Archival Cooperation: A Critical Look at Statewide Archival Networks

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Abstract: Cooperating institutions in nine states founded archival networks in the 1960s and 1970s to administer more effectively their archival and manuscript collections. In July 1981, a National Conference on Regional Archival Networks was held to evaluate the achievements of these networks. The authors of this article extend the work of that conference by offering a critical look at mature networks. The first author reviews the development of archival networks and compares the reasons behind their establishment to the realities of daily operation. The second author analyzes the extent to which archival cooperation exists in five areas: local government records, acquisitions, collection use, resource sharing, and conflict resolution. The third author examines the effectiveness of archival networks in terms of funding and structure.

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Introduction

Richard A. Cameron

In July of 1981 more than sixty archivists from all over the United States gathered in Madison, Wisconsin, at a National Conference on Regional Archival Networks. The conference, supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, had as one of its major goals a "critical overview of archival networks" which would "permit a clearer conceptualization of the nature of networks and of their potential contribution to the preservation of and increased access to historical records."[1] According to John Fleckner, the conference was "organized with the conviction that, in hard times as in fair, interinstitutional cooperation (a basic concept on which archival networks are built) is the right way, the most effective way, for our institutions and our profession to proceed."[2]

Nine statewide networks were represented at the conference in Madison. Although all of the networks shared a common faith in cooperation and networking, "the general tone of the conference . . . was more critical than celebratory and most participants stressed the promises that archival networks seem to offer rather than their accomplishments thus far."[3] The conference did not succeed in drafting a critical overview of archival networks or an evaluation of their achievements.

There are at least two basic reasons for this failure. First, although everyone cooperates and networks, no one agrees on just what they are doing. Second, although archivists are an introspective bunch, we hesitate to formally evaluate our institutions. Small wonder then that we shy away from evaluating interinstitutional cooperative programs. In addition, in this time of diminishing resources, we are perhaps particularly sensitive about offering criticism. At the same time, that scarcity of resources compels us to evaluate some of the claims made by proponents of networks.

[1]National Endowment for the Humanities, Research Grant Application, "National Conference on Regional Archives Networks," February 7, 1980, p. 4.

[2]John A. Fleckner, "Introduction to *The Midwestern Archivist* Issue on Archival Networks," *Midwestern Archivist* 6 (1982): 95.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 94.

I. The Development of Archival Networks: "Not Exactly What We Had Expected"

Timothy Ericson

The cooperative archival networks established during the 1960s and 1970s were founded by enthusiastic supporters. The idea seemed so simple. Yet, it was a tremendous leap forward in the quest to preserve our documentary heritage and to promote the use of primary historical materials. In most instances, the network idea worked very well. Even those who are not completely convinced will admit that there have been at least certain areas of success.

Planners responsible for establishing archival networks made certain assumptions as they sought to sell their idea. They outlined goals for the network or purposes that a network could serve; speculated about prospective patrons who would benefit from the existence of an archival network; and outlined the role of the central, or creating, agency in the administration, coordination, and governance of the network. In a similar fashion, they sketched out the roles of the repositories that would, in a sense, be created by the network. Finally, they talked about network holdings—the sorts of historical documentation that the archival network was being created to preserve. The assumptions made in these five areas were crucial in justifying networks, and they appear with almost unbroken regularity in all of the state proposals. They also were important because they gave direction to an experimental movement about which archivists knew little at the time.

These assumptions were based upon the experiences of professionals who, although leaders in their field, had little or no direct experience with archival networking. Gradually it became clear that, even if the network idea had worked well, the result was not always what had been expected. Some of the intended goals and purposes were accomplished, others were not. Sometimes the assumptions about the roles of the participating institutions, potential users, and types of holdings proved accurate, other times they did not. Evolution and experience have changed many aspects of individual networks, but little of the existing literature reflects these changes. Archivists have made little effort to look where they have come and, on the basis of this, to consider again what they are about.

Archival networks were created for many reasons, most of which can be condensed into six basic goals. Archivists saw in networks an opportunity to preserve a greater percentage of valuable historical materials. Second, a statewide system of archival repositories seemed a natural vehicle for collecting records. Likewise, the creation of additional archival centers would make primary historical materials more accessible to potential users. Availability also would encourage use. In regions where there were a number of well developed archival programs, a network promised to be an effective way to reduce competition. Finally, archival networks were created to improve access to information and to more adequately inventory, process, and describe historical material.[4]

Network planners also had some very specific ideas about the role of the central agency in a cooperative venture. It was generally agreed that a state historical society or state archives should be

[4]Information about archival network goals is available from the respective state network coordinators. For names and addresses of these individuals see *Midwestern Archivist* 6 (1982): 98-129. For additional information see also James E. Fogerty, "Four New Regional Networks: A Progress Report," *Midwestern Archivist* 2 (1976): 43-52; John A. Fleckner, "Cooperation as a Strategy for Archival Institutions," *American Archivist* 39 (October 1976): 447-459.

responsible for administration, developing procedures, keeping records, supervising, and providing technical assistance. Title to almost all collections of archival and manuscript materials would remain with the central agency. Although there were some differences among the states over the issue of processing, it was agreed that a state historical society or a state archives should either do the work or supervise its completion. Those states that addressed the question of training assigned the responsibility to network headquarters. Most networks transferred some collections from the coordinating institution to the regional repositories; however, each reserved the right to retain materials that were either of national significance or within the scope of existing institutional research strengths. Finally, the state historical society or state archives assumed responsibility for maintaining overall bibliographic control and, in Wisconsin, Missouri, and Texas, the administration of archives and manuscript loans.

Many regional repositories were created by the establishment of a network, and this fact limited their initial role. Generally, it was their responsibility to provide the physical facilities such as a fireproof stack area, a space for researchers to work, equipment such as microfilm readers, and nominal supplies. In addition, network centers were expected to implement the general goal of making materials available by providing a local director or coordinator and personnel to supervise the work of patrons. Although the exact nature of their involvement varied from state to state, network center curators generally were assigned some role in the acquisitions function. In Wisconsin, for example, that role was initially defined as furnishing leads to the state historical society, while in Ohio, Missouri, and Minnesota the activity was more direct.[5] Little was said about developing technical expertise in areas such as conservation, because at the time there was little to build upon and plenty of other work to complete.

When considering network holdings, a very heavy emphasis was placed upon manuscripts and upon state and local government records. A few plans mentioned photographs and oral histories; and, although other types of resources such as newspapers or printed collections were occasionally noted, their inclusion in the network center's holdings was suggested rather than mandatory. Again, the planners were operating from experience; and they worked in institutions where these resources already existed. It was difficult for them to imagine otherwise. One senses that these supplementary resources were viewed, and rightly so at the time, as frosting on the cake.

Expectations about the types of people who would make use of the network centers focused almost entirely upon scholars and students. Scholars were usually defined as professional, academic historians, and students as history majors. One network proposal envisioned the "proliferation of degree-granting institutions [and a] dramatic surge of history graduate programs . . . a growing dynamic community of history scholars and graduate students will require more library-archives materials."[6] Genealogists were mentioned with some frequency although the explosion in their numbers was entirely unforeseen. Likewise, local historians were specifically acknowledged; they normally were mentioned just before the inevitable

[5]Richard A. Erney, "Wisconsin's Area Research Centers," *American Archivist* 29 (January 1966): 17.
[6]David R. Larson, "Ohio Network of American History Research Centers," *Ohio History* 79 (Winter 1970): 62-67.

category "and others." For all practical purposes, no other interest, discipline, or group was mentioned in planning documents or promotional literature.

For the most part, these initial assumptions and projections were accurate. With little archival training or experience in their brand-new network centers, the central agencies took the lead in developing programs. Since most of the centers were located on university campuses, directors took advantage of the close proximity of history students to promote archival collections and to build statistics. With so much to learn about collecting and using primary materials and with minimum initial staffing, center personnel had little time to do anything else.

Gradually the situation changed. History professors or librarians, who had been given release time to direct centers, found themselves being asked questions about genealogy, historic preservation, and conservation. Few had received any formal instruction on these topics, so they learned. Researchers who came in to use manuscript collections found that they needed other resources to fill gaps in the primary record. Consequently, regional curators responded to user requests for those resources. As programs developed, some institutions began to hire full-time archivists to direct the operation of the regional repositories. In short, the day passed when a network coordinator could report "Thus far, there has been no indication that the reference and service duties have been more than a minor load on any of the library staffs."[7]

In an attempt to determine how far networks have developed, we surveyed seventy-five archival institutions that belong to state networks or depository systems. Seventy-five percent of the repositories responded. We explored four areas of the network center's program: the physical facility, holdings, use, and specific outreach activities.[8]

Although the overwhelming number of network repositories are housed in libraries, there is considerable variation among the different states. In Wisconsin, Michigan, and Missouri, all of the responding archivists indicated that they were located in library buildings; however, Washington repositories are housed in a renovated hospital, a multipurpose building, an abandoned junior high school, and a commercial warehouse. Roughly one-third of the responding institutions said that their space had been constructed as an archives.

There appears to be general satisfaction with these facilities. Most respondents felt that they had adequate space for processing, acceptable temperature and humidity controls, convenient access to services such as copying, and a location with easy access to researchers. Parking was a more worrisome problem. The most serious drawback was visibility to the public.

Figures relating to patronage also varied considerably. Annual totals ranged from a high of more than 3,000 patrons to a low of just 25. The average was slightly more than 1,100.

Manuscript collections were the most frequently held resource in network repositories, followed closely by state, county, and local government records and photographs. More than half reported having maps, printed collections, oral histories, and university archives. More than 40 percent had census records, and almost 20 percent reported collections of artifacts.

Some of the most interesting responses were those dealing with use.

[7]Erney, "Wisconsin's Area Research Centers," p. 16.
[8]See table.

Summary of Results of Archival Network Questionnaire

A. Archives located in what type of building?

Library	41	Historical Society	1	Multi-Functional	1
Classroom	4	Administration	2	Abandoned Junior High School	1
Museum	2	Renovated Hospital	1	Commercial Warehouse	1
Archives	2				

B. Advantages and disadvantages of location:

	Advantage	Disadvantage
Visible to public	31	22
Convenient to researchers	46	7
Convenient to services	41	12
Parking	34	18
Temperature and humidity controls	46	8
Space for stacks and processing	42	10

c. Was space constructed as an archives? Yes 19 No 35

D. Annual patronage:

Number of patrons annually	Number of responses
1-500	19
501-1000	6
1001-2000	12
2001-3000	6
3001+	7

E. Description of respository holdings:

Manuscripts	48 yes (85%)	Oral history	36 yes (64%)
State & county records	46 yes (82%)	University archives	32 yes (57%)
Photographs	45 yes (80%)	Census records	25 yes (44%)
Printed collections	39 yes (69%)	Artifacts	10 yes (17%)
Maps	36 yes (64%)		

F. Most heavily used materials:

Most used		Second most used		Third most used	
State & county records	41%	State & county records	30%	Printed collections	17%
Census records	28%	Manuscripts	20%	Photographs	15%
Printed collections	26%	University archives	18%	State & county	15%
Manuscripts	23%	Printed collections	15%	Manuscripts	14%
University archives	22%	Photographs	13%	Maps	11%
Photographs	4%	Oral history	5%	Oral history	8%
				University archives	8%
				Census records	8%

G. Asked about which of below?

Historical preservation	75% yes	Provide speakers	65% yes
Museum displays	51% yes	Conservation	84% yes
Genealogy	78% yes	Oral history	76% yes
Appraisal of materials	78% yes	Archaeology	36% yes

H. In which of these activities do you participate?

Business/church records preservation	80% yes	Local government records	74% yes
Historical society activities	96% yes	Community group programs	70% yes
Community/institution centennials	52% yes	Work with public schools	46% yes
County fairs	13% yes		

Notwithstanding the planned emphasis upon manuscript collections, only 23 percent of the curators reported that these were their most heavily used resource. In fact, manuscripts were listed fourth—behind government records, printed collections, and census records, and only fractionally ahead of university archives. Conversely, government records received an extremely high rating. More than 85 percent of the respondents said that these were among the three most heavily used resources. This percentage was almost thirty points higher than the next category, printed collections. The only other types of resources mentioned with any frequency were oral histories and photographs; and these never rated higher than 15 percent in either the first, second, or third use category.

The responses to the survey also showed that patrons' expectations of network archivists went beyond the original plans. An overwhelming majority said that they were called upon to assist with questions about conservation. More than 70 percent reported inquiries about how to do oral history or genealogy and how to appraise the financial value of donations. More than half said that they have been asked about creating museum displays and to speak to local history groups. More than one-third were asked to provide archaeological information.

Archivists reported wide variations in their ability to answer these questions. Significant numbers were almost never able to provide information about certain subjects. The most serious problems occurred in the areas of archaeology, museum displays, and appraisal of donations. Conservation, genealogy, and oral history presented the fewest problems; but the wide ranges existing within each network were significant. Some curators reported that they were almost always able to answer questions relating to the subjects listed on the questionnaire; but within each network there were always some who were almost never able to be of any assistance on the same subjects.

Finally, the area of outreach showed an exceptionally wide assortment of activities. Almost every regional network center works with county and local historical societies. Most have had contact with local government, businesses, and churches about how best to preserve historical records. Most also provide programs of some sort to community groups, and almost half work with students from the public schools. A few are involved at county fairs or at similar activities. Several of the specific projects mentioned by network curators were especially interesting. A regional center in Washington state was instrumental in founding a Chinese Historical Society, an Illinois archivist sponsors an extensive adult education program, a Texas repository produces a radio call-in show, and another Texas center participates in an annual historical symposium and arts festival.

Judging by the growth in number and by the increased activity of networks, one must conclude that the assumptions made during the planning stage were, for the most part, accurate; but the same growth also has changed the conditions under which those original assumptions were made. We now have two decades of experience behind us, and perhaps it is time to make some new assumptions based upon this background.

First of all, it seems clear that community expectations have resulted in programs that are much more broadly based than was originally planned. For this reason, perhaps network staff training should be addressed more directly. Archivists should be prepared in advance for the many genealogists who will

arrive at their institutions. Local curators should receive more direct assistance in planning training programs for student assistants and volunteers. In-service training seminars might be a worthwhile addition to network meeting agendas. In addition, network archivists should communicate more extensively with each other. Too often, it seems, one curator is an expert while his or her neighbor is a novice. Sharing knowledge promises to improve the quality of service throughout entire networks.

A second recommendation reminds me of a recent telephone conversation with a colleague. He called one afternoon, obviously much excited. "Guess what!" he exclaimed, "I had a real live scholarly request from a historian this morning. It was fun!" Despite earlier expectations, most network personnel probably would agree that use by academic historians has fallen somewhat short of the level that had been anticipated. Most network archivists would be in serious trouble if they had to justify their existence solely upon patronage by college or university scholars. Without making any judgment, we simply should admit that our original speculation was not correct. We have developed other patrons, and they are a group whose background is more broadly based. This may be advantageous when archivists need community support. We should acknowledge this fact and then consider what we might do to better serve the patrons we already have.

Perhaps it is this more broadly based constituency that is responsible for the third assumption: that non-archival resources have become a part of most network collections. The fact that these supplementary materials are useful was recognized from the start, but their acquisition has been treated as a luxury in most of the existing literature. Today most programs have progressed beyond infancy, and they need additional resources if they are to continue growing. To illustrate this point, let me use an example that probably only someone from River Falls, Wisconsin, would even consider. Around the period of World War I there was an intense debate raging among agriculturalists about the best way to construct a dairy barn. One author proposed:

> For the best results the barn must be something more than [just] a shelter: it must be a cow's home, approximating June pasture conditions as closely as possible. Construction of this kind, providing sunlight, warmth and ventilation is necessarily expensive, but dairymen agree that it is necessary to increase the net returns.[9]

At the risk of taking this analogy too far, I would simply note that we need to "approximate June pasture conditions." Although a collection containing only archives and manuscripts might provide sunlight, patrons will also want warmth and ventilation. Supplementary resources may no longer be a luxury; they may be critical to the development of a program.

Fourth, the high percentage of university archives in network centers and their relatively high use (almost equal to that of manuscript collections) indicates that we underestimated the importance of this development. It can constitute a highly visible university service when compared to the idea of cooperating with institutions hundreds of miles away. Since campus administration was given the responsibility of providing staff, space, and supplies for the operation of the centers, their financial support is necessary to the continuation of the program.

[9]Robert H. Smith, "Hole in the Doughnut," *The Country Gentleman* 81 (February 24, 1917): 36.

Finally, with the proliferation of expertise throughout networks, we may wish to re-examine some of the traditional roles that were assigned to network centers. Archival programs that have been in existence for more than a decade may well be able to take on additional responsibilities, and this increased role probably will work to the advantage of the local program as well as of the beleaguered central agency.

In short, if networks are to continue to grow—or if they are to continue at all—they must continue to meet the needs of people. Past growth is a signal of success; but, in another sense, growth is a cause as well as a result. It demands change. Archival networks need to remain flexible in their structure and open to the opportunities made possible by their peculiar orientation. If they can do this, networks will continue to influence the development of the archival profession during the coming years.

II. Statewide Archival Networks: Implementing the Strategy of Cooperation

Richard A. Cameron

Before we can evaluate regional archival networks and their success in achieving interinstitutional cooperation, we need to refine our defintion of cooperation. Rather than one activity, interinstitutional cooperation represents a range of activities from simple to highly sophisticated. The simplest forms are informal; involve one person from each institution with a single task; require no expenditure of funds, no written agreement, and little or no planning; and have little direct impact on the programs of the institutions involved. An example might be any of a number of requests for information about operating procedures. On the other end of the spectrum of cooperation are the formal arrangements that involve several organizations; affect their entire programs in an ongoing activity that is central to the institutions' programs; require a detailed written agreement, a separate budget, and extensive planning; and result in the interdependence of the cooperating institutions. The more sophisticated forms of cooperation tend to be, by their nature, institutionalized. They require the development of special organizational structures and procedures.

This paradigm of interinstitutional cooperation is complicated by at least two other factors. First, institutions are not static and neither are their forms of cooperation. A task that once was central and involved numerous personnel and significant budgetary commitments can be continued but de-emphasized. Second, most archives are not autonomous institutions but rather are operating units or subsidiaries of larger institutions. The sophistication of the cooperation then must be viewed from the standpoint not just of the archives but also of the institution of which it is a part. In evaluating networks as vehicles for cooperation, it is important to examine not only their effectiveness in meeting specific goals, such as improved documentation and increased patron use, but also their effectiveness in encouraging coordination within the network to achieve those goals. The level of sophistication of the cooperative efforts is an important factor in evaluating the coordination achieved through networks.

Just what are the goals of cooperation through statewide networks? In speaking of the goals and achievements of networks, F. Gerald Ham said:

> These networks are designed to maximize the use of limited resources. They have proven effective for dealing with neglected and deteriorating local government records, a systematic approach to

> regional and community documentation, and a crucial first step in developing coherent acquisition programs. In effect networks create supra-institutional structures to resolve conflicts of institutional interests and to free us to pursue common goals.[10]

There are five areas where networks should be achieving goals cooperatively: local government records, systematic acquisitions programs, enhancing use of collections, sharing of resources, and resolution of interinstitutional conflict. Without evaluating all the existing networks in detail, I would like to begin to develop a critical overview of networks, to challenge some of our assumptions about networks, and to focus on what networks have been able to achieve cooperatively.

There is no doubt that networks have been successful in transferring and acquiring local government records and manuscripts. Networks now hold in excess of 100,000 linear feet of records and papers.[11] In most states where networks exist, the regional archives are the primary physical custodian of local government archives in the state. In fact, four of the nine state networks list public records as the only, or the primary, focus of their network; and in only one of the nine networks are government records excluded.[12]

Nevertheless, the transfer and appraisal of local government records remains, for the most part, a function of the state archival agency rather than an interinstitutional effort. This is usually the result of legislation or other formal administrative authority. Where personnel at the regional archives carry on appraisal or transfer of local records, the people carrying out those functions are employees of, or are supervised by, the state archival agency in all but one of the networks. Wisconsin appears to be the only state in which personnel employed by the host university are involved in field contact, appraisal, and transfer of public records without direct supervision of state archives staff. Of course, state archives must retain final authority over the public records in archival custody; but it is significant in evaluating the level of cooperation of networks that appraisal and transfer of local records is not a shared function.

It seems likely that the personnel of the regional archives in which the local government records are processed, housed, and used could provide valuable information that would contribute to the appraisal process. Centers can provide information on the uses of local records as well as the opportunity to view them in the context of the other available local and regional documentation held by the center. Although local government archives cannot be appraised like manuscripts, other available documentation can still be an important appraisal criterion. Almost all regional archives have both manuscripts and local archives; but in a number of networks, appraisal decisions on these two forms of local documentation are made independently. This practice not only inhibits effective appraisal but also limits planning for collection development and for strategies or priorities for transferring local records.

Only one interinstitutional cooperative appraisal project involving government records has been undertaken within a network, and that involves the university archives in the University of Wisconsin System. Cooperative appraisal and retention guidelines will be established. It has been proposed that

[10]F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," *American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981): 212.

[11]"Survey of Archival Networks," *Midwestern Archivist* 6 (1982): 98-123.

[12]*Ibid.*, pp. 98-123.

sampling through selective retention at one or two campuses be used as a system-wide strategy for certain types of documentation. Regional networks are natural vehicles for this kind of experiment, controversial as it may be; but they have not been used extensively in this way.

It seems safe to say that two important and related goals in the area of local records have been achieved through networks. First, the use of networks has expanded the resources, primarily personnel and storage, devoted to preserving local government records. Second, the geographical balance of the local government archives within the network states has been improved. Whether it will be possible to sustain these accomplishments through the current fiscal uncertainty remains to be seen.

The major cooperative aspects of the local government records programs conducted through networks are the regional storage of and access to the collections. Originally many of the networks were primarily designed to address the storage problems connected with local records. In some cases the storage has not been optimal, but Timothy Ericson has confirmed through a recent survey of regional archives that most centers are housed in university libraries which provide adequate storage conditions, especially when compared with courthouse or town hall basements and attics. Interestingly enough, though, many of the centers surveyed by Ericson listed space problems as one of the disadvantages of network participation. In only one or two instances have networks made extensive use of microfilming in order to address the critical space problems associated with local government records. For example, a number of networks through the state archives agency have cooperated with the Genealogical Society of Utah in their selected filming of some local records. Whether regional archives will be able to expand and meet the space challenge in the future remains to be seen.

Although networks have contributed to dealing with neglected local records, for the most part coordination has been within a single, though decentralized, archival agency. The cooperative aspects of the program have been limited along functional lines with a minimal amount of interinstitutional cooperation necessary. There is a danger in this approach that no one will accept responsibility for the totality of the program. Far from representing a heightened significance for local records, a decentralized cooperative network may be perceived by the state archives' parent agency as denoting a program of less significance than those administered completely by the archives or its parent agency.

If networks' involvement in local records signifies a renewed appreciation for local sources, then research center networks like those in Ohio, Wisconsin, and, until recently, Minnesota represent a form of archival program that is as significant for the archival profession as the new social history has been for the historians. James Fogerty has suggested that networks gather material that would not have been collected otherwise or would not be as accessible as it is through the network.[13] Networks are able to do this partly because they are schizophrenic; they change personality from local to regional to statewide to national at the merest suggestion. This makes them compatible with many manuscript donors who want the prestige and professionalism of a national collection but still desire the

[13]James E. Fogerty, "Manuscript Collecting in Archival Networks," *Midwestern Archivist* 6 (1982): 140.

folksy informality and accessibility of a local one.

As has already been suggested, while networks have been successful in acquiring manuscripts, most have not gone beyond that crucial first step toward coordinating acquisitions. After the turf has been staked out and the borders secured, there have been limited incentives to cooperate further in acquisition of manuscripts. Even more disturbing is the discovery that you can lead a regional center to a manuscript, but you cannot make it collect that document. In this sense, limiting collecting competition may not always be the most effective way to assure expanded resources. Some centers see their participation in the network as an obligation *not* to collect rather than an obligation to collect.

No network now has in operation a written, system-wide collection policy or strategy. Of course, in those states where manuscripts and other sources are outside the mandate of the network, coordinated acquisition is most limited. Even in networks where central ownership of the collections encourages network members to view their collections as elements in one comprehensive integrated statewide collection, cooperation in acquisition has tended to be limited in extent or most successful on a project basis. Project collecting can be very successful in acquiring collections, but it is not a substitute for an ongoing, coordinated acquisitions system. No network has formalized a central lead or contact file, although most encourage the informal exchange of donor information.

Although one can cite examples of the avoidance of costly duplication in network collecting and can argue that eliminating competition has maximized collecting resources, the cooperative structures for collecting have been underutilized in networks. Coordinated acquisition programs remain a tantalizing possibility that, for the most part, is unrealized. Networks cooperate in some of their collecting; they are successful collectors, but they are not sophisticated about their cooperation.

Networks have achieved the greatest success in the use of the collections. If networks represent a democratization of sources, equally important is their diversification and democratization of the users of those sources. Networks have reached patrons who would not otherwise have the opportunity or, in many cases, the desire to use primary source material. Networks provide continual confirmation of what we all knew already: that our primary users are not scholars. If decentralization is a disservice to certain types of scholarship, it is a service to others. Networks now serve more than 50,000 patrons a year. In addition, networks are providing a variety of information services to a wide range of clientele.[14]

Despite this impressive performance, networks are not consistently providing coordinated reference service. While it is difficult to document the patterns of use without doing extensive user surveys, it is safe to say that centers in many networks do not serve as access points for the entire system's collections. While most networks maintain some sort of central catalog, only Missouri makes this primary reference tool available at each center. Other centers rely on guides and on personal referrals. Two notable developments in access involve the use of automated data bases in Illinois and Washington. In Illinois data on local records in the state archives and the Illinois Regional Archives Depository System (IRAD) network is maintained

[14]Timothy Ericson, "Survey of Regional Archival Network Centers," 1982 (unpublished).

by the state archives and distributed in fiche format to all network members. In Washington the data bases are much more comprehensive and include government records in the state archives and its regional branches, records still in the custody of state and local agencies, records and papers in other repositories, and records in the custody of a private individual or organization. Up to now this information has been distributed to the regional branches in two published guides and in computer printouts. Neither network involves on-line access to the data bases through regional archives. Many networks simply cannot provide such service. At least three of the nine networks indicated little or no direct communication between centers. While use of the collections in networks has been substantial and innovative, the extent to which access on a system-wide basis is a reality, or even an aggressively pursued goal, is difficult to determine.

The most common claim for networks is that they reduce costs, share and extend resources, or maximize the use of resources. Networks have expanded the resources devoted to preserving local primary sources. Nevertheless, the claims that networks maximize the use of resources rest more on broad assumptions than on hard data. Such claims are supported by cooperative microfilming programs, the provision of conservation services, or even the joint purchase of supplies by networks. Most networks have some of these features, but not many have all. In addition they are not utilized as fully as they might be. While it seems certain that economies are achieved through these measures, they are more haphazard than we would wish.

Archives are expensive; and networks, while they have expanded resources, have not effectively demonstrated reductions in the basic costs. Archives in general have not been very sophisticated or precise about measuring their costs. Let me suggest a rather crude cost comparison just for the sake of discussion. How do networks and their central repositories compare on a cost per patron basis? For the Minnesota network in fiscal year 1980 (the only year in which the data gathered is sufficient to permit an accurate comparison), the estimated cost of the network was $191,000 to serve 2,106 patrons in the centers. This is an average cost per patron of $91. For the same year, the operating budget of the Division of Archives and Manuscripts (DAM as it is affectionately known) was $592,000. DAM served 3,998 patrons at a per patron cost of $148. The cost per patron was significantly lower in the regional centers, probably for two primary reasons: the centers use nonprofessional staff, and many expensive services were provided centrally through DAM.

If networks have achieved some modest but demonstrable economies in administering archival programs, they have done so without a great deal of sophisticated planning. Most of the bilateral agreements that represent the authority for the cooperative efforts in most networks are very general and do not specify the levels of service that must be provided by participants. Many in networks find this vagueness a necessary or even attractive feature. In addition, there is little formal communication between the cooperating institutions regarding budgeting for the regional archives programs. The budget development processes of the cooperating institutions operate independently with only the decision being communicated. Although the programs of the regional archives create interdependence, the budgeting and decision making processes for regional centers are fairly limited in their sophistication and coordination.

Conflict resolution is an area in which networks have shown positive promise. Networks, by their nature, represent an effort to reduce conflict among collecting institutions. They do this by trying to rationalize collecting and by maintaining channels of communication among the participating institutions. The pattern of geographical division, arbitrary as it may be, seems to have worked rather well in limiting conflict in collecting. This structural feature is enhanced in three networks by the actual transfer of collections among the participating units. Far more dramatic than the simple fact that title to the collections in some networks resides with the central repository, the transfer feature emphasizes the unity of network collections by making them accessible on a network-wide basis. In such a system, a member does not lose access to material when physical custody lies with another member. This helps to reduce the possessiveness that often leads to interinstitutional conflict. Networks have not eliminated conflict over collecting, but they have minimized it.

Most networks also maintain channels of communication among network members which, in theory, reduce conflict or make it manageable; yet, for the most part, these lines of communication are not formal. In fact, in a number of networks there is no formal charter or authorizing legislation creating the network as an entity. In most networks the detailed agreements guaranteeing cooperation are bilateral. Network-wide structures then are neither formal nor required. Given the informality of the structures and, in some cases, the infrequency of the network meetings, networks can only be effective if their conflicts are minor and isolated.

The Minnesota Regional Research Centers present one example of a network where conflict became serious. Due to the state's continuing financial crisis, the Minnesota Historical Society in December 1981 formally terminated its participation in the network that it had helped to create ten years earlier. Prior to its decision to cease its involvement in the network, the society had halved the central funding it provided the network. Both of these decisions were precipitated by externally imposed budget reductions, but both were unilateral. In the year between the initial cut and the final withdrawal, one of the serious flaws of network governance became apparent. Networks provide only limited communication between the institutions involved. During the budget crisis there was no channel of communication between the individuals in the participating institutions in Minnesota who ultimately make budgeting and planning decisions. While this was certainly not the cause of the problems and it is doubtful that such communication would have saved any network funding, such communication might have prevented what may amount to a formal dissolution of the network and would certainly have improved the planning as the Minnesota regional centers strive to continue as operating realities. Networks are largely inexperienced at resolving serious interinstitutional conflict, but it is certain that in the future they are going to get more practice.

How then do networks measure up, especially as vehicles of cooperation? Is the strategy of cooperation working? Networks have been able to accomplish a great deal. They have expanded our resources and our horizons. Although they are the archival profession's major venture into formal cooperation, the cooperation in which they engage is limited in both extent and sophistication.

It is limited by the nature of the institutions that compose the networks

and by the way in which we measure the success of those programs. If cooperation is an idea whose time has come, it is not a style with which our institutions or their managers feel comfortable. We can only cooperate to the extent that we are willing as institutions to define our goals and evaluate our successes multilaterally.

It is questionable whether our institutions, especially in these times, are capable of such vision. While there are rewards to be gained through cooperation, as networks clearly demonstrate, it is unlikely that the rewards will be sufficient to change our well-established patterns of behavior and accelerate our cooperative efforts.

III. Network Funding and Structure

Anne R. Kenney

Archivists in the United States and Canada have embraced the network concept with the same zeal that nineteenth-century missionaries hoped the heathen would take to the true faith. For archivists, the network is the model for the future. It is the only sensible way to cope with economic cutbacks, technological advances, and the increasing mass of documents.

A careful look at networks in operation, however, reveals that there is already trouble in this imagined paradise. Center directors feel they are being asked to do more for the network, even while they are receiving less money, service, and support with which to do it. They feel left out of the decision-making process, isolated from other directors in their network, and treated as second class citizens by their parent institutions. There is little wonder that directors often see network functions as annoying duties that interfere with their own programs.

Of course the story has another side. Network coordinators do not feel that directors are bearing their part of the load. They do not respond to direction well, keep the coordinator informed, or follow uniform practices. The directors often act as if they no longer need the network, but at the same time they ask for more money and more services. There is little wonder that coordinators sometimes begrudge supporting network operations at the expense of their own programs.

The directors and the coordinators are both right. There are real snakes in the garden. Archival networks are in worse shape than they have been in since they were created. No network has a coordinator who can devote full time to network administration. The Wisconsin coordinator was recently reassigned to other tasks. Time spent by the Ohio coordinator on network business is "negligible,"[15] and the Minnesota coordinator lost his job in a budget cut. Even when network administration is recognized as a primary function, coordinators estimate that they can usually spend no more than a third of their time on network duties. Just as troubling, networks themselves are far from flourishing. The Minnesota Historical Society withdrew all support and affiliation from the Minnesota network. This effectively put it out of business. The Ohio network, according to its coordinator, has been "more or less defunct" for the last few years. The Nebraska network is still in the struggling stage it has occupied during its six-year life.

So what is the source of all this trouble? The bad state of the economy is undoubtedly the major factor. A lack of money has hit the midwestern states particularly hard. In Missouri and Ohio, for example, two to three consecutive years

[15]Statement by Dennis East to Anne R. Kenney in a telephone interview, 13 September 1982.

of 10 percent budget cuts have made it difficult to carry on business as usual. The Minnesota network represented $75,000 in hard cash and one full-time position. That was simply more than the Historical Society was willing to pay. The source of the trouble may run deeper than a bad economy alone. When a budget crunch comes, networks are among the first items to go. This suggests that the institutional commitment to networks is quite low. It also means that network leaders have failed to be powerful and effective advocates of their own systems.

Placing blame is easy; but in all fairness, we need to ask whether networks are not to some degree victims of their own crimes. Networks may be in danger because they are not living up to expectations, and they are not developing in ways that will guarantee their continued existence. Networks are now entering a new stage in their life cycle. If we want to see them survive, we must be prepared to modify the ways in which they are governed and funded. We must reassess their functions and then commit ourselves to a strong defense of the reevaluated, more mature, network concept.

In the happy days when foundations and legislatures were willing and able to provide funds, promoters of networks could promise much and not be held accountable. In particular, they could claim that networks would offer an economical solution to the problem of records keeping; consequently, spending a little money would eventually save a lot of money. The undoubted success of library networks helped make this claim plausible. Libraries began cooperating when it became clear that a single library was never going to have adequate funds to keep up with the information explosion and meet increased user demands. Independent library networks could solve both problems and support themselves by the sale of their services. Libraries subscribed to the networks because they could save money that way. Joint purchasing, interlibrary loans, and shared cataloging could both cut costs and enhance services.

There are profound differences, however, between library networks and archival networks. Since archival collections are unique, there can be no cost savings in duplicate cataloging. Archivists, unlike librarians, do not feel compelled to meet all the information needs of users, so they do not feel compelled to circulate material. There is no economic incentive to make joint acquisitions because archival collections are not usually purchased anyway. The obvious point here is that it is not possible to argue that archival networks can deliver on the promise to reduce costs while enhancing services in the way that library networks can. The hard truth is that archival networks do not pay for themselves and have not offered a way for members to reduce their own costs. When this is taken in conjunction with the fact that they are not perceived as essential, it becomes clear why archival networks are particularly vulnerable in hard economic times.

Networks are also vulnerable when they occupy a "poor relation" position with respect to the parent institution. When times are good, the poor relation is welcome at the table; but when times are tough, attitudes change. The situation in several states shows that network funds are quickly cut when they are included in the operating budget of the institution. The network is simply not seen as a crucial part of the institution's mission. Indeed, the network is viewed as a competitor for scarce funds. Cutting is more likely when the institution does not have control over a center. The money is more apt to go to a program over which the institution does have control. Even when there is control, another factor

comes into play. It is easier to cut the budget of a center a hundred miles away than it is to cut the salary of the person at the next desk. Furthermore, because networks are relative newcomers, they are likely to suffer from an application of a version of the last hired, first fired principle.

The very tenacity of some centers also makes networks an easy target for the budget cutters. Most coordinators have estimated that one-half to two-thirds of all centers would probably survive if their networks were dismantled. No center in Minnesota has actually ceased operation, although activity at several centers has slowed. The demise of the Minnesota network has, in fact, encouraged some of the centers to take responsibility for the university's archives. Centers seem more likely to survive when they assume additional functions.

Centers may survive, but the future of the network is less clear. If the network budget continues to be included in the operating budget of the coordinating agency, the network will continue to be vulnerable. A recognition of this fact suggests that members should lobby to have their funds made separate line items in the budget. Richard Cameron has suggested the central agency could then act as the fiscal agent for the system without having control over the budget and without thinking of it as part of its program.[16] In the future, network funding may have to be made the responsibility of more of the participants and not be thought of as the job of the central body alone.

Networks are also vulnerable because some of the rationales initially offered to justify establishing them are simply no longer valid. Networks were supposed to reduce competition, increase efficiency, and provide low-cost storage facilities; but none of these justifications is very persuasive today. It is true that networks have led to coordinated collection development; but reduced competition for collections was probably inevitable anyway. After all, as repositories run out of storage room, they are less inclined to worry about whether some other agency scoops them on a collection. Increased efficiency has also been a mixed blessing. Basically, it has meant centralizing such operations as processing and preservation; but this has also meant that centers have had to wait literally for years to have their collections returned to them. Coordinating agencies cannot live up to their original offer to care for the preservation needs of centers when they are unable to offer adequate service for their own collections. Finally, low-cost storage is a thing of the past. Ten years ago, when local campuses agreed to accept records, they had much space and little understanding of the volume to which they were committing themselves. A decade of unstructured collecting, plus the dumping of public records, has strained the storage space of most centers. Many now resent having to provide so much space for collections that are rarely used.

Another source of trouble for networks is their antiquated governing structures. Almost all were founded on a series of bilateral agreements between headquarters and centers. As a result, effective mechanisms for establishing communications and sharing power among centers in the networks have never been developed. The lines of communication typically connect directors and coordinators, not directors and directors. A director in IRAD has been on the job for two years and has yet to meet any of his colleagues. Another director claims this is because the administration wants to "keep us isolated

[16]Statement by Richard A. Cameron to Anne R. Kenney in a telephone interview, 17 September 1982.

so that we don't know that others share our problems and then they don't have to solve them." The coordinator in Springfield agrees that the IRAD system lacks "network consciousness," and he prefers it that way.[17] Out of frustration and common interests, directors have started to talk to one another. In northern Wisconsin, the proximity of area research centers at Stout, River Falls, and Eau Claire encourages joint projects. Similarly, the St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri, centers have worked together to build complementary urban collections. Such unofficial, informal links are likely to increase as directors begin to demand more input concerning network affairs.

Coordinators may once have been justified in treating centers as outposts in the archival wasteland. At the beginning, when both the network and centers were being established, it made sense to centralize technical and administrative decisions; but centers have now matured. They are now staffed by professionals, and have taken over many functions both within and outside the network. As centers assume more responsibilities, they will also demand a greater share of authority. Under these changed conditions, it makes sense that centers no longer wish to be treated as second rate. Not surprisingly, some centers have already combined forces to help bring about the inevitable. In Missouri, the operations committee has assumed more of the responsibility of decision making. Directors have also petitioned for representation on the policy-making committee; and, as in Wisconsin, network-wide meetings are now being held at regional centers. In Minnesota, the MRRC developed long-range planning goals that would have cemented relations among the centers and the historical society. Recently, IRAD directors joined together to demand their first meeting in over two years.

These cases mark a beginning, but there is still a long way to go. The centers' only real power lies in their right to secede from the network. For many this is unrealistic, and for most it is undesirable. To solve the problem, governing boards must be given real authority; and methods of conflict resolution must be developed. When directors disagree with each other or with a coordinator, there must be a way of resolving their differences while recognizing the rightful responsibilities of each.

Sharing power can produce its own set of problems. For example, from the outside it looks as if everything ought to work well in the Ohio network. Their policy statements are outstanding. Each center has an equal say in network affairs, and the historical society provides overall coordination. Despite such arrangements, the system still does not work satisfactorily. The missing ingredients seem to be a lack of accountability and of an authority to compel cooperation. Even when the network governance board determines policy and members agree to a particular plan, it may turn out that nothing happens. Despite initial written agreements, members can still ignore suggestions and refuse to cooperate.

Part of Ohio's problem may be that the network tried to take too big a bite. Ohio centers cooperate on newspapers and audiovisual materials as well as on public records and manuscripts. The systematic collection, processing, and storage of such a variety of materials is an enormous task, which many of the centers cannot afford to perform

[17]Statements by David Koch, Glen Gildemeister and Roy Turnbaugh to Anne R. Kenney in telephone interviews, 8 September 1982.

thoroughly. Nevertheless, they are unwilling to give up their territory.

The network system effectively transformed the Ohio Historical Society from a statewide organization into a regional one. What was lost in the process was the power to insure that a job gets done when a center fails to do it. What is obviously needed is a central authority with the power to force centers to cooperate and to undertake certain functions when centers lack the capacity to perform them individually. Of course this may be problematic in local areas wary of the encroachment of the state. The need for such a central authority is recognized in the draft of revised regulations for the Texas network. Under them, the coordinating agency is empowered to determine the geographical area assigned to a depository and to change it if adequate service requires a change. There is a clear need, as the Ohio experience shows, to hold centers accountable and to bypass them when necessary to get the job done. The only way to meet this need is to give a central authority the power to call the shots.

Networks will survive because they serve useful purposes; but they cannot do everything. They must adapt to new economic rules, be more sober in their promises, and take into account the interests of their individual members. Networks need to come to their own defense; but they must also face up to their problems. They must seek ways of becoming self-sufficient and establishing themselves as independent of any one institution. Most important, they must develop new means of sharing and exercising power.