

# The American Archivist

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## The American Archivist

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# The Forum

## FROM THE EDITOR:

The News Notes department relies on contributions from members of the Society as well as on information abstracted by the editor and reporters from newsletters, journals, and press releases. Only through a substantial cooperative effort can News Notes report developments in the archival profession.

Some of the many problems facing archivists are resolved in court. The News Notes editor would like to cover court cases more thoroughly. However, because issues raised in court are often not resolved until after the news media have lost interest, it is difficult to report the outcome of cases. Final decisions are what should be reported, because final decisions change archival policy. Recent examples include a dispute between a corporation and a corporation officer over ownership of office correspondence, a case preventing the Federal Bureau of Investigation from destroying investigative files previously approved for destruction by the National Archives, a case concerning Library of Congress policy of retaining only random selections from certain types of material in the archives of the Copyright Office, and a suit against a hospital for destroying medical records of patients. Reports to the News Notes editor or appropriate reporter on the outcome of cases will insure effective coverage of archives at the bar.

THOMAS E. WEIR, JR.  
*Editor, News Notes*

## TO THE EDITOR:

After some twenty-two years in the Society, I have decided to drop out . . . . I guess that the nature of my work and the nature of the world in which that work must be done has changed faster than the run-of-the-mill member of the Society seems to want to live with. The Future is fast moving down the road; I mean to stay with it as best I can. It will not wait for archivists to catch up with it . . . . That's a tragedy.

I wish you and the publication well . . . . I continue to care about the recording of the present for the generations yet unborn.

BELDEN MENKUS  
*Middleville, New Jersey*

## TO THE EDITOR:

I have just read "Archivists and Librarians: A Common Mission, a Common Education" (*AA*, October 1979), and want to voice my displeasure at the ideas it suggests. I am sure that many like myself, who have been reading the Society's journal for two and three decades and have been following archival literature in general, must feel similarly.

To suggest that, because the Society has had and is having difficulty setting up educational guidelines, the easiest of all solutions is simply to set up shop with librarians because "our basic goals have been to

collect, organize, conserve, and provide access to information" is, forgive me, to miss the boat completely.

It is no disparagement of librarians to say that usually the average librarian is concerned with what might generally be labelled "non-scholarly work" (issuing bibliographies on different subjects for high school and college classes, getting film programs ready for various age groups, tacking up print-outs from wire services, assisting some individuals to fill out welfare applications, answering varied "telephone reference" questions, reading fairy tales to pre-schoolers, and the like—often in a setting ranging from peaceful or not-so-peaceful suburbia all the way to definitely not-so-peaceful large cities). The average archival atmosphere is usually the opposite of the above; but more than that, we deal with different materials, face greater problems of conservation, have moral or legal commitments to donors, and much more which I need not go into here. At a time when many libraries are witnessing all kinds of funding curtailments and impositions of various governmental directives, whether they like it or not (who to hire, how many hours to stay open and on what days, making libraries become neighborhood information centers), all of which may or may not be healthy things to force them to do, at a time like this to suggest that libraries and archives have much in common is to suggest and do a disservice to both. No wonder our records management colleagues still look at archivists askance, since some of us still don't feel too steady on our feet and have to tie ourselves to a non-archival field like the library where, incidentally, salaries are the lowest of all professions.

Please—archivists are a distinct professional group, and let's keep it that way. Archivists themselves are a divergent group without getting further complicated with libraries. Is there anything really wrong in wanting to be left alone, if that's the proper way of putting it? Our democratization practices here in America may very well be the end of us all someday. Our forefathers, from the end of the nineteenth century when archival theory was

being formulated and gradually brought into being, have essentially said it all: look at the record. We have the same goals as librarians only in a general way, much as the dentist and the surgeon might have. But there are differences, and in this day and age I say with no offense intended to anyone: *vive la différence*.

NICHOLAS J. FALCO

*Manuscript Curator*

*Queens Borough Public Library*

PS: And while I'm at it, I've noticed a decided drift the last half decade or so to gradually alienate some archivists by introducing social issues which really have no bearing on the profession. Those of us who want to concern ourselves with social issues can and do join organizations set up for those goals. For example, there has been much deliberation lately regarding conventions being held or not being held in states which have or have not ratified ERA. This issue and ones like it have brought needless friction to the American Library Association, have caused it to lose members, and have not done a thing to raise the status of librarians. Let the SAA avoid similar losses.

NJF

#### TO THE EDITOR:

In your Winter 1980 issue I find Fredrika J. Teute's essay, "Views in Review: A Historiographical Perspective on Historical Editing," to be a rather limited and in some ways strange work. I question the editorial judgment that put it into print, at least under such a sweeping title.

The author is completely preoccupied with the historical editing of papers of famous men, all sponsored by NHPRC. She gives just passing mention to four "institutional projects" also sponsored by NHPRC. (The list is in footnote 2, and see on p. 50: "... *who* deserves to be edited . . ."; and on the following page: "... the question of *whom* to publish . . ." [emphasis added to indicate the concentration on persons]). Not only does she limit herself in this way, but she pays almost literally no attention to historical editing

prior to 1960. She might be interested to know, for instance, if she does not, of a controversy over editing practices between Clarence E. Carter and Allen Nevins, which followed publication of Carter's *Historical Editing* (National Archives Bulletin No. 7, 1952). Ms. Teute discusses precisely the main issues at dispute between them.

I, for one, find unconvincing her characterization of historical editing in the 1960s as dominated by "idealism and pride," with a marked change in the 1970s when there was, she writes, dominant "self-examination" followed by exhaustion of "the capacity for critical appraisal," with references to the war in Viet Nam (pp. 52-53). This is based on a further example of her limited approach: she writes sweepingly of "the majority of historians who reviewed the volumes in the 1960s" (p. 52), but in fact she cites with very few exceptions reviews only in AHR, JAH (MVHR), JSH, and WMQ.

There are some small items also. I think that "historical notes written around the documents" are not properly called *emendations* (p. 45). I believe she is mistaken in stating (p. 49) that "the eclectic texts of the literary editions are no less subjective and oblivious of historical context." And she speaks in wide-eyed fashion of a policy that "in fact has been instituted by some of the newer projects" to issue printed volumes of selected documents while putting out everything available on microfilm (p. 50). Exactly this procedure was instituted in the 1950s in the National Archives by Clarence Carter, then editor of *The Territorial Papers of the U.S.*, and continues.

On another subject, I think it is a misuse of your valuable pages to run reviews of exhibitions. Your space should be dedicated to material of widespread and permanent (or at least not clearly ephemeral)

value and interest. But I would enthusiastically approve of newsletter reviews of exhibitions.

JOHN PORTER BLOOM  
Editor, Territorial Papers  
National Archives and Records Service

#### TO THE EDITOR:

I am profoundly disturbed that a heavily ideologically loaded political issue, meaning the ERA, has grievously hurt the professional status of the SAA. The terrible ideological divisiveness of such issues does not contribute to the needed unity pertaining to those other issues which do, in fact, unite archivists *as archivists*. One of the major components of professionalism, surely, it to be above the crude level of a political faction because the greater needs of a profession logically dictate that all good efforts be properly directed at particular issues affecting the profession.

Such ideologically loaded political issues, as represented by the ERA, are in the general nature of issues affecting society at large. Now, while I myself have a great variety of pet peeves, I would never dream of ever introducing them as topics for the concern of SAA. The concerns of a professional, it would appropriately seem, are not of the same nature as society in general *in relation to* the professional organization and its activities.

If such highly nonprofessional and detrimental activities are continued, I shall be forced, by my conscience, to seriously reconsider my membership in the SAA.

JOSEPH ANDREW SETTANNI  
Associate Archivist,  
Archives & Research Center  
The Salvation Army