth of supplies. Clearly, these procedures exceed both the financial resources and the conservation skills of most archivists."

Personally, I do not find what Mucci has to say impossible to follow. Nor do I agree with the reviewer that the procedures he advocates are beyond the range of skills of most archivists. . . . Following the simple procedures that Mucci outlines will, in fact, save money and preserve collections, two goals most archivists aspire to achieve. Most of us who work on limited budgets cannot afford the conservator except in rare cases. It therefore behooves archivists to learn the relatively uncomplicated procedures that Mucci and other conservators such as George Cunha advocate to allow archivists to care for their own collections. The great mass of archival material which is need of physical care will never go to the conservator's table. Neither is three hundred dollars an excessive amount to request in a year's budget to take care of collections that would require many times that to send out. . . .

More than this, however, is the patronizing tone and the "me too-ism" of a review that recommends a man's contribution to his fellow workers as "a handy source of wheat and rice paste recipes" and concludes that "It is particularly disappointing when one notes the book's publisher; Mucci's manual is the first monograph in the MARAC Archival Series." By the looks of the publisher, it would not seem that the manual was intended to be a great commercial success; and I am sure that the editors of MARAC, in their collective wisdom, saw something more valuable

in Mucci's contribution than did the reviewer whose particular form of arrogance I find destructive.

L. D. GELLER

*Restoration Project Archivist
of Plymouth County, Massachusetts*

TO THE EDITOR:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to respond to these letters about my review of *Paper and Leather Conservation: A Manual* by Paul Mucci. I do not believe, however, that either letter requires a response. Ms. Boccaccio

provides some insight into MARAC's decision to publish this book, and L. D. Geller's misinterpretation of the review is so basic that a simple rebuttal is impossible. Nevertheless, I agree that archivists should acquire basic conservation skills.

I am pleased that my review provoked reaction and hope this is an indication of archivists' increasing concern about conservation.

PATRICIA ARONSSON
Simmons College

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