

# The Beast in the Bathtub, and Other Archival Laments

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FEW PEOPLE THINK OF GOING to an archives for a book. More people should. The bookish resources to be found in an archives can be both rich and wondrous to behold. They can also be immensely rewarding to those whose interests lie in fields that differ widely from the traditional uses of archives. W.A. Katz, for example, drew attention in a 1965 essay to materials in the National Archives that could illuminate the history of public printing<sup>1</sup> in developing areas of the American West, focusing principally on Washington Territory.<sup>2</sup> Among those resources, he noted, were vast numbers of vouchers sent in to the federal government for payment of debts owed to

printers who had taken care of the public business. One would reasonably expect to find that kind of thing in an archives. But would one—should one—expect also to find there examples of the public printing itself? Katz found some, and more than just a few.<sup>3</sup> Ten years after publication of the Katz piece, George W. Belknap performed a similar service for printing historians by bringing to their attention the occasional abundance of imprints in local archives. His illustrations were drawn from one record series in a single county in Oregon; he, too, located printed items, and also included intimations of the immortality of printed materials in the ar-

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<sup>1</sup>Public printing is defined here to include all printing ordered by and executed for any official governmental entity, no matter where or by whom it may have been printed.

<sup>2</sup>"Tracing Western Territorial Imprints Through the National Archives," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 59 (1965): 1-11.

<sup>3</sup>Katz, p. 9, describes the Washington catch as "disappointing" but notes that printed legislative bills for at least one session are present. If the territory was at all typical the number of these pieces alone could be sizable.

chives of other Oregon counties.<sup>4</sup> In a more recent article Belknap described his discovery at the Oregon State Archives of nearly 50 printed pieces scattered willy-nilly among the voluminous records of the provisional and territorial governments of Oregon.<sup>5</sup> Belknap has also found Oregon imprints in at least 13 other archives, public and private, on both coasts and between.<sup>6</sup>

My own researches over the past many years include investigations of the printing trade and its products in a good many areas of the trans-Mississippi West. In the beginning, though, my bibliographical interests were pointed exclusively toward a revision of the WPA inventory of Nevada imprints;<sup>7</sup> the inventory is a remarkably botched and limited work that has nonetheless until now had to suffice in its field. And, with Katz and Belknap, I have located, rather more frequently than one might expect, copies of pieces in archives—and in manuscript collections—that were printed in and for the area that is now Nevada.<sup>8</sup>

While few of the items found by any of us can properly be called books (some, on the other hand, can be described in no other way),<sup>9</sup> each of us has found in unforeseen places a number

of printed pieces that too few bibliographical scholars—and, it would seem, nearly as few archivists and curators of manuscripts—know are there. They are there, though, and it behooves us all, bibliographers and archivists alike, not only to recognize their presence but to noise it about, to send out the word broadcast so that others will know, too.

I intend to address here the difficulties faced by scholars when they know or suspect that something they need is in a repository but cannot get at it because of inadequate archival preparation—or, just as often, inadequate archival presentation. First I would like to provide some examples of the unexpected things that can be found in these unexpected places. But before getting to that it is necessary to furnish something of a framework for this part of the discussion.<sup>10</sup>

From the earliest years of the republic until 1873 when the Department of the Interior took over, the U.S. Department of State was responsible for administration of the areas that were organized as federal territories. Internal affairs were of less than compelling interest to those who fancied themselves as caretakers of the nation's foreign destiny, however,

<sup>4</sup>"County Archives as a Resource for Regional Imprints Studies," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 66 (1975): 76–78. The archives of Lane County, Oregon, with its seat of government in Eugene, was the author's primary source for this study.

<sup>5</sup>"Early Oregon Imprints in the Oregon State Archives," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, 66 (1981): 111–127.

<sup>6</sup>Belknap to Armstrong, 23 February 1982. In the same letter he wrote that in compiling his statistics he had "passed over all agencies that might, more properly, be called libraries."

<sup>7</sup>*A Check List of Nevada Imprints, 1859–1890* (Chicago: Historical Records Survey, 1939).

<sup>8</sup>*Nevada Printing History: A Bibliography of Imprints & Publications, 1858–1880* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1981). My count—based rather differently than Belknap's in note 6—shows that among the 97 locations listed in the book, printed materials are to be found in 24 archives and manuscript repositories. I have, somewhat loosely and perhaps to some unacceptably, classified museums here with manuscript repositories, largely because printed items are often handled equally as badly in both kinds of places.

<sup>9</sup>Legal briefs numbering up to several hundred pages each can sometimes be found in the records of federal, territorial, state, and local courts.

<sup>10</sup>Readers seeking a broader examination of territorial history should consult Earl S. Pomeroy, *The Territories and the United States, 1861–1890: Studies in Colonial Administration* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969). This extraordinary study, originally published in 1947, is still by far the best in its field, though the author's understanding of the Treasury's role in territorial administration is strangely wanting.

and the territorial dependencies cannot be said to have thrived during the first half-century. So in 1842 the Congress, which had the ultimate responsibility for the territories, anointed the Treasury Department as its factor in matters relating to territorial finance.<sup>11</sup> Control of the currency brings great power, naturally enough, so almost by default the First Comptroller and First Auditor of the Treasury<sup>12</sup> became lords of vast portions of the United States.

During the first several years of its control the department did little more than to niggle bureaucratically about this transgression and that immortal sin, preferring for the most part to consolidate its position of supremacy in territorial matters. Late in 1855, though, the First Comptroller, Elisha Whittlesey, issued an extraordinary order to secretaries of the several territories.<sup>13</sup> Secretaries of 19th-century United States territories did not hold insignificant offices. They wielded enormous power, in fact, within their own small worlds. When the only local officers who outranked them, the governors, were out of the territories or for one reason or another had been removed from office—frequent occurrences, both—secretaries *became* governors, with all the considerable prerogatives and leverage the title suggests. Sometimes their “acting” status lasted for years at a time, and they were thus able to exert influence well beyond what one might normally expect. Yet even though they were themselves presidential appointees and could on occasion become insufferably pushy at home, they were beholden, necessarily, to keepers of the federal purse. So Whittlesey’s order, issued as a printed broadside, had a profound ef-

fect on the secretaries and on the conduct of their responsibilities for the public printing.

Territorial secretaries had from the beginning been answerable for legislative expenditures, which included everything from the payment of salaries and travel allowances through the purchase of gavels and penknives and spittoons to the hiring of woodchoppers to keep the legislative fuel bins from running out through long winter sessions. They were also required to engage a local printer during each legislative session to execute such niceties as the message of the governor, reports written by administrative officers, the many bills that each lawmaker found it prudent for the public good or his own reelection to introduce and have printed, gubernatorial proclamations, a variety of appointment and commission forms, and such other bits and scraps of incidental printing as might from time to time be ordered. It was also understood that these contractors (or others, when the secretary became disenchanted with their work during the session) were to print, if the usually meager congressional appropriation had not already been exhausted, the official proceedings of the two houses and the laws, memorials, and resolutions they had enacted. Prior to Whittlesey’s order of 1855 the Treasury Department oversaw such transactions between secretary and printer only to the point of requiring that copies of the laws and the legislative journals accompany vouchers submitted by the local officers. After the circular appeared, though, secretaries were obliged to send copies of *all* printing for which the public printers expected pay-

<sup>11</sup>U.S. *Statutes at Large*, vol. 5, p. 542.

<sup>12</sup>In neither case does the word “First” indicate primacy in the department; it is simply a means to differentiate the duties of one office from those of another.

<sup>13</sup>U.S. Treasury Department. *Circular*, 10 October 1855. The text appears as Appendix A in Armstrong, *Nevada Printing History*.

ment. I cannot say whether the First Comptroller's apparently profound suspicion of the locals was based on proven impostures or if he wanted only to head off future temptation; it is clear, though, that he and the First Auditor were not acting merely as acquisitions specialists for federal libraries, since many of the pieces thus sent remain intermixed to this day with audited vouchers at the National Archives.<sup>14</sup> And, for the printing historian, such pieces!

Consider, for instance, the altogether remarkable series of printed legislative bills introduced into Nevada Territory's lower house in the earliest days of its first session. Nevada's secretary, Orion Clemens<sup>15</sup> (a journeyman printer himself), had signed an agreement with the only job office in the territory that was willing to put up with the federal government's sluggish and unreliable methods of payment.<sup>16</sup> The owners of the Carson City *Silver Age* had perhaps been lulled into a commonly-held belief of the period that there were great profits to be made from the public printing—an assumption that is still infrequently questioned, oddly enough, by present-

day bibliographers.<sup>17</sup> They were soon to be disabused of that bit of popular cant. In the meantime they produced some quite unlovely examples of territorial bill-printing (but no more dreadful, it should be said, than similar pieces printed elsewhere by low bidders, then or now): the first 15 pieces of legislation put into the Nevada House of Representatives hopper. They apparently also printed one bill for the Council, or upper house, but only one because of a need to husband the territory's small treasury.<sup>18</sup> Whether any other House bills were printed is open to question, but it seems unlikely. Not only is there a lack of evidence to substantiate such a suggestion anywhere in the National Archives, the Nevada State Archives, or the Nevada Historical Society (which at one time served as the state's archival agency), but the partnership that had originally agreed to Clemens's terms dissolved rather unbecomingly during the session and the successor firm, made up of former employees in the newspaper's job operation, seemed to know better than to traffic with such as the government in Washington, D.C. In any case, no further examples of printed

<sup>14</sup>Record Group 217, Records of the General Accounting Office (cited hereafter as RG217). At its formation in 1921 the General Accounting Office, an arm of the legislative branch, absorbed certain functions that had previously been carried out in the Treasury Department. A draft inventory is available for use at the Archives, but as of this writing no contribution to the "Preliminary Inventory" series has been published.

<sup>15</sup>The adjective that is used more often than any other to describe Orion Clemens is "feckless." It is used by people who know little of him except that he had the standard American dreams and achieved them rather less successfully than his little brother Sam, who adopted while in Nevada his better-known pseudonym, Mark Twain. But Sam, superb wordsmith and interpreter of his time—and everyone's time—that he was, could not claim to have been appointed to federal office by the nation's greatest president, nor could he list among his accomplishments election by his peers to a state legislature. Feckless Orion could.

<sup>16</sup>Secretaries were authorized to pay on completion of a job only one-half to two-thirds of the printers' bills, the remainder, if the government decided there was one, to be paid only after federal audits had been completed—and, at that, only in the generally discredited (and usually discounted) greenbacks, not the gold that was the normal medium of exchange in the West of the 1860s. Moreover, federally authorized rates for composition and presswork were consistently far too low in terms of Western realities. Audits often took place many months or even longer after submission of vouchers—in Nevada's case, up to seven years after the territory had ceased to exist.

<sup>17</sup>Public printing after admission to statehood, when federal rigidity was no longer a factor, could be profitable indeed, though some printers were less good at making money than they were at winning elections.

<sup>18</sup>RG217: Clemens to Whittlesey, 24 December 1861.

bills have so far been located for the first legislative session.

There are surviving bills aplenty for Nevada Territory's second and third legislative sessions (the legislature did not meet again during this briefest of apprenticeships for statehood). A good many are to be found in the National Archives, along with conclusive evidence in the form of audited vouchers that others, no longer extant, were printed.<sup>19</sup> There is also an extensive file of bills from the third session at the Nevada Historical Society;<sup>20</sup> on some of them are notes suggesting a connection with vouchers that may have been submitted but no longer exist. And there are other Nevada pieces at the National Archives, all of them minor in terms of their importance for the study of the area's territorial development, though not at all minor for its printing history.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that of the 54 Nevada

territorial imprints at the National Archives, 38 have been recorded nowhere else—not at all a bad accounting, I should think, for an institution that is so infrequently thought of as a place to look for printed materials.<sup>22</sup> And if such treasures are to be found for Nevada's brief three-and-a-half-year territorial period, think for a moment about what must remain from the much longer terms spent as territories by Dakota or Idaho or Montana or Wyoming.<sup>23</sup> And consider, too, New Mexico, with its nearly 62 years of territorial thralldom. And Arizona, with 52 years, or Utah, with 46. And Alaska. And Hawaii.

There are, of course, many other instances of printed items in archives.<sup>24</sup> Easily the most numerous examples for my study are at the Nevada State Archives, which holds very nearly one-fifth of the titles described in *Nevada Printing History*, and of that number almost

<sup>19</sup>Though I lack first-hand knowledge there are reports that no examples of the public printing for some territories are to be found in RG217. A probable explanation is that secretaries simply ignored their responsibilities. One that is equally as good is that federal auditors discarded printing samples when they had had their way with them, since notations on vouchers frequently make it clear that the printed pieces had been available during the auditing process.

<sup>20</sup>Records of the Legislature of Nevada Territory.

<sup>21</sup>There are, for instance, two petitions in Record Group 46, Records of the U.S. Senate, dating from the period when most of what in good time became Nevada was still a part of Utah Territory. One prayed for separation from Utah, while the other pleaded for improved mail service. Separation came in 1861; postal improvement is still awaited.

<sup>22</sup>I cannot with confidence say that I have seen all of the Nevada imprints and printing records in RG217. On my second visit to the National Archives I was shown a considerably larger group of materials than the first time around; there could still be, I suppose, some items that were not brought to the search room either time.

<sup>23</sup>I have seen examples of the public printing from these territories on microfilm made from National Archives materials in Record Group 48, Records of the Interior Department, and Record Group 59, Records of the State Department. Some of the same imprints, and others, can also be seen in the *Records of the States of the United States* series, a cooperative project of the Library of Congress and the University of North Carolina. The printing historian should be cautioned, though, of the compiler's predilection for filming the copies that were most readily available to him, i.e., those at North Carolina, even when better and more bibliographically revealing copies could be had, and for filming parts of more than one copy to produce what he apparently presumed to be a "perfect" copy. Access to this widely unknown series is through a fat volume published in 1950 by the Library of Congress Photoduplication Service, *A Guide to the Microfilm Collection of Early State Records*.

<sup>24</sup>W.N. Davis, Jr., has described in a splendid article some of the wonders to be found at the institution he headed for many years, the California State Archives, in "Research Uses of County Court Records, 1850-1879, And Incidental Intimate Glimpses of California Life and Society," *California Historical Quarterly* 52 (1973): 241-266, 338-365. Among the pictorial items he selected to illustrate his contribution, which was in no other way connected with printing, were a number of official printed forms.



three quarters are *sui generis*.<sup>25</sup> And why cannot they simply be removed from the archives and cataloged into a suitable library—the archives in Nevada is, after all, a division of the state library system—where researchers might more easily find them, might more reasonably expect to look for them? It isn't that uncomplicated. They cannot be transferred because the bulk of the imprints are briefs in the case files of the territorial and state supreme courts, and to remove them would emasculate the records and leave them utterly without meaning. The same can be said for the much smaller number of Nevada printed items in the Federal Archives and Records Center at San Bruno, California, where there are briefs submitted to the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Nevada:<sup>26</sup> take out the printed briefs and little—in some cases, nothing—remains of the cases.

Archivists err badly if they consider only the most apparent of possible uses when determining what to keep and what to throw away. A brief example of how wrongheaded the error can be is illustrated by the transfer in the late 1960s from one federal institution to another of several items that had been listed in the 1939 Nevada imprint survey as unique; soon after receipt in the second repository they were summarily destroyed.<sup>27</sup> It is important to stress here that I am not talking about imaginatively designed and splendidly executed samples of the printer's art: public printers, after all, were most often chosen for their loyalty to the party in power, not their commitment to typographical excellence. These pieces were, instead, quite normally ugly and utilitarian examples of government

printing—at least one must assume they were, based on similar pieces printed at other times, both before and after—that could easily be passed over as expendable if checking for usefulness (perhaps in such an unusual place as a government-sponsored bibliography!) were not done. Still, one should be able to hope that the commonplace and ordinary, especially when not duplicated elsewhere, will not always be treated with such insouciance. No one of us should be overjoyed to learn that these institutions were libraries and not archives, but all of us might with good reason question our own wisdom when, more or less automatically, we relegate this class or that category or yet another variety of materials to the trashbin. I do not mean to suggest that archivists should be so timorous that they cannot allow their training and accumulated understanding and sound professional judgment to enter into decisions concerning what is appropriately to be retained and what is equally as appropriately to be cast aside. I do suggest, though, that second-guessing the uses to which a future scholar might put one's wares is, at best, a questionable practice. Technical skill is a quality that is devoutly to be wished for in an archivist, but one likes to think that it is coupled frequently, and imaginatively, with good archival sense. And good archival sense does not allow the disposal of historical materials simply because they do not fit easily into the expected order of things, simply because they are different, simply because we are not used to dealing with them, do not know how to deal with them, are, perhaps, afraid to deal with them.

<sup>25</sup>There are 1,254 imprints and publications described in the book; of these, 237 are at the Nevada State Archives, and 173 of that number have been found nowhere else.

<sup>26</sup>Eight of the nine Nevada items at San Bruno are unique, and on the remaining publication—one of only two recorded copies—even the binding is not duplicated elsewhere.

<sup>27</sup>For a somewhat fuller discussion of what I consider to be a shameful and toadish act, see Armstrong, *Nevada Printing History*, pp. 10–11.

The dilemma for the archivist is clear; what to do about it clearly is not. It is no easier for the curator of manuscripts. If there is anyone in this story who is reasonably certain of what he must do it is the printing historian, who has worked with records of printers and printing firms since an interest in the "art preservative" first developed. His dilemma, though, is in locating the materials he needs to work with. My own use of printers' records to determine actual costs of composition and press-work has not been as extensive as I would have liked, but only because the ravages of fire and flood and earthquake and time have been more than usually cruel to the records of Nevada's printers.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand I have often used manuscript collections to unearth examples of printed materials—a practice that has so far found too little currency among printing historians. But acceptance will come, and curators will be just a bit ahead of the game if they can muster the wit to anticipate. I offer some examples of my finds.

One of the more difficult things for anyone to handle, librarians or curators or seemingly anyone else, is the printed form whose blank spaces are to be filled in by hand. Property deeds and mining deeds and appointment forms and various kinds of writs and notarial documents fall frequently into this category. The problem seems to be that no one knows whether they should be classed as manuscripts with printing on them or printed pieces with handwriting on them. Everyone I have talked with has recognized the need to do something sensible with them, but no one was quite

sure what it ought to be. So I found these indescribable and unclassifiable and pesty "things" among manuscripts and alongside books and mixed in with maps and broadsides and invitations to dances, cataloged under the name of one or another of the parties to the transaction described on the document, more or less uncataloged in file cabinets or in boxes or in map cases or spread about on shelves, grouped with other quite dissimilar pieces gathered together by a collector, and even—just once—arranged under the agency that originally issued it.

I cannot claim, as it is often possible to claim in the case of government archives, that printed pieces found in collections of manuscripts necessarily belong there, that their removal from the accumulations of which they have somehow become parts would diminish the meaning of those groupings in any significant way. It happens, of course. It sometimes happens that to pull them out would render essentially meaningless both the original collection and whatever categories these displaced pieces were put into. I cannot imagine, for instance, snipping out from the diaries of a journalist the newspaper contributions he had pasted there, especially if his daily entries describe the circumstances under which the pieces were written. But suppose the same diarist also made a practice of tucking into his journals copies of playbills and programs for musical and theatrical entertainments he had attended. Still no difficulty, I should think, unless in the same collection there were a number of playbills that were separate from the

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<sup>28</sup>Harsh conditions were common in the early West, certainly in Nevada but also in San Francisco where, despite title page claims to the contrary, much of Nevada's public printing through 1880 was done. The 1906 devastation in that city is well known, but it was presaged by more than a few similar catastrophes. In the mid-1880s alone two of the city's major printing houses that provided a great deal of Nevada's early printing were destroyed by fire; their records were lost along with the buildings. And there are numerous accounts in contemporary newspapers of flash floods and explosions and cataclysms of other kinds, natural and otherwise, that leveled Nevada printing establishments.

diaries and were not specifically mentioned in them. Then the curator has a problem; so too does the bibliographer if the curator's solution is inconsistent with his own sense of the way the world should be ordered. The example given here is not wholly theoretical; it draws heavily on a collection at the University of Nevada Library and the way I thought it best to arrange it some few years ago. As a manuscript librarian I had good reason, I thought, to do as I did; later on, as a historian of Nevada's printing, I had cause to wonder how a responsible curator could leave so many loose ends and enigmas to addle and bewilder an earnest scholar.

I wondered the same thing in a good many other institutions as well. I still wonder how so many marvelously detailed guides in so many repositories could fail even to mention that printed materials are to be found in their manuscript collections. I wonder particularly because, as one who has some knowledge of the craft and the way it is supposed to work and the way it more often than not actually does work, I still find many of the registers that are put before me to be opaque and to a large degree unusable. That may bespeak an inability on my part to interpret for my admittedly somewhat arcane purposes the work of my archival colleagues. I suggest, however, that the responsibility to interpret a repository's holdings should not rest so heavily on the user.

It is sometimes possible to find, as both Belknap and I have found,<sup>29</sup> copies of imprints that have been dismembered, with the resulting segments mounted in journals or in scrapbooks. But it is almost never possible to locate them through a manuscript library's finding aids. Neither can the printing historian rely on these guides with any

confidence to find much of anything he is after, unless it is the "traditional" sort of thing such as the records of printing establishments or of typographical unions or of organizations that from time to time placed printing orders. I rather suspect that if some rough and intimidating beast were to appear without prior announcement in one's bathtub most people would find a way to bring it to the attention of others. Soon. And forcefully. Yet when we discover oddities, even incongruities, mixed in with our manuscripts we become uncommunicative, insensible, mute. I do not know why.

When out looking for imprints I have occasionally been able to talk to the person who was responsible for the processing of a collection, though more often only with someone who had inherited a less than remarkable system of presenting his findings. In both cases I could sense genuine, even worried concern for my needs; in neither case did I find much reason to be encouraged that solutions were anywhere near at hand. Over and over, even when talking with people whose professionalism I have good reason to respect, I heard that the best response to an uncommon request, indeed the only coherent response, is just a little more of what we have always done. And what we have always done is to make ourselves indispensable. Ourselves! We have acquired fine collections and processed them and produced clever finding aids and reported our results well and faithfully to NUCMC. And then we have waited around apprehensively for someone to ask what we think, what we know about our collections. *Our* collections. We have, it seems, put together our guides in such a way that they lead not so much to the collections as to us. That is called

<sup>29</sup>Belknap, *Oregon Imprints, 1845-1870* (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1968), no. 247; Armstrong, nos. 927, 1229.



reference service! But what is it called on the day we must go to the dentist or to see our firstborn in a school play? What is it called when we finally succumb to the long-cherished desire to attend the season-opening baseball game? And what is it called the day after our retirement party, when the only ones left to offer assistance to researchers could well be people who are new to the institution, who do not know the collections at all? Too often, I'm afraid, it is still called reference service.

It should be readily apparent that the crushing dependence we place on our sometimes quirky and too frequently unreliable memories is not to be encouraged, not even allowed. Yet we do it. We do it to the degree that we require our patrons to depend on them, too. And we do it despite the good and sensible counsel we have had for years from various good and sensible people, most recently in a contribution by Mary Jo Pugh to this very journal.<sup>30</sup> Pugh gently but quite properly rubbed our noses deeply into the messes we have created of what we like to call "service to the public." Pets whose noses are rubbed, even gently, soon learn what it is we want them to know. If they do not learn they are usually kept outside.

So what must we do to be saved? I have no sure answers, only involved and frightfully convoluted and often embarrassing questions. It seems to me, though, that we must do three certain things. We must keep reminding ourselves in the first instance that printed materials in archives and manuscript collections can be very important, perhaps crucially important, to the scholar—and not alone the bibliographer—if only he can find out about them. It can be helpful to remember that sometimes—often—they

are the only extant copies and are therefore, like manuscripts, unique. Even when they are not the only copies, though, even when they are fairly common, we must let researchers know about them. A scholar could save himself a very expensive research trip if he knows that a copy of the item he needs is close at hand; another who is putting together a union list needs to know about it, too. So, for that matter, does the more casual user whose research requirements are less exacting but whose need is felt no less strongly. Second, we must note the existence of these materials in the finding aids we prepare, and not as afterthoughts listed at the tag-end or described as secondary, second-class goods, but as legitimate research materials that are every bit as equal as the manuscripts or records they accompany and support. We may even have to pay relatively more attention to them than we do to our manuscript records just so we can let people know we have them. Easy stuff, I should think. We're used to handling things that few others have ever seen and we have become accustomed to telling ourselves we are good at it. We have, in fact, evolved some unquestionably good ways to provoke their scholarly use. But we have to take a little more time and spend a little more effort and learn a whole lot more about subjects that have so far eluded us so we can do the things that are, I think, quite rightly to be expected of us. I do not know why we are unable to do it. Perhaps we are unwilling.

So we come at last to the final point. Also the toughest point. We have to let people know what we have wrought. I do not mean that simply reporting our wares to NUCMC would do the job (though it couldn't hurt). I do not

<sup>30</sup>"The Illusion of Omniscience: Subject Access and the Reference Archivist." *American Archivist*, 45 (Winter 1982): 33–44.

mean, either, that every institution should publish every few years a detailed record of the wonderments it has captured since the last one (though that could help). I do mean that the finding aid that is put out for use within the institution has to be reordered, redefined, produced in a more usable, more malleable form—possibly, even probably, reinvented. The guides we put out now are too often for our own benefit, not for the use of those for whom they are ostensibly designed. They are devised to help *us* find things, not to help our patrons find things. And when we do find those things for our customers they have no way of knowing whether we have indeed interpreted our own inventories correctly and brought to them all the glories we have for them to see.

I am not going to suggest here that the guides we put before our patrons be indexed more fully or more imaginatively, or that one of the SPINDEX permutations be adapted for use by county clerks

or local historical societies. I am not going to call for an international meeting of archivists and scholars where each of the parties can hurl vile and unconscionable imprecations (between social events) concerning the basic and abiding inadequacies of the other. But neither am I prepared to say that the beast cannot be tamed, that we—whatever our calling—must necessarily put up for all time with the shortfalls of the past. People whose wont it is to explain and to expand knowledge, to create knowledge, have the right to expect something rather better than simple muddling from those who have set themselves up as arbiters and manipulators of their approach to that knowledge. And those of us who insist on calling what we do a “profession” would be well advised to make something better of it than we have so far. We are not without our accomplishments, but there is more than a little yet to be done.