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The American Archivist

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COVER: Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnson, courtesy of the Library of Congress. See review on page 221, of exhibit *Life and Times in Shoe City: The Shoe Workers of Lynn*.

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The Forum

FROM THE EDITORS:

We, the editors of the Reviews Department, are encouraged by the quantity and quality of recent literature pertaining to archives. To our delight and dismay, we find ourselves, simply because of lack of space, not reviewing interesting books or giving those books just brief notes instead of a full review. We have had to reduce reviews of guides to a minimum; we must choose between books on similar subjects, such as copyright and preservation techniques; and we have pared down our listings of new publications. We hope that when your favorite book is not promptly reviewed you will understand, and we appreciate any comments or suggestions that will help us make decisions.

In the past, editors of the Reviews Department have been fortunate in being able to call upon the Society's members to contribute reviews of books of interest to the profession. We hope this membership interest continues. We try to select reviewers who represent the numerous concerns and activities of the archival profession, who are from different geographical areas, and who have a wide variety of interests. A sincere effort is made to pair a book, guide, or exhibit with a person who, by recommendation or stated interest, is appropriate for the task. During the past year, we have relied heavily on the reviewer-interest forms received in response to our call for volunteers. Obviously, not everyone who returned a form has been asked to prepare a review; we cannot always match your interests with the books we receive. Nonethe-

less, we wish to thank those of you who did respond and to assure you that your willingness is much appreciated.

Reviews are published, with a minimum of editing, to reflect the opinion and evaluation of the reviewer, alone. We wish to encourage a frank expression of views, although publication does not imply approval or disapproval by the editor of this journal in particular, or by the SAA in general. We feel that frank discussion provides a better service to our readers and to our profession. We welcome your opinions on the matter of reviews and, as always, we would like to hear from those who wish to add their names to our list of reviewers.

BRENDA A. BEASLEY
MARY ELIZABETH RUWELL
Reviews Editors

With this issue I end the second year of my three-year term as editor of the *American Archivist*. As each issue "hits the streets," I wonder if the readers understand what goes into producing the journal.

The department editors are essentially autonomous, and they earn the praise that readers express for them. When there are errors in the departments, I am responsible; as editor-in-chief I should catch mistakes in my final review of copy.

Except for the assistant editor, we all have full-time jobs in archives. Those of us in Washington hold staff meetings during lunch hours and conferences during coffee breaks.

My gratitude to the department editors knows no bounds. And to Bruce Ambacher

go special thanks for the professional draftsmanship that has made our flowcharts and Venn diagrams tidy and legible.

VIRGINIA C. PURDY

Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

In his review of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission's *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States* (AA 42 [July 1979]: 350–51), David Bearman questions the commission's use of the SPINDEX computer program system for its national data base. He argues that any national system must include, as a *sine qua non*, on-line searching, something which SPINDEX cannot yet do. While one might agree that in the best of all possible worlds on-line searching capability would be desirable, that is not the world in which we archivists are currently living.

Bearman assumes that any national archival data base should be oriented toward researchers using Boolean searching. Indeed, this is his main criterion in evaluating the NHPRC's data base and the SPINDEX system. As in his earlier article, "Automated Access to Archival Information: Assessing Systems" (AA 42 [April 1979]: 179–90), however, he hedges on the question of how much such a system would cost in terms of hardware, computer connect time, and staff support, let alone the development of descriptive standards, authority lists, and thesauri—and the tougher question of who would pay for the development and day-to-day maintenance of such a system.

Bearman's emphasis on indexing capabilities also assumes that the level of descriptive analysis of material entered into a national system will be detailed enough to permit effective use of an on-line search capability. Yet most of the information we have currently available to us in the form of guides, NUCMC descriptions, and other printed finding aids, is introductory rather than exhaustive. Indeed, it is a basic premise of the NHPRC system to use what currently exists or what, realistically, we can hope to obtain without becoming involved

at this time in debilitating, complex analysis. Moreover, the NHPRC system is not designed to serve only researchers. Despite our ability to generate publications such as the *Directory* and a variety of collection-level guides, the data base is also designed to provide for administrative control of the materials being described, and is being used in this manner by nearly every one of the NHPRC's cooperating projects.

There are many areas to consider in evaluating an automated system: existence of documentation and ongoing system support; flexibility for a variety of uses; cost; and ease of use. If SPINDEX scores zero at present in its capacity for on-line searching, it more than compensates in the preceding areas. Moreover, as we have seen in the development of SPINDEX III, the system is capable of changing to suit the varied needs of its users. Indeed, as this letter is being written, work is underway on a global search-and-replace routine, more flexible data entry mechanisms, and expanded output capability. Is it not possible that, if user needs demand it, on-line software could be written or even borrowed from existing systems?

If archivists insist on waiting for the "ideal" system, then they will probably wait for many years to come. At the NHPRC we are at least taking the first step: moving toward standard descriptive approaches and gathering descriptive information where none previously existed. We aim to accomplish the possible, as soon as possible!

NANCY SAHLI

*National Historical Publications
and Records Commission*

TO THE EDITOR:

Thank you for bringing us two differing views on the professional education of archivists [*American Archivist*, October 1979]. It is an area of increasing concern, and it is important to develop a strong set of standards if we are not to be inundated by mediocre programs started by other professions to solve the problem of *their* job crunch.

McCrack's solution of a combination M.A.-M.L.S. is certainly desirable; and, from a reading of the University of Maryland's course prospectus, it appears to be as comprehensive as any graduate archives program that has been established.

The main problem with this direction is the investment of time and money in a two-year program, when a student does not need or want an M.L.S. I think the joint program may be good for some; but there is a need for a one-year graduate program in archival administration, and to my knowledge none exists.

The second article, by Peace and Chudacoff, reinforces my feeling that I do not want to leave archival education to librarians. While making a strong case for both professions being concerned with the control and dissemination of information, they fail to take into account the major difference between the two professions: the uniqueness of archival holdings and the consequent concern for preservation. Their emphasis on cataloging, with only passing reference to conservation, reveals the continuing dichotomy between the two professions. I don't see cataloging taking a place in my trinity of Preservation, Arrangement, and Description.

THOMAS WILSTED
*Archives and Research Center
The Salvation Army*

AUTHORS' RESPONSE:

We assure Mr. Wilsted that we also honor the trinity of Preservation, Arrangement, and Description. We would include, however, one more deity: Access. The point of our article was not to advocate the cataloging of archives and manuscripts, but to recommend the adaptation of certain concepts from library cataloging which seem to us applicable to archives, specifically in the area of subject access.

NANCY PEACE
*Simmons College,
Boston, Massachusetts*

NANCY CHUDACOFF
*Archives and Library Consultant,
Boston, Massachusetts*

TO THE EDITOR:

I must complain about the editing of my article, "The Donor as Archivist" (October 1979). My original text was changed substantially, and while I agreed, as a condition of acceptance, to virtually all suggested shortenings, I did protest a few *additions* for which I did not want to claim responsibility. These included several stylistic infelicities, an illogicality, and an exaggeration; but it would be tedious to embark on a detailed exegesis now that the damage has been done. One point, however, must be corrected: I took great pains to avoid using "he" in my text, but a gratuitous "that he assume," referring to an unspecified archivist, was added over my objections.

This is the second time a contribution of mine has been changed for the worse. A technical note about permanent carbon copies was published under the incorrect title, "Last Call for Permanent Carbon Paper" (January 1978); in fact, the carbon paper was highly disposable, but it made lasting copies.

Such problems could be avoided by the common practice of sending authors proofs of their articles; but two letters from me requesting this went unanswered, and the October article was published without regard for any of my expressed wishes. If authors cannot propose adjustments or compromises, and if they cannot have advance notice of the final form of their articles, then the initial editing should be far less freewheeling.

I should put my criticisms in the context of the otherwise commendable improvements that have been made to the journal, for which all readers are rightly grateful.

TIMOTHY STROUP
*John Jay College of Criminal Justice
New York, New York*

We regret that errors occurred in two of Mr. Stroup's contributions. The problems with his Shorter Features article were caused by a change of editors in that department while his article was being edited. We hope that he will continue to contribute to the journal despite his unfortunate experiences in the past.

VCP

TO THE EDITOR:

I am the reviewer of the *American Archivist* for the official journal of the State Archives of Italy, *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato*. I wish to compliment you on the department The International Scene, which is very interesting and useful.

If you think it helpful, I am willing to cooperate with you by sending archival correspondence and news, regularly, from Italy.

DONATO TAMBŁÉ
Archivio di Stato di Roma

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to commend the staff of the *American Archivist* and Baltimore City Archivist Richard J. Cox on the publication of his article "The Plight of American Municipal Archives: Baltimore, 1729–1979," in the July 1979 issue of the *American Archivist*.

The plight of Baltimore's beleaguered public records seem, from my own experience, to be fairly representative of the varying attention to the records of most local governments. The history of the treatment of the public records of the City of Providence, R.I., closely parallels that of Baltimore. In fact, it appears that Baltimore's records may have fared better over the years than those of most cities.

I could not agree more with Mr. Cox's statement that:

Few municipal archives are adequate. Various causes of the problem have been cited, including municipal apathy, emphasis by archivists on state and national levels, lack of support from the historical community, the failure of records management programs, and the lack of public support. Despite recognition of the problem, there has been no systematic study of the historical development of American municipal archives; and such study is necessary for the full understanding of that plight.

There is now increasing interest in local history and public support of attention to local public records, which only emphasizes the need for archivists to turn a greater portion of their energies toward this largely uncultivated field of archival material. Not

only systematic study of the needs for municipal and county archives, but also a systematic effort of national financial and technical support for the establishment of professionally staffed archives is necessary if this goal is to be accomplished in this era of zero-based budgeting and municipal bankruptcies.

I think it is significant that NHPRC grant requirements encouraged the City of Baltimore to hire its first professional archivist. The same thing happened in my case with Providence city government. NHPRC deserves to be recognized for this contribution, not only in these individual instances but also for raising and upholding high standards for archival procedures and professional personnel in archives and historical agencies all across the country.

With the increasing number of municipal and county archives being established or rejuvenated, I hope to see more articles in the *American Archivist* concerning local government archives and that SAA will give an increasing amount of attention to this fertile field for the archival profession.

ALBIN WAGNER
City Archivist of Providence, Rhode Island

Please see News Notes, p. 250 ED.

TO THE EDITOR:

Dan Fenn's article on the Kennedy Library (*AA*, October 1979) aroused thoughts and emotions too complex and contradictory to be put into a few words. It is simpler just to point out two errors in the picture captions.

On page 432, the "left bank" of the Charles River is actually the right bank in the usual sense of the term; while it is on the left in the photo, the viewer is facing upstream, and so the hands are reversed.

More interesting is the error on page 435, where eleven Kennedys are depicted but only ten named. The missing one is Edward Moore. One trusts that this omission was purely accidental.

EVA MOSELEY
*Curator of Manuscripts
Radcliffe College*

TO THE EDITOR:

1984 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the National Archives. Whether the National Archives will survive the next four years is a matter of grave concern to all of us. As you know, these are times of stress for the National Archives and the archival profession: the Archivist of the United States resigned his position in August 1979; the Archives has been under attack by the news media; and Admiral Rowland G. Freeman III, Administrator of the General Services Administration, is posing a threat to the continued existence of the National Archives as we know it.

In a recent address to the staff of the National Archives and the Archives Advisory Committee, Freeman stated: "I have a tremendous sense of history. I have helped make it. I know where I'm coming from. I'm an expert in almost every area you work." Based upon his expertise in the archives field, Freeman has issued four new policy directives for the National Archives:

1. Admiral Freeman has decided to decentralize the Archives as part of President Carter's goal of bringing the government to the people. This will entail dispersal of the records throughout the country and, according to historian John W. Toland, would be "the beginning of the end of the National Archives."
2. In his list of priorities for NARS, Admiral Freeman has placed the records management functions of the agency at the top and the education programs of the National Archives at the bottom because the Archives is not cost effective.
3. Admiral Freeman intends to discontinue the presidential library system of the National Archives by centralizing the records of all future Presidents.
4. Admiral Freeman has stated that he intends to destroy all documents coming into the National Archives, after they are microfilmed.

While we realize the National Archives does have serious problems, we feel that these changes would lead to the destruction of the National Archives as a respected

archival and historical institution and would cause irreparable damage to the American archival profession.

If you feel as strongly about the future of the National Archives as we do, please write to your congressmen, President Carter, and the two congressional committees that oversee the GSA—the House Government Operations Committee and the Senate Government Affairs Committee—urging them to prevent the admiral and the GSA from implementing their ill-conceived programs and to investigate alternative solutions to the problems of the National Archives.

LAURA GORRETTA

JEFFREY ROLLISON

Archivists,

Case Western Reserve University

The letter above, addressed to the editor of the American Archivist, was received and duly set for printing as a letter-to-the-editor. As most readers know, copies of the letter were widely circulated by the authors. A copy of the letter reached the Administrator of General Services, Admiral Rowland G. Freeman III, who wished to reply to it in the American Archivist. Leonard Rapport also asked for the opportunity to reply in the American Archivist.

THE EDITOR

TO THE EDITOR:

Let me specifically address the four points raised:

1. There has been no decision, nor is any foreseen, for a "decentralization of the Archives" that would disperse the core holdings in a destructive way. The program of transferring selected, regionally oriented holdings to the eleven archival centers—begun more than ten years ago under former Archivist James B. Rhoads—will continue in a sensible, orderly manner that has proven successful. The program was temporarily halted by mutual agreement between Archivist James E. O'Neill and me. I will rely heavily on the new Archivist of the United States to properly oversee this program and other important programs of NARS. As in the past, recommendations for records to be transferred

will come from archivists, after consultation with users. Examples of records to be transferred, which I have used in various statements, have been the suggestions of the Archivist.

2. I have given no directive that records management functions of the agency be placed at the top and educational programs at the bottom of the priority list of the National Archives and Records Service. In testimony November 8, 1979, before the House Subcommittee on Government Information and Individual Rights, I said that with regard to the reevaluation of the current distribution of resources and priorities within NARS, I do not want to proceed without giving the new Archivist an opportunity to review the options and recommend appropriate courses of action. In light of continually limited resources, and no immediate prospect of relief, we must keep our statutory responsibilities in proper perspective with the nice-to-haves.

3. The statement that I intend to "discontinue the Presidential Library system" is an outright distortion. Before General Services Administration oversight committees on November 6, 1979, I stated that "consideration should be given to limiting the involvement of the government to the archival storage of presidential papers, with only a very limited capability for exhibition." As one alternative to dealing with the burgeoning costs of maintaining presidential libraries, I listed the centralization and combining of functions, and the limiting of the size and scale of each library. One concept would be a central presidential library that would accommodate the official papers of up to six Presidents. Arranged in a campus-like setting, they could share a visitors center that would contain conference rooms and other common facilities to bring about needed economy of operation. This is an alternative, not a decision or even an intention.

4. The statement that I intend to destroy all documents coming into the National Archives after they are microfilmed, is false. In my November 8 testimony, I said, "We want to ensure that those records *which are not worthy of permanent retention* are disposed of in an efficient and expeditious

manner." "A substantial reduction in these holdings would greatly improve the cost effectiveness of our records management operations and would help to alleviate our crowded space situation." Further, I said, "Original records—but *never those with intrinsic value*—will be disposed of to save space only when microfilm copies of them are deemed of satisfactory quality, and this technology is now available."

Finally, I want it known that I am happy to meet or communicate directly with responsible representatives of the user community as well as professionals within the National Archives. In my view, direct exchanges will lead to greater understanding by all parties and the ultimate benefit of this invaluable institution.

R. G. FREEMAN III

Administrator,

General Services Administration

TO THE EDITOR:

This winter, GSA Administrator Rowland G. Freeman III issued a televised invitation to NARS staff members to tell him what they thought about what he was doing. Whereupon I wrote commenting, in part, on what I perceived to be the errors of some of his ways. He replied with a letter more polite than I might, under the circumstances, have anticipated. That exchange I expected to constitute my involvement in the confrontation between the admiral and the archivists.

However, the wide distribution of Ms. Gorretta's and Mr. Rollison's letter and its appearance in these columns brings me back into the fray. Fairness, I feel, calls for somebody to answer it.

The writers list what they describe as four new policy directives for the National Archives. I haven't seen any official version of these directives, but will consider them as stated.

First, decentralization of the records in the National Archives. In my letter to the Administrator I disagreed with certain aspects of what I understood his proposals to be. He sent me a copy of a press release in which he says, in part, that a temporary halt to the transfer of records to regional

centers had been called until conferences on the subject can be held with the user community. I am taking him at his word. Those less willing might, at least until what at the moment seems a tenuous truce is broken, maintain a state of armed neutrality.

Second, placing the records management functions of the agency at the top and the education programs of the National Archives at the bottom. The trouble here is that the Administrator has read the 1950 Federal Records Act. Possibly he may believe the priorities should be reversed; but he doesn't find support for that in the Act. In neither the 1934 nor the 1950 Act can he find much about his obligation to educate the populace (or even the word education); but he does find a lot about records management. The 1950 Act, particularly Chapter 29, "Records Management by Administrator of General Services," spells out in detail the duties of the Administrator in managing the records of the Federal government. Being a navy veteran, he knows the term *dereliction of duty*. Having sworn to faithfully administer the Act, he is not about to lay himself open to a charge of dereliction by giving precedence to something that may (or may not) have been intended, over what the law specifically tells him to do.

Third, the centralization of future presidential papers. Having chided the Administrator for wanting to decentralize the records in the National Archives, the writers now chide him for not wanting to do the same with the records of future Presidents. True, this is the most debatable of the four directives; but is there a researcher anywhere who, by preference, would follow the threads of modern U.S. history from Austin to Boston with layovers at West Branch, Hyde Park, Independence, Abilene, and Ann Arbor? History seldom starts, stops, or even pauses every fourth January 20th. There may have been some justification for the present dispersal when presidents owned their papers and could set the terms for donating them. The Presidential Records Act of 1978 takes away that prerogative. Only stockholders in connecting airlines will view with alarm the end of the

proliferation of presidential libraries. There can still be presidential museums to display the trappings and artifacts of past power; and these edifices can borrow documents for display.

Fourth, the destruction of "all documents coming into the National Archives after they have been microfilmed." I don't believe the Administrator advocates destroying *all* such documents—if for no other reason than that he is aware that statute law requires him to "carefully preserve the originals" of a certain few documents that the National Archives periodically acquires. These are the exceptions. What is coming into the National Archives are not the Continental Congress Papers or the letters received by the early secretaries of the original departments, handwritten by the Great White Fathers on interestingly watermarked, rag-content, handmade paper. What is coming in are millions of typewritten pages of woodpulp paper, created or received in the past several decades by the likes of the Office of Emergency Preparedness, the Southwestern Power Administration, and the Office of Economic Opportunity. Almost always the only value of such pages is the message they convey. Once the message has been transferred to film (and I am less sanguine than the Administrator about the practicality of much of this microfilming) and a legally and archivally acceptable microfilm has been obtained, do the writers seriously maintain that these paper records should be reshelfed alongside the microfilm and preserved (at a true cost you wouldn't believe) to the end of time? If they do so value these originals, a great opportunity awaits. The Records Act permits the National Archives to donate this paper, once filmed, to non-profit repositories. I believe I can safely say that if Case Western Reserve or any other qualifying repository wants, it can back up 18-wheelers to the loading dock and take on tons of such paper, along with the challenging task of deacidifying, laminating, encapsulating, or whatever else is needed to preserve this paper for generations unborn.

I can agree with the writers' last three words: "independent National Archives."

I have worked under every GSA Administrator since the first one. The present Administrator is the only one I have heard express a willingness to set free the National Archives. In my letter I congratulated him on this willingness and hoped "we achieve that independence under a competent Archivist, the choice of whom is now up to you."

Finally, I recalled to the Administrator James Madison's account of what Benjamin Franklin, on September 17, 1787, said

as he sought to reconcile deeply differing views: "I cannot help expressing a wish that every member of the Convention . . . would with me, on this occasion doubt a little of his own infallibility." I cannot help expressing a wish that this might be taken to heart not only in GSA and in NARS but also among our friends out beyond the National Capital beltway.

LEONARD RAPPORT

National Archives and Records Service

SAA '80
Sept. 30 - Oct. 3

Come to
Cincinnati...
you'll have
been to
many
places

The fabled hills of San Francisco. The festive spirit of Munich. The riverfront flavor of New Orleans. The gourmet restaurants of Paris. The cosmopolitan mood of New York. In Cincinnati you'll find them all.

