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On the cover: A small, private bureaucracy—the office of the Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Company in Lynn, Massachusetts, probably in the 1940s. See articles pp. 119 and 131. Photo courtesy of The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

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The Forum

FROM THE EDITOR:

IN THE PAPER SHE PRESENTED at the session on archival literature at the 1981 SAA meeting, Virginia Purdy, this journal's last long-term editor, argued that the journal should not be seen (or edited) as a repository of archival holy writ. In reading, and writing for, the *American Archivist*, I had never suspected that anyone would expect to find gospel truth in the journal; I had always preferred articles that, while informative, were also provocative—or even provoking.

There is little holy writ in the seven longer articles printed here. Even Robert Shuster's piece on a variety of religious experience grapples in only a preliminary way with the question of documenting an ahistorical event. Michael Lutzker leads us a few steps down the road, not to Damascus, but to an understanding of records in relation to the bureaucracies that produce them, and Trudy Peterson does the same for record forms in relation to counting needs.

David Herschler and William Slany (who on very short notice combined two papers into one) introduce us to a system at the frontiers of recordkeeping, but little of the information they provide can be graven in stone, for technology never stops changing. What we get from

Herschler/Slany, and especially from Lutzker and Peterson, is a look at the common denominators of recordkeeping, the needs of human beings organized into societies that keep us notching sticks, knotting strings, inscribing clay tablets, or inputting data at a CRT terminal. Shuster points the other way: to a kind of event that, while crucial in the lives of multitudes, has often been an individual event and one that does not, and perhaps cannot, leave a record.

While these authors consider implications for archivists, Richard Berner is specifically concerned with various problematic aspects of the profession. Someone having recorded and stored information, how do we and researchers get it out again? How should we learn our jobs? Are we doing justice to our mission of documenting contemporary American society? Helen Slotkin and Karen Lynch discuss a central part of our work: processing—and put it in the perspective of our intellectual role as partners in determining the range and shape of future research. Like Lutzker and Herschler/Slany, Slotkin/Lynch indicate an enhanced, more interesting, and more difficult role for archivists.

Finally, we hear from a researcher, Marcia Synnott, who, having produced a dissertation and a book on an in-

teresting subject, took the trouble to present to archivists a paper about her research methods and problems. While in Slotkin/Lynch's paper we become intellectually more active "brokers" between the creators and the users of records—but the two groups remain separate—in Synnott's we see the user sometimes dealing directly with the creators, or with later incumbents of the creating offices. The archivist's role as broker here may become more delicate and more challenging, especially when a researcher investigating a sensitive area of policy is the first to ask to see records never before used for research.

Virginia Purdy ended her paper by suggesting that she might after all have used a title for it that she had rejected as too pompous: "Recent Archival Literature in the United States: A Measure of the Maturity of the Archival Profession." One measure of maturity is a realistic view of oneself, one's importance, and one's competence. Another is to take care of one's business. This journal has, after a prolonged childhood in the house of foster parents, been kicked out and is currently *On the Road*, on the obligatory adolescent coast-to-coast odyssey of American youth. Sponging and odd jobs are all very well for a time, but the journal, like the hitch-hiking adolescent, should soon settle down somewhere, become part of the household, and pay a fair share of the room and board. (It is good news, received after this was set in type, that the Society is in fact looking for a home for the *American Archivist*.)

EVA S. MOSELEY
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Radcliffe College

TO THE EDITOR:

Thank you for publishing George Mazuzan's fine article, "The Challenge of Nuclear Power Development Records" (Summer 1981). I would like to second his call for archivists to take a more active role in collecting the records of local and grass roots groups that form to oppose or to moderate the use of nuclear power. Most are all-volunteer and poorly funded. Many have a fluid existence; they come together over an issue only to disband shortly and reform over other issues. The new groups may inherit the records of their predecessors and refer to them for a time for mailing lists and background material, but often those records are boxed, stored, and forgotten until they are pitched to make room for something else.

Archivists and activists alike must assume the responsibility for preserving these records. If archivists take care to establish ties with such groups and encourage them to think of their records as historically significant, activists might at least call their local repository before cleaning house. Although records keeping is rarely a top priority, most activists I know do believe in the importance of their material. Some are quite protective of their files. One woman with a fine nuclear power collection has convinced me that when the time comes to receive her files, we should preserve the printed as well as the archival material. Her experience of the past twenty years has shown that in many cases older government publications are impossible to obtain. They are either out of print, superseded by newer (and more favorable) reports, or available only on microfilm, which is sometimes impossible to read because of the fine print. Several years ago, I was visited by Dr. Peter Carr, a folklorist and oral historian at Califor-

nia State University at Long Beach, who used his sabbatical to tour the country and talk with activists about preserving their records and to archivists about setting up a network of repositories for local and regional anti-nuclear records. His motto: "If we succeed in saving the earth, they'll want to know how we did it."

I might end by stressing that not only traditional researchers use our collec-

tions. Area activists consult them for information on the political process and organization work: how to get an initiative on the ballot, how to qualify for tax exempt status, how to get press releases in print, and how to prepare for a mass rally.

ANNE R. KENNEY
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St. Louis*

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