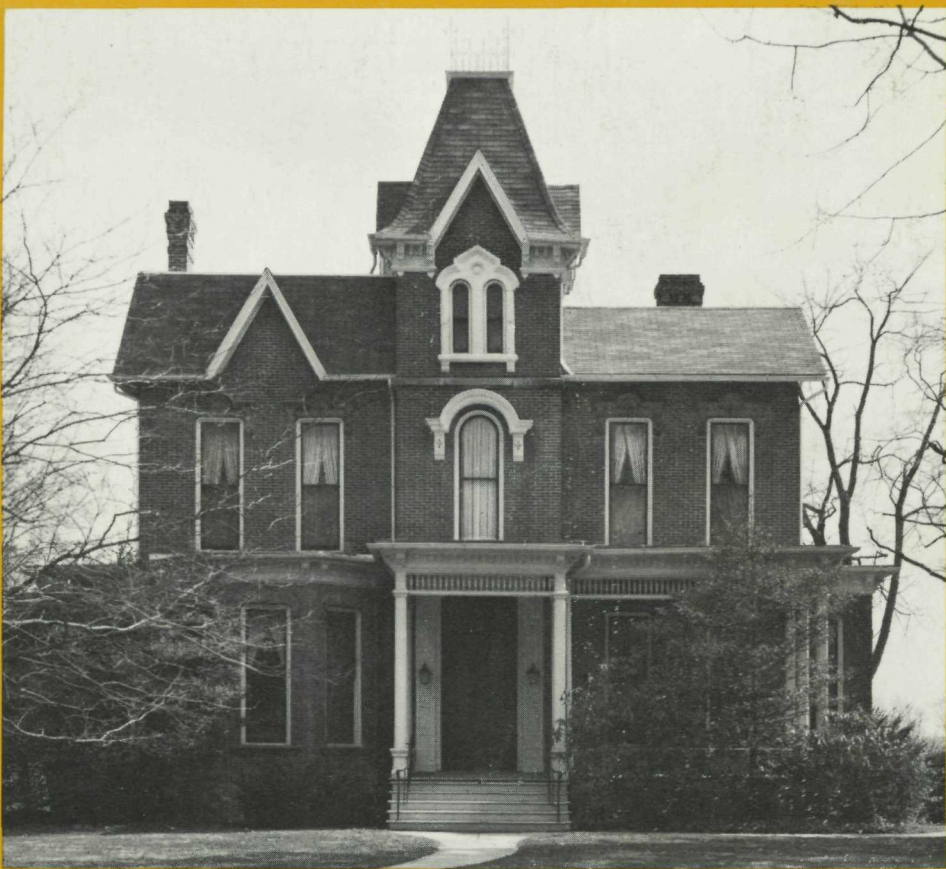


# The American Archivist

Volume 43

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Fall 1980



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## The American Archivist

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COVER: The Dillon House, museum annex and guest house of the Hayes Library. See page 485.  
*Photograph courtesy of the Rutherford B. Hayes Library, Fremont, Ohio.*

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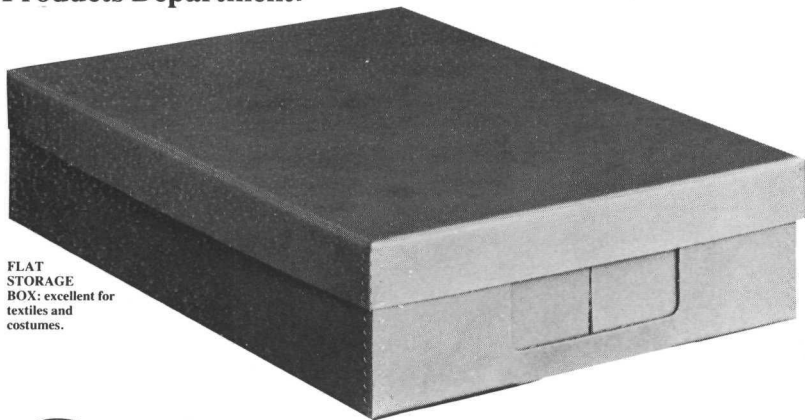
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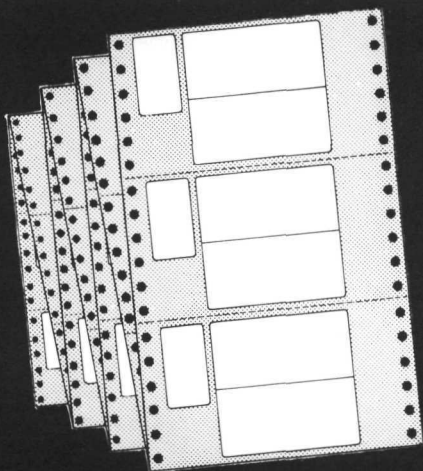


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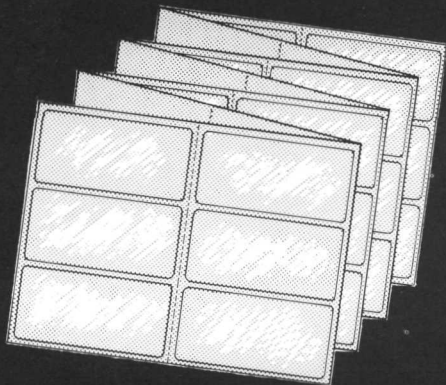
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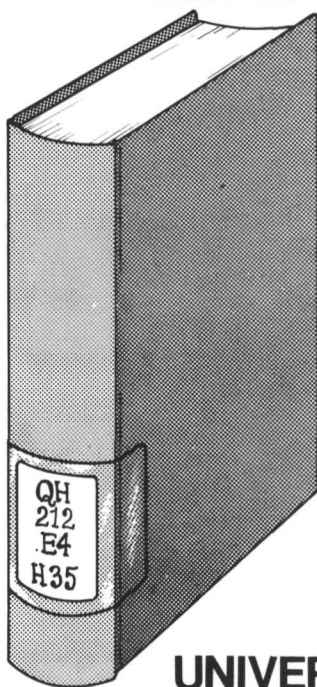
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# The Forum

## TO THE EDITOR:

In the October, 1979, issue of the *American Archivist*, Nancy Peace and Nancy Chudacoff emphasized a need for library science training for archivists. They argue that technical training is the most important element in professional education. Is not this route the one taken by the education profession? Are there not grave doubts about the effects of such an approach upon public education? Peace and Chudacoff noted that the Bemis Committee recommended some technical education but emphasized scholarly credentials in their report in 1939. Has the need for academic training diminished? I would argue that there is nothing more enlightening about archives and research libraries than the experience of using them as a scholarly researcher. It is an intellectual experience, and also a very practical one, that no amount of technical training can possibly match. There is much in library science that is valuable, and its utilization by archivists is broadening. Emphasis on technical training, however, may actually narrow the archival profession, not broaden it.

WILLIAM R. ERWIN, JR.  
*William R. Perkins Library,  
Duke University*

## TO THE EDITOR:

In an article on historical editing in the Winter 1980 issue of the *American Archivist*, Fredrika J. Teute touched upon some of

the failings of the present generation of documentary editors. In noting some of the excesses found in modern letterpress editions, she has reaffirmed the valid criticisms made by various reviewers. Her other objections, however, could be raised equally against archivists, manuscript curators, editors of microfilm editions, or any other historian who is required to make professional judgments.

In quoting one reviewer, Ms. Teute implies that the "inclusiveness and convenience" of letterpress editions will hamper the writing of good history because they eliminate excitement from research. Certainly few scholars will use only one documentary series in their work; and even if they did, they still would have to do the hard analysis of the documents before them. If convenience is an obstacle, then the same criticism could be leveled against comprehensive microfilm editions that gather manuscripts from a variety of repositories. On a larger scale, one could raise a similar objection against repositories that collect manuscripts relating to a certain theme.

Ms. Teute also fears that the researcher may "unquestioningly assume he has all the relevant or significant material before him when in fact he may not." Certainly editors have an obligation to state the basis for their selection of documents, yet this same assumption of completeness could plague the unwary who use microfilm editions or manuscript collections at a repository. One can always expect to find copies of private correspondence or government records

that have strayed into private hands over the years. Any scholar who assumes that he has seen every last document on a subject is naive indeed.

Ms. Teute is concerned that the editor's arrangement of documents in a series creates an impression that results from the editor's values. The same objection, of course, can be raised against microfilm editions in their preparation for filming. The arrangement of disarrayed manuscript collections and archival record groups also reflects the judgments of their processors. At the South Carolina Department of Archives and History a record series made up of antebellum governors' messages was recently rearranged after being filed for years in a subject classification. The enclosures were once again reunited with their original covers and these two different arrangements give the user a strikingly different perspective. (Topical access can, as with this project, be provided by computer-assisted indexing.) In deciding how to establish record groups and series for documents that have lost their original order, the archivist is making an historical judgment about the operations of the creating agency. When the historical editor arranges documents for publication, he is making the same sort of judgment.

Ms. Teute notes that it will be many years before some projects will be completed, but where is there a repository that does not have a backlog of unprocessed material? If the speed at which documentary series are completed is a problem, then perhaps more funds, and not less, ought to be channeled toward these projects.

Cost is a problem with letterpress editions, yet some of the alternatives Ms. Teute suggested also have their difficulties. Oral history projects, such as the one she proposes, are expensive if transcribed and, if not, the results cannot be disseminated as widely as letterpress editions. Her suggestion that state archives arrange legislative petitions chronologically and topically would not be inexpensive and goes against modern archival practice. Sound archival projects, oral history programs, or well-edited documentary volumes *are* expensive, but they ought to be judged not merely on

a ledger sheet but by their quality and usefulness.

If, indeed, our aim is to make important and useful documents available to a wide audience, the letterpress editions should be commended for their accomplishment. Certainly the dedicated scholar will use a microfilm edition or travel to a distant repository to listen to an oral history tape. The undergraduate student who is not majoring in history, or the amateur historian, however, will probably take the path of least resistance and go to the familiar bound volumes on the library shelf. The fingermarked pages and broken bindings on library copies of editions such as *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* lead me to believe that there are individuals other than professional historians who have consulted and used these volumes. Such a judgment is admittedly subjective, yet perhaps no more so than the criticisms directed at modern letterpress editions by Ms. Teute.

MICHAEL E. STEVENS, *Editor*  
*The State Records of South Carolina,*  
*South Carolina Department of Archives and*  
*History*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

I have read closely the recent review article by Fredrika Teute that appeared this winter in the *American Archivist*. I found the article to be an excellent evaluative statement that mirrors to a remarkable extent my own views on the contemporary condition of the field of historical editing.

I might take issue with Teute, however, in two minor respects. First, she might have dwelt at greater length on the mechanical problems of editorial treatment of texts, particularly the propensity of editors to clarify intention of authors by silently emending punctuation and, occasionally, spelling, and even syntax. Of course, this practice makes such projects even less reliable from the standpoint of textual integrity, and therefore a good deal less than definitive. Second, as a matter of emphasis, I believe I discern somewhat more change in the field of historical editing than that described by Teute. Perhaps one reason



why criticism has leveled off is that there is increasing reliance on a comprehensive microfilm edition of papers, supplemented by a selected letterpress edition. To put it another way, what Teute suggests as a reform (a comprehensive microfilm edition with a selected letterpress edition mostly of correspondence) has already been widely embraced.

And as it continues to find favor as a strategy for historical editors to follow, that approach promises to begin to close the difference in perspective between the two constituencies, historical editors and archivists, served by NHPRC. Microfilm editions will be served by inventories or registers, while the very fact of microfilming collections is, in its own right, an important documentary conservation measure that can protect the American documentary heritage in ways its scholarly guardians may find surprising.

WILLIAM L. JOYCE

*Curator of Manuscripts/Education Officer,  
American Antiquarian Society*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

I thoroughly appreciated Eva Moseley's comprehensive and well written "Sources for the 'New Women's History'" in the Spring issue of the *American Archivist*.

However, it seems that the Women's History Sources Survey, at least as far as she outlined it, has completely neglected to investigate one rather obvious source of women's history material. I am speaking of the records of the women's fraternities (known as sororities by most people). This oversight seems universal in the archival world, since none of the articles I have ever read about women's history, Ms. Moseley's included, mention the social fraternities at all.

If women's history documents "women and their activities, achievements, and relationships," then the records of the women's fraternities should not be overlooked. These organizations started by women, governed effectively by women, and operated for the benefit of women, include among their goals the promotion of good scholarship among their collegiate

members and the pursuit of the elusive ideal of "sisterhood." These are women who are acting, not acted upon. The sororities are non-profit businesses, and as such, they have restraints on the outside use of their records, similar to those of any other business. Many records can be made available to the properly qualified researcher, however. I cannot speak for any other fraternity, but I know the one which I represent welcomes appropriate outside use of its resources, and has enjoyed visits from scholarly researchers several times in the past. It would benefit the writing of women's history if this use were more frequent.

In the sorority archives it is possible to research the lives of "Great Women," ordinary housewives, and many women whose lives fall in between these categories. It is also possible to examine the development of the sorority itself as an organization which accommodates the wide range of interests and ages of its members. While it is true that most sorority women tend to come from middle-class backgrounds, there are many among them whose fathers were artisans, poor farmers, day laborers, railroad workers, and even sheepherders. Many members are first generation Americans; a few are immigrants themselves. These women are the first to make it to the college level of education and are the first in their families to reach middle class status. Sorority membership records document their rise very well.

As they are part of society, so the women's fraternities are influenced by society. Their records reflect the pressures of regional customs, sectional antagonisms, nationwide social concerns, and the efforts of all-male college faculties, administrations, and boards of trustees to change or eliminate them. All these pressures are seen from the women's point of view; the way the women manage to confront and resolve difficulties reflects their ideas of what their proper role in society should be. The philanthropic projects that all sororities conduct also demonstrate the members' commitment to a certain role. These projects have ranged from neighborhood fund raisers to global war relief.

Nearly 1,900,000 women have been members of sororities affiliated with the National Panhellenic Conference. This number increases by about 50,000 each year. Additional women have joined local sororities. While a few of these women have become famous, and many have had satisfying and successful careers, most have opted for the traditional college-marriage-motherhood sequence. Their letters, diaries, and scrapbooks, along with the records of the organizations that unite them, must surely become a standard source of material for all "women's history" written in the future. Archivists and historians cannot afford to overlook the resources of the women's social fraternities any longer.

JANE K. GIBBS

*Archivist, Delta Gamma Fraternity*

EDITOR'S NOTE: *There are entries for women's college fraternities, by name, in the index to Women's History Sources, including one to a local chapter of Delta Gamma.*

TO THE EDITOR:

It is always of interest to learn of additional manuscript or archival sources on women, especially on "anonymous" women. It seems a shame that, if the sororities (or even only Delta Gamma) have archivists, contact was not made, one way or the other, between them and the Women's History Sources Survey. As this lack cannot be remedied in the foreseeable future, I wonder whether Ms. Gibbs or one of her colleagues could tell us in more detail about the kinds of records that exist, where they can be found, and who can have access to them and on what terms. Perhaps a short article in the *American Archivist* would be appropriate.

EVA MOSELEY

*Curator of Manuscripts  
Radcliffe College*

TO THE EDITOR:

It was refreshing to read Edward C. Oetting's "Indexing Student Newspapers," in the Spring 1980 issue and while I agree

with many of the author's points I must take issue with one of them: that college work-study students can index quickly and accurately. To some degree, yes. But we have found in the ongoing project at the University of California Archives that it takes some underlying knowledge of the university's history to effectively subject-index; i.e., where mention is made of a new student union, one needs to know under what name that construction was finally effected. Names of prominent faculty are often garbled and need to be corrected; otherwise an entry is useless. Students mentioned may later become faculty, and the indexer needs to bear this sort of thing in mind when choosing which names to enter and which to omit. Too, there is no indexing of national and international news, which is indexed elsewhere.

Such an index to a student newspaper serves many purposes, but I do not see how it helps in writing "the popular 'what was happening in 19—' type of article" which Mr. Oetting cites. The index is arranged by subject, not by date. To create this type of article one must sit down with the paper, not the index.

J. R. K. KANTOR

*University of California Archives*

TO THE EDITOR:

J. R. K. Kantor's letter concerning my article "Indexing Student Newspapers" is a welcome addition to the dialogue on such projects. In the interest of brevity, I would like to respond only to Mr. Kantor's comment concerning college work-study students as indexers.

Although it was not stated in the article, the key to effective utilization of student workers is supervision and review of their work. For example, at SUNY-Albany, the typist plays an important role in maintaining consistency and accuracy of the index. The main point I would like to make, however, is that the use of student workers in many small archives is not a luxury, but a necessity. At SUNY-Albany, if the indexing were not done by students, it would not

be done at all. Therefore, it is up to the archivist to insure that those students have the proper supervision and training.

EDWARD C. OETTING  
*Archivist, State University  
of New York at Albany*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

In the Spring issue, my colleague Leonard Rapport replied to Gorretta and Rolison's letter appearing in the same issue, and widely distributed in the profession, questioning Administrator Freeman's priorities for the National Archives. Rapport noted that the Administrator will find a good deal in the legislation which authorizes NARS records management activity, but nothing about an "obligation to educate the populace, (or even the word education.)"

As a matter of fact, he won't find in that section of the law which deals with archival administration the words "reference," "automatic data processing," "training," or a number of other terms that have made their way in both use and practice since the law was written. What he will find is a mandate to provide for the "reproduction . . . description and exhibition of records," including the preparation of "inventories, indexes, catalogs, and *other finding aids to facilitate their use.*" And in legislation for the National Archives Trust Fund Board, that group is charged with funding "the preparation and publication, duplication, editing, and release of historical photographic materials and sound recordings." The educational programs of the National Archives are founded on this language; the tag we give those programs is an accident of time and custom.

Rapport will also recall that the 1950 legislation that mandated NARS' records management function was imposed upon our other functions, which were, from our inception, those of an administrative, educational, and cultural institution. Nothing in the imposition of that function was meant to change this original role. The guns or butter thinking that lurks behind Rapport's comment can, however, do a

great deal of damage never intended by the 1950 legislation.

The English language, Mr. Arbuthnot reminded us, is a difficult one and will trip us up every time. It ought not, however, to be pushed to do so, as Rapport's artful, but dodgy, phrasing would.

ELSIE FREIVOGEL, *Director,  
Academic and Curricular Development,  
National Archives and Records Service*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

In a college library I saw your Winter issue and enjoyed your president's article about facing facts, about saving, and about costs versus value. I liked also Linda Henry's article "Collecting Policies of Special-Subject Repositories." I am with an organization fitting the ideas in both articles, and I want to point out that these problems are shared by some of the little libraries that have archives also.

I am a co-founder of my organization, the Homosexual Information Center, Inc., which has as its core its library, started years ago; its most important resource is its Archives of the Homosexual Movement, consisting of early papers and letters and other materials of groups long defunct. Most of this material is not available anywhere else because people cannot be convinced even today, as Henry points out, that daily office records are valuable to future historians. In the field of homosexuality there are three main libraries doing the collecting, and while we are concerned about a certain amount of duplication of effort and material, it is good for us all if people realize we are seeking and preserving homosexual movement materials.

What bothers me is that so little is known about our work. Even when professors, politicians, and news media people learn of our existence they frequently fail to take us seriously, or are not serious enough themselves to use our resources or get our views. Too many are interested only in popular, attention-getting, notions and in higher ratings or sales. A balanced depiction of homosexuality is not important to them. Rather, we find many authors are either so

lazy or incompetent that they do not look further than their own preconceived ideas on the subject.

The average person who realizes that he is ignorant about homosexuality will look to others for help. Unfortunately, such a person usually turns for information to the so-called professionals or "experts," rather than to homosexual movement sources. Thus the popular misconceptions are perpetuated.

I hope to read future issues and get some ideas. We have no grants to help us acquire and preserve our materials, but maybe someday we will find a source of money.

WILLIAM EDWARD GLOVER, *Vice Chair,  
Homosexual Information Center,  
Hollywood, California*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Like most questionnaires, the SAA Advisory Poll attached to the 1980 Ballot forces the respondent to reduce quite complex and heated issues to a few numbers. The inevitable consequence of such a poll is not to determine what the membership is thinking but to distort and obscure our thoughts by forcing them into narrow categories.

I strongly urge that all future SAA polls be structured in the form of short answer exams with room enough at least for responses of one or two sentences. Surely, if these questions are worth asking, our answers are worth reading.

STEVEN P. GIETSCHIER  
*South Carolina Department  
of Archives and History*

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