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The American Archivist

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The Forum

FROM THE EDITOR:

A NEW DEPARTMENT, called *Technical Notes*, appeared for the first time in the April 1963 issue of the *American Archivist*. Its editor was Clark W. Nelson. On his retirement as editor, seventeen years later, he deserves the gratitude of the profession for his long service.

Beginning with the Spring 1981 issue, Ben DeWhitt, of the National Archives and Records Service, will edit "Technical Notes."

It has been decided that the *American Archivist* will be edited henceforth within strict page limitations. Articles will be vigorously edited to control their length. "The International Scene" will become an intermittent feature and will no longer include abstracts. "The Forum" will contain only letters dealing with material that has appeared in the journal. Other departments and annual features may be sharply cut and occasionally omitted.

We are considering another survey to guide us in selecting articles and information of most interest to our readers. Meanwhile, comments and suggestions are always welcome.

VIRGINIA C. PURDY
Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

IN THE JULY 1978 *American Archivist*, pages 333-34, Michael Plunkett, Assistant Curator of Manuscripts, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, contributed what I

consider to be an intelligent and fair-minded review of the second edition of *American Literary Manuscripts*, which I edited. A half year later (January 1979, pages 3-5) a letter appeared in The Forum section of the *Archivist* about *ALM2*, . . . written by Frank G. Burke, Executive Director, National Historical Publications and Records Commission. Mr. Plunkett considered it so intemperate that he replied briefly (July 1979, page 277) and said, "I hope that Mr. Robbins is given a fair chance to respond to that criticism." This is that response.

There are four aspects of the book which enrage Mr. Burke (and outrage is the general tone). . . .

Item 1: *ALM2* is incomplete, says Mr. Burke. My staff and I were proud that we increased the coverage on 273 libraries in *ALM1* to 600 in the second edition, but Mr. Burke chides us for not covering all 8,000 in the country. (Where he gets a figure of 8,000 libraries with literary manuscripts I do not know.) We were well aware that our census was not complete. We say so in the introduction. (Does Mr. Burke assume that *NUCMC* is complete, or ever will be? Or Hamer? Or the new *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories*?) It is correct that, for reasons of funds and manpower, we reported partial holdings at the University of Chicago and the New York Public Library and others. We say so in "Notes on Coverage" (pages xxii-xxiv).

Mr. Burke thinks that we go "astray" and "waffle on a definition of 'literary,'" because we include FDR and JFK. In the

introduction we explain that one basis of our author list is those authors given detailed treatment in the bibliography of *Literary History of the United States*, among whom are Washington, John Adams, Lincoln, and Wilson. FDR and JFK we considered to be reasonable additions to those four. I assure him that we included no author in *ALM* for frivolous reasons.

Item 2: *ALM2* is inaccurate. Mr. Burke cites no specifics, but we do have some inaccuracies. (What work processing masses of data doesn't?)

Item 3: Mr. Burke dislikes our format. I admit that it would be better with author names in bold face, but beyond that I do not agree. *ALM2* is easier to use than *NUCMC*, with its four separate indexes. And who sits down with *any* guides to manuscripts to read consecutive pages? Mr. Plunkett was intelligent and reasonable when he said, "a thoughtful perusal of the prefatory material is ample preparation for deciphering the text."

Item 4 is another matter altogether. Fully half of Mr. Burke's comments assail the right of scholars to survey primary materials in their field, even though their need is not being met by other manuscript guides. *ALM* he calls "ill-conceived," apparently because "it flies in the face of archival theory and recent practice." (That is, we do not specify collections or other finding codes by which a manuscript curator retrieves materials from his collections.) Archivists, he says, should not have replied to our requests for reports of their holdings ("Archivists have more important things to do than to respond to requests for special information from special groups"), to which I would say that several did refuse, as was their right. In those cases, when we could afford to do so, we went in and compiled the reports ourselves.

Mr. Burke implies that a patron's requests based on data in our volume are a nuisance and a burden ("a bane to manuscript curators for years to come"). I would like to ask Mr. Burke what the difference is between a scholar who enters Library X and asks to see the 102 letters of Henry Adams cited in *ALM2* and the

"mere" citizen who enters and says, "I would like to see any letters you have of Henry Adams." Both requests are legitimate. The results should be the same in both cases: the manuscript curator locates the 102 letters and presents them to the patron.

If an archivist considers the legitimate requests of patrons improper, then what is his primary function? The manuscripts in his care are just inert masses of paper and ink until the trained scholar locates them, studies them, brings the contents of those materials to life, and so enlarges knowledge. I am appalled to find such an archival philosophy uttered by an official of our federal Archives. The legend on the Archives Building in Washington reads, "Study the Past"—not "Preserve the Past." The public archivist, of course, must aid in both tasks, but he is paid by the citizenry, most certainly, to produce requested materials in his keeping so that the qualified citizen-scholar may study the past.

Finally I would like to instruct Mr. Burke by some comparative statistics. Taking a random name for illustration, I find for Thomas Bailey Aldrich four citations in *Hamer's Guide* (all four are also in *ALM2*); nineteen in *NUCMC* (of which there are three not in *ALM2*); none in *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories*. The total number of libraries cited in *ALM2* as holding manuscripts of Aldrich is eighty-four. Obviously literary scholars were not being served at all well by these general federal guides, which is why they decided to compile their own checklist of materials essential for their research. Furthermore, in our work on *ALM2* we made a special effort to locate the small manuscript-holding library. As the returns came in from across the country, I was gratified to have news of a library which had just *one* literary manuscript, for I knew it would never appear in the federal guides to large collections. . . .

For Mr. Burke to say that "the volume is a disservice to scholarship" when there is abundant evidence to the contrary is to reveal bureaucratic arrogance of the worst sort and to betray the scholar's ideal of objectivity and respect for knowledge,

whatever its source and whatever its form.

I find nothing in Mr. Burke's remarks about *American Literary Manuscripts* informative, fair-minded, judicious, or professionally responsible.

J. ALBERT ROBBINS
Professor, Indiana University

HOLED AWAY IN LONDON where the *American Archivist* reaches me several months late, I've only just read Nancy Sahli's response (Spring 1980) to my review of the NHPRC's *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States* (July 1979). Like the earlier response by Harriett Ostroff (Winter 1980), it obscures the issues which my review raised and which I believe are critical to our profession.

First, I hope it was clear from my review that I welcome the *Directory* and congratulate its editor for a superb reference tool. What I questioned was the wisdom of using the SPINDEX system which served this volume so well in the task of constructing a national data base of archival series and manuscript collections. What I noted was that such a data base could be accessed only by printed indexes which would commit us to another multi-volume series similar to the NUCMC, when what is required in a national information system for archives is a searchable data base available to users on-line. I noted that converting SPINDEX to such a data base would be prohibitively expensive.

It should be apparent that it is intellectually dishonest to dismiss these comments, which involve considerations of long-term significance to the entire archives community, merely by pointing out that on-line systems could be expensive and that no specially designed on-line system suitable for a national archival data base is currently available. NUCMC and the new NHPRC data base are expensive too and they duplicate each other without meeting the needs of users, who, after all, are the reason for a national data base in the first place. It is silly to pretend that a national data base can be justified by the administrative control it gives individual repositories. Nancy Sahli knows perfectly well

that this would be provided even without a national data base.

On the other hand, there are ways to make the NHPRC data base available for searching and to bring data from systems automated with software other than SPINDEX into a national information system for archives. The effort to establish standard minimum data elements and formats for information exchange is going ahead under the SAA Task Force on National Information Systems and committees advising OCLC and RLIN. Efforts to modify MARC formats in line with such a set of exchange data are also being made. The option of providing NHPRC data and other integrated data bases on archival holdings to data base vendors such as Lockheed, SDC, or BRS awaits only our determination of such an exchange format. OCLC and RLIN, as all archivists are doubtless aware, would both like to build data bases on archival holdings within their library bibliographic networks. And the possibility of using existing software to make the NHPRC's data base searchable is being reviewed by the staff, as Nancy Sahli suggests.

All these positive developments have been supported by both Harriett Ostroff and Nancy Sahli and both have been engaged in them for the past year and even longer. Both are as aware as I am, especially as I have been out of the country for nine months, of the growing realization that plans do have to be made for a searchable national data base and that if we are all not involved in the process of defining whatever system will emerge, we will merely be dictated to by some version of the AACR II minimum data elements. I wish that they had responded to my call for attention to these issues by documenting how they are currently working to solve the problem I forecasted, rather than by reflexively defending multi-volume printed catalogs.

DAVID BEARMAN
London, England

WHEN I FIRST SAW a draft of David Bearman's review of the *Directory of Archives and*

Manuscript Repositories, I doubted whether a book review was the appropriate place to raise serious questions about automated access to archival information. Now that the issue is being bandied about in the pages of "The Forum" I feel even more strongly that we need to be treating the entire problem in a much more serious and better informed manner. Indeed, the SAA Task Force on National Information Systems is doing just this, and the NHPRC looks forward to the completion of that study, in order to incorporate its findings into the development of our own system.

I hope, too, that David Bearman reads carefully the recent staff report on the NHPRC data base, minutes of the OCLC Manuscript Task Force meetings, proceedings of the Spring 1979 SPINDEX Users' Network technical meeting, proceedings of the symposium on archival automation held at the University of Maryland in April 1979, and other materials that document how truly complex the question of automated access to archival information is, both philosophically and practically. The question of on-line access isn't the only question there is.

And, by the way, I have never reflexively defended "multi-volume printed catalogs." We anticipate using COM (computer output microform) for NHPRC-produced data base products. Our one exception, the *Directory*, is printed simply because that is the most convenient format for that kind of information. When Ma Bell puts the telephone directory on COM or makes it on-line, then we might consider doing that with ours, too.

Finis.

NANCY SAHLI
*National Historical Publications
and Records commission*

NANCY SAHLI SHOWED ME David Bearman's response to her rebuttal of David Bearman's critique of the NHPRC and Nancy Sahli's *Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States* (DAMRUS), but one wonders just how long the exchange can go on. "The Forum" is hardly a forum for advancing

well-reasoned, conflicting arguments in the critical area of archival automation. The NHPRC is now circulating a 146-page report on its data base and the future of DAMRUS. Perhaps Mr. Bearman could enlarge upon his forum statements in a full-length article for publication. A proper dialog might be established if opposing views could be exchanged and random sniping eliminated.

FRANK G. BURKE
Executive Director, NHPRC

I MUST PROTEST the result of the "advisory poll" that has prompted the decision to move the 1981 Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists from San Francisco to Berkeley. I do *not* object to the fact that so many members are willing to huddle in empty dormitories during the dog days. That is merely ridiculous. I *do* condemn—strongly—the dangerously short-sighted thinking that produced the poll's result.

What was that thinking? San Francisco would be expensive, so we will retreat to cheap university facilities, when the school has no use for them, in order to deal with the problem of cost. That solution is false and destructive. The true course is to force the institutions for which we work to recognize that we are engaged in fully professional activities that must be funded realistically. To do otherwise—as we are doing—is to send an unmistakable signal to our employers that we will work cheaply and that that work can (logically) be valued cheaply. That is not only wrong, but insidiously damaging to basic archival funding patterns in all areas, not travel alone. Why are so many members willing to agree to long-range fiscal suicide?

In regard to this issue, the Association of Records Managers and Administrators has flatly put members of the SAA to shame. The records managers have told their employers that costs are high and they must meet them. And they have! ARMA will meet at the Boston Sheraton in October in rooms that cost up to \$76 and with a registration fee of up to \$250. Why in the world do we do unthinkingly assume that

that is too rich for our blood? Really—we are a national professional organization, but we are acting like a group of perpetual graduate students, retreating to the academic womb when difficulties arise.

I am not arguing for travel perks. In practice, they are as mythical as the free lunch anyway. I am arguing for our self-respect as a profession, and for the healthy assertiveness that should naturally grow out of a conviction of the value of our work.

JOHN DALY

Director, Illinois State Archives

THE SAA ADVISORY POLL clearly demonstrates that most archivists reject John Daly's notion that our "self-respect as a profession" turns on our willingness to pay San Francisco's exorbitant hotel rates. Far from being an act of "fiscal suicide," the decision to move the 1981 annual meeting to the University of California—Berkeley campus is a responsible and innovative response on several scores.

First, it will further encourage the exceptionally high rate of participation by SAA members in our annual meeting. In my view, this is a far better measure of our strength and commitment as a profession.

Second, like the International Congress of Mathematical Education and the Fulbright Scholars Alumni Association, to name two groups who met on the campus this summer, the Society of American Archivists will be the guest of one of America's most renowned research universities. Its facilities include the internationally known Bancroft Library and the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratories, as well as a range of meeting rooms unavailable in a hotel setting.

Third, Berkeley is a beautiful location. Attractively landscaped and designed and set on a hillside overlooking the entire Bay, the campus is one of the most scenic in the country. Berkeley offers a variety of restaurants, shops, and other commercial attractions as well as easy access to downtown San Francisco by public transportation. Even the weather is pleasing. Clear, warm afternoons and cool, lovely evenings are a

welcome relief from the dog days in the rest of the country.

All of us involved in the 1981 annual meeting expect to maintain, perhaps even to exceed, the quality and success of the meetings of the past few years. The move to Berkeley adds greatly to our ability to meet that goal.

JOHN A. FLECKNER

*State Historical Society of Wisconsin,
Co-chair, 1981 Program Committee*

I WAS DISTRESSED by Thomas Elton Brown's review of Robert F. Boruch and Joe S. Cecil's *Assuring the Confidentiality of Social Research Data* (AA, Summer 1980, p. 377). Allowing for the place of professional sensitivities, I think it was a poor service to the readership to have a review that dwelled on injured pride and ignored the substance and importance of the book.

As an academic researcher, public administrator, private consultant, Navy officer, and declassification analyst, I've worked on all sides of the classification, confidentiality, privacy, public access, and freedom-of-information issues for over a decade. For the last three years I've worked intensively with the privacy/public access problem. I can confidently say that Boruch and Cecil have produced the *only* book that deals in a significant way with the *practical* matters that recordkeepers and researchers encounter. Moreover, as someone who has tried over the last two years to develop a nuts-and-bolts workshop on privacy administration for archivists and records managers, I admire Boruch and Cecil for their success in creating something useful for anyone who has to deal with a concrete problem. Certainly their work is a refreshing change from the handwringing and platitude-exchanging I've seen and read from archivists.

Rather than bemoaning Boruch and Cecil's omission of obeisance to us as a profession, let's get busy producing materials that extend the work they've begun well and that fill the gaps that belong to our peculiar interests. At the least, let's not obscure for those who have an immediate

"need to know" that there is "a show in town," even if it has a few lines missing.

JAMES W. WILLIAMS
James W. Williams and Associates
Information Management Consultants
Indianapolis, Indiana

PS: I bought my own copy of Boruch and Cecil as a basic reference tool and would urge anyone genuinely concerned about the issue to do the same. JWW

MR. SETTANNI ("The Forum", Summer 1980) claims to be "profoundly disturbed" by the efforts of some archivists to foster human equality, but his disturbance is really quite shallow and even his invocation of logical necessity does not obscure the basic incoherence of his view and his manner of expressing it.

If professional unity is indeed so valuable, in what more important way could it be exercised than to guarantee that equality of treatment shall not be abridged on grounds of sex (or race, religion, etc.)? Mr. Settanni seems to think that the Society should speak with one voice, except when it comes to matters of basic human rights—then it is not "appropriate" to speak at all. On the contrary, I suggest that on lesser issues—both professional and political—diversity of opinion can be healthy, but that it is absolutely imperative that we take a united stand against sexual and other invidious discrimination.

The Society is not merely grappling with an issue "affecting society at large." Discrimination directly affects archivists as professionals: it has disastrous consequences for hiring, promotion, salaries, and even for what archivists think it worthwhile to preserve. Why should we put beyond our purview a proposal which would improve professional status and standards by removing unjust inequalities?

Mr. Settanni is extremely myopic in implying that outrage over sexual discrimination is nothing more than a "pet peeve." Quite the opposite, righting discriminatory wrongs is one of the great moral challenges of our time. What is peevish, however, is Mr. Settanni's threat to deprive us of his

membership if the Society refuses to be as indifferent to social evil as he appears to be.

TIMOTHY STROUP
John Jay College of Criminal Justice
The City University of New York

I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS my appreciation to the *American Archivist* for your cooperative assistance during the process leading up to publication of my article, "Collecting Archives in Thailand" (Fall 1980). This article is an important step for our small operation. We are still very much in the pioneer stages of our work; and it is, thus, very important that we "establish" ourselves both within our collecting fields and in professional circles. It is for this reason that we have appreciated your responsiveness and patience in negotiating the content of my article. You have materially contributed to the encouragement of the profession in our small corner of Asia. Thank you.

HERBERT R. SWANSON
Payap College
Chiangmai, Thailand

IN 1979 ARCHIVISTS and their organizations were active in supporting legislative reauthorization for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, and working to prevent a reduction in the NHPRC appropriation for fiscal year 1980. As an outgoing member of the NHPRC, I believe it is important that readers of the *American Archivist* have a full understanding of the outcome of their efforts in 1979—especially since a similar reauthorization attempt needs your informed and energetic support in 1981.

The NHPRC in late 1977 drafted legislation for continuation of the commission after September 30, 1979, the end of its existing five-year authorization. This new legislation would have raised the maximum appropriation level from the then, and still, current \$4 million per year to \$6 million, \$7 million, and \$8 million respectively over a three-year reauthorization period covering fiscal years 1980–82. The draft also

provided for some much needed flexibility in the operation of the NHPRC program and would have permitted staff and other administrative costs to be taken from the NHPRC appropriation rather than from the overall National Archives budget as in the past.

Despite this early submission by NHPRC, legislation did not reach the House and Senate until April 1979. The late transmittal was due to delays in handling the draft legislation at each of the three review levels: the National Archives, the General Services Administration, and the Office of Management and Budget. The legislation finally sent to the Congress made only one significant change in the commission's request: it disapproved the request for increased appropriation authority and continued instead the existing \$4 million maximum for three years. By the time the Administration's legislation reached the House Government Operations Committee, the chairman of that committee had already introduced his own bill to continue the NHPRC for *five* more years at the same \$4 million maximum level *and* without any of the substantive changes included in the Administration's bill. He had also met with the chairman of the NHPRC, the Archivist of the United States, who informed NHPRC members that he agreed with the committee chairman's cautious advice that 1979 was not a time to press for *any* change in NHPRC legislation and that another five-year authorization was the best that could be hoped for.

Meanwhile the Administration's budget for fiscal year 1980 (FY80) had asked for a reduction in the NHPRC grant appropriation from \$4 to \$3.5 million. In the early spring of 1979, organizations, repositories, and individuals began to petition the Congress on behalf of NHPRC reauthorization and to argue against this reduction. The SAA and regional archives groups were particularly active and were joined by, among others, the American Library Association, the International Institute of Municipal Clerks, and the Association for Documentary Editing. Most supporters urged congressional approval of the reauthorization legislation recom-

mended by the commission with its requested increase in funding levels. Petitions to the appropriations committees regarding the FY80 appropriation requested an increase over the \$4 million available in FY79 or, at the very least, no reduction.

The numerous written and personal contacts with the appropriate committees and subcommittees and with individual members of the House and Senate appear to have had a strong positive impact, most importantly in the House Government Operations Committee. Here the relevant subcommittee, during its April 30, 1979, meeting, voted to override the initial recommendations of the chairman of both the subcommittee and the full committee, which called for a five-year continuation of existing legislation. There was considerable sentiment among members to increase the authorized funding level for NHPRC; some members expressed surprise that the Administration was not asking for increased funding in light of inflation and the good work of the NHPRC. Ultimately, the subcommittee voted to extend the existing NHPRC legislation for two years rather than five so that the commission's programs and needs could be reviewed again in 1981 with the hope of recommending increased funding. The House Government Operations Subcommittee's discussions, recommendations, and report all indicated that members and staff had received impressive communications from constituents. These were important in the decision to recommend reauthorization for only two years rather than the much more debilitating five years. Constituent contacts may also have provided a base for more sympathetic and informed consideration of NHPRC programs in 1981.

It appears that by the time the Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee on Civil Service and General Services received the Administration's NHPRC reauthorization legislation, the House had already acted. The Senate voted then to agree with the simple two-year reauthorization recommendation of the more closely involved House subcommittee. However, because of its very late consideration of the matter, the

Senate subcommittee recommendation came after the Senate's May 15 deadline for new legislation affecting a FY80 appropriation. As a result of this complication, the Senate and House finally reached an understanding in late September which provided NHPRC authorizing legislation covering FY81 only; the commission thus operated in FY80 solely on the authority of appropriation legislation. In its report to the full Senate, the Governmental Affairs Committee noted that this special arrangement was necessary because of "the delay in development of an Administration proposal for reauthorization of the Commission."

While Congress was considering—or not considering—NHPRC reauthorization, archivists and others were also contacting House and Senate appropriations subcommittees handling the NHPRC appropriation for FY80. As a result, on both sides of the Hill, the Administration's request for a reduction to \$3.5 million was overridden

in the appropriations subcommittees. Staff of these subcommittees in both the House and the Senate remarked on the impact of constituent efforts in the decision to recommend continuation of \$4 million in NHPRC grant funds.

SAA members and their representatives on the NHPRC can take pride in their efforts in 1979 on behalf of NHPRC authorization and appropriations. Without this effort the commission's programs would have been even more enfeebled. It is now time to begin anew to strengthen the program for the future. Perhaps this time the executive branch will consider more carefully and promptly the importance of the commission's programs. I hope that archivists will again support the NHPRC and that Congress will be receptive to the voices of its constituents.

JANET WILSON JAMES
Department of History, Boston College

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