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The Forum

I HAVE WAITED what seems to be a decent interval, thinking surely someone would respond to Carl M. Brauer's evaluation of our reference abilities in the Winter 1980 issue. Wait longer I cannot. Brauer's complaints sound about right and I am sure we all would feel better if we measured up to the standards researchers set for us. I write not in defense of slipshod or thoughtless practices and I heartily agree that archivists should themselves experience research. Still, a point or two needs to be made.

The lack of the exit interview is decried, that vehicle by which we can find out what really is in our records. Unfortunately, all too often the exit of the interviewee takes place only because we turn out the lights and indicate where the door is located. If the researcher finds strange things, let him say so. We will listen. In too many instances it is so difficult to find out what the researcher wants when he enters that further interviewing is above and beyond the call of duty. . . .

Lastly, I must explain why small archives tend to be more accommodating and flexible in hours and weekend time. That is because the sympathies of archivists are too easily stirred. In big institutions such overwork is out of the question because we are protected by bureaucratic regulations against persons with heart-rending stories. For every archivist who will give up his time, there is more than one researcher ready to take advantage of him.

W. E. BIGGLESTONE
Archivist, Oberlin College

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT AREAS in the archival field that require nationwide attention, in my opinion, are the collecting of contemporary papers and records, and the development of appraisal standards. Subsidiary to these two priorities are the processing (accessioning, arrangement, description, filing, and storage) of them, their conservation, graphic reproduction, historical editing, and support services.

The major proportion of funding has been for institutional guides, for historical editing, graphic reproduction, outreach programs, surveying (NHPRC exclusively, I believe), and conservation. [See NHPRC's "Seven National Needs," *AA* 43:32.Ed.] Of these, only surveying bears a relationship to collecting and appraisal—indeed, it is a necessary preliminary step for both. While funding in the other areas is meritorious, it is questionable that they would receive the priority attention which they have received, were national archival priorities to be established. Archival materials must first be collected before they are used for study, research, writing, and/or exhibiting. What is collected must first be judged to be worth saving. This is an appraisal matter. Collecting of manuscripts has historically been oriented toward bringing under archival custody the chance documentary remains of the past. "Collecting" of public records has a similar history, except in those states and the federal government where records management has provided for a regular flow of contemporary records into archival custody once they have lost their utility for

current administration. If we are to make archival documentation as authoritative as it can be, the aim must be for both comprehensiveness of scope and for consecutiveness in the most significant record series.

In this endeavor we can be grateful for what archival documentation has survived and is in custody, but we know also how incomplete those remnants are and how limited is the scope of coverage. To put a formal end to such haphazard collecting, and awaken archivists and librarians to a clearer sense of the archival mission, some federal guidance is needed in helping to determine priorities.

Appraisal is particularly essential for the intelligent collecting or acquisition of contemporary papers and records. The sheer bulk alone requires sound appraisal standards. Only in the subfield of machine readable records is much attention being given to the problem. Yet, if we do not engage archivists in a broad-gauge effort, archival documentation will fail to provide the authoritativeness as documentation that it must if it is to be a responsible source of information. The important must be segregated from the unimportant, and the latter should be destroyed; otherwise we will all be overcome by a useless undifferentiated mass.

There is an urgency in dealing with this two-fold problem, particularly in view of the shortage of funding available. To focus the attention that the problem deserves, I recommend that the NHPRC and NEH co-sponsor a conference to determine national archival priorities. I will gladly submit a position paper advocating that top priority be given to the development of appraisal standards and the need to acquire papers and records of contemporary society.

RICHARD C. BERNER, *Head
Archives and Manuscripts Division
University of Washington Libraries
Seattle, Washington*

I CANNOT LET PASS the comments on librarians made by Nicholas J. Falco in his letter in the Summer 1980 issue of the

American Archivist. I find it ironic that a person who apparently owes his employment as manuscript curator of the Queens Borough Public Library to the foresight of a librarian who created and assured funding for his position can have such a distorted impression of librarianship.

I agree with Mr. Falco's statement that "archivists are a distinct professional group," and I suspect one would have to be a Diogenes to find any responsible librarian who would disagree with that statement. Mr. Falco chooses to ignore the administrative reality that archives are frequently departmentalized within a library because of the similarities of their needs and goals, particularly in research-oriented institutions. Libraries, like archives, are charged with the responsibility to collect, preserve, and make available for use the records of our past. For most libraries, and most archives, the bulk of these materials share a common denominator in that they are records on paper, film, or tape, and, as such, present common problems of storage, use, and conservation. I know a few library administrators who expect the archivists on their staffs to process, index, or curate archival records in the same manner that their librarians treat printed materials.

Many distinguished archival collections were first created by farsighted librarians who recognized the need to preserve the non-printed materials entrusted to their care. I would invite Mr. Falco to sit at the reference desk of any university library for a day, or in the cataloging department of a large special library, or the book preservation units many research libraries now have, or any of the many data base operations libraries utilize, in order to expand the myopic vision he seems to have developed about the role of today's librarians.

Yes, Mr. Falco, some librarians do spend some time on film programs, bulletin boards, story telling, and assisting patrons with government forms. Perhaps if more people in the archival profession utilized their special skills in creative uses and interpretations of the materials in their care—if more archivists would (without jeopardizing their collections) utilize their

talents and materials in ways to benefit more than just narrow groups of specialized researchers—then perhaps the public acceptance of archivists as a distinct profession would become more widespread than now seems to be the case.

Should Mr. Falco ever be in the Midwest, I would personally be happy to show him a variety of institutions where library, archival, and even museum collections have successfully been integrated into a total research facility much more capable of responding to the needs of their clientele than would have been possible had they been separate administrative units.

JAMES R. REED
*Director of Libraries and Curator
of Special Collections
Missouri Botanical Garden
St. Louis*

I THANK MR. REED for his comments and hasten to reply that no offense was intended to individuals in the library profession, and I think he will agree that nowhere in my letter did I indicate as such.

I cannot elaborate in this reply on the long, arduous, and difficult periods that archivists and manuscript curators had to face to finally achieve their status as a distinct and different profession from that of librarians. Indeed, may I add that this struggle is still an ongoing one in many parts of the country (I was almost going to say "the world," but Europe and certain other areas have always known this distinction). At any rate, any suggestion by anyone tending to mar this distinction is, I feel, dangerous and a disservice to archivists, manuscript curators, records managers, and librarians. No affront was or is intended, and I apologize if that's how my remarks were seen by anyone.

I would like to quote, if I may, the late, respected archival theoretician, Theodore R. Schellenberg. Almost three decades ago when he wrote *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*, he thought it wise to preface his chapter entitled "Library Relationships" with the following:

In this chapter I wish to discuss the relationships of the archival and library professions. I propose to do this by pointing out the differences in the materials with which the two professions deal and the differences in their methods of dealing with them. *My aim is not invidious.* In emphasizing differences I have only one purpose in mind: *to make clear the essential nature of the archival profession.*

The emphases above are mine. Archives and libraries are indeed different—in philosophies, in backgrounds and histories, in techniques, in problems, in staffing, in pressures faced, in clientele served, in laws which govern some of us. I for one am not happy to see the essential nature of archives discussed in roundabout fashion, as it were, by emphasizing our sameness with the library profession, rather than by discussing our *raison d'être* as a separate profession and the qualities that make us different and unique from others. My enthusiasm for the subject may get the better of me sometimes, but after almost thirty years in the field, that's the way I view it. Thank you.

NICHOLAS FALCO

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK the *American Archivist* and Stephen E. Haller for the review of the *City of Portland Records Manual*, in the Fall 1980 issue, page 495. In his review, Mr. Haller made special note of our retention and disposition schedule developed for computer services. I do not want fellow members of our profession to think that this schedule was entirely developed in-house. During the production of the *Manual*, we researched numerous other retention schedules for models, particularly in the federal system. Our research led us to the U.S. Energy Research and Development Administration, *Records Disposition/Records Management Handbook*—Manual Appendix 0230, 16 September 1976. We borrowed liberally the sense and theme, if not the format, from ERDA's Annex B-16, "Data Automation Program Records."

Records manuals, by their nature, are "cut and paste" documents. I hope our

manual represents some of the better concepts and layouts found in preceding manuals. Further, I hope archivists and records managers faced with similar tasks in the future will incorporate the best thoughts and practices found in our work, to meet their needs.

STANLEY PARR
*Records Management Officer,
City of Portland, Oregon*

I HAVE BEEN INFORMED that the Editorial Board of the *American Archivist* has decided to change the publication of the "International Scene" from a regular feature to an occasional one. As a long-time reader and contributor, I am quite concerned

about this change and hope that the members of the Editorial Board will reconsider their decision.

In a period when international cooperation is expanding, and knowledge of other people's work becomes more urgent than ever, information about foreign archives and archivists needs to be expanded. The parochialism that can result from such a curtailment of information brings to mind the discovery by American historians in this country during the Bicentennial that foreigners were also researching and writing about the American Revolution. It was a most unpleasant and shocking surprise. I can't believe that the Editorial Board wants to support such parochialism.

GEORGE O. KENT, *Professor
University of Maryland*

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