

Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists

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Abstract: For over three decades following its founding in 1936 the Society of American Archivists remained the only professional organization of archivists in the United States. Just as SAA was a child of other professional organizations, particularly the American Historical Association, it has in turn generated its own offspring. Even though some leaders of the SAA viewed the creation of the first regional archival organizations with apprehension, the SAA Council did provide a number of them with financial assistance as they were being organized. Likewise, several of the SAA's leaders were instrumental in organizing a number of the regionals. At present there is a considerable overlap between leaders of the SAA and the regionals.

The author of this article describes the historical context for the emergence of the local, state, and regional archival organizations; provides a current profile of these organizations that includes information on the dates of their founding, number of members, cost of individual dues, frequency of meetings, and type of publications; discusses the evolving relationship of the SAA with the local, state, and regional organizations; and offers several suggestions for improving these relationships.

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Just a decade ago, at the beginning of 1972, there existed five regional archival organizations. A vast majority of archivists viewed the Society of American Archivists as their sole professional arena. The SAA in turn was entering a new phase of its history as a younger generation of archivists began to supplant those who had led the society during the quarter century following World War II.

The social ferment that swept the United States during the late 1960s had penetrated even the traditionally staid SAA, giving impetus to efforts by younger archivists to democratize the society, to improve the status of women both in the society and in the archival profession, and to establish local professional organizations. These efforts led to the formation within the society of the Committee on the Seventies, the progressive caucus that became known as ACT, the Committee on the Status of Women in the Archival Profession, and the Women's Caucus. Outside the society, other archival organizations have proliferated phenomenally since the early 1970s. During 1972 six regional archival organizations were founded, including what have since become the two largest and best known: the Midwest Archives Conference and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference.

A decade has elapsed since this "founding wave" of 1972. It seems appropriate, then, to draw a balance sheet of the regionals' development since 1972 in order to create the context for a discussion of the relationship between the SAA and the regionals. Such a balance sheet should begin with a profile of the regionals as they presently exist, keeping in mind that their development has been anything but uniform. The term "regional" will be used here in a broad sense referring to all non-national archival organizations, including multi-state, state, and local groups. Our colleagues in Canada have their own na-

tional archival organization, the Association of Canadian Archivists, as well as local and provincial organizations.

An examination of thirty of the currently active regional organizations in the United States reveals that eight encompass two or more states; thirteen are state organizations; and nine are local groups in major metropolitan areas. Of the eight multistate regionals, the largest both in terms of geographical turf and number of members is the Midwest Archives Conference (MAC). Its approximate 700 members reside in a twelve-state area ranging from Ohio to the Dakotas. Within the MAC region are four state organizations: the Society of Ohio Archivists, the Society of Indiana Archivists, the Michigan Archival Association, and the Iowa Historical Materials Preservation Society; and five local organizations: the Association of St. Louis Area Archivists, the Kansas City Area Archivists, the Chicago Area Archivists, the Twin Cities Archives Roundtable, and the Grand Rapids Archives and Museum Professionals.

The second largest regional, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC), has a membership of nearly 600 and encompasses seven states—New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia—and the District of Columbia. Within the MARAC region are three local organizations: the New York Archivists Roundtable, the Long Island Archives Conference, and the District of Columbia Archivists.

The New England Archivists number about 300 in the states of Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut. One local group within this region is the Boston Archivists Group (BAG).

The South Atlantic Archives and Records Conference, with 125 members, includes North Carolina, South

Carolina, Georgia, and Florida and shares Virginia with MARAC. Within its borders are two state organizations: the Society of Georgia Archivists and the Society of Florida Archivists.

The Society of Southwest Archivists (SSA) has 127 members within the states of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, New Mexico, and Louisiana. The Arkansas Archivists and Records Managers is the only state group in the southwest region. There is also a local group in Austin, Texas, which has not been organized formally. SSA is the only regional to have established a national award, the Sister M. Claude Lane Award, given annually by SAA to an outstanding religious archivist.¹

Farther west is the 112-member Conference of Intermountain Archivists (CIA), which covers Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming and shares Idaho with the Northwest Archivists and New Mexico with the Southwest Archivists. The Society of Colorado Archivists is the only state organization in the region.

The Northwest Archivists has 150 members. In addition to sharing Idaho with the CIA, this regional includes the states of Montana, Washington, Oregon, and Alaska and the province of British Columbia.

The remaining regional organization, the Lake Ontario Archives Conference, includes members from New York State and the province of Ontario.

Five state organizations exist within areas not covered by multistate regionals: the Kentucky Council on Archives, the Tennessee Archivists, the Society of Alabama Archivists, the Society of Mississippi Archivists, and

the Society of California Archivists. Because of its large membership of 300, the latter functions virtually as a regional organization. If archivists in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi would join together to form a multistate regional, Hawaii and California would be the only states not included in a multistate organization.

The seven multistate regional organizations (excluding the Lake Ontario Archives Conference) have a combined membership of 2,114; and eleven of the thirteen state organizations for which information is available include 1,729 members. Scant membership data is available for the nine local organizations. For purposes of comparison, the present individual membership of the Society of American Archivists stands at 1,515.

Undoubtedly there exists a considerable overlap among the memberships of the SAA and the regional, state, and local organizations. According to a survey conducted in 1982 by the SAA, 1,100 out of a total membership of 2,363 of six selected multistate regional organizations were also members of the SAA. Thus, 47 percent of the members of these regionals also belonged to the SAA. For the eight state organizations surveyed, the percentage is considerably lower. Of a combined membership of 1,269, only 454, or 36 percent, were members of the SAA.²

Typically, the regional and state organizations meet twice a year. Most publish quarterly newsletters, and two publish journals: the Society of Georgia Archivists' *Provenance* (formerly *Georgia Archive*) since 1972 and the Midwest Archives Conference's *Mid-*

¹Charles R. Schultz, *Society of Southwest Archivists, the First Decade* (College Station, Texas: privately published, 1982).

²The data in this section was derived from information gathered by Jay Haymond, former chair of the SAA Regional Archival Activities Committee. The data was published subsequently in the *Directory of Regional Archival Organizations* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1982). Additional information was provided by the SAA office.

western Archivist since 1976. Dues average \$5.50 per year. Almost all are governed by formal constitutions and by-laws and by elected officials, including a president, vice president, secretary-treasurer, and a council or board.

As noted above, the first regionals were organized very rapidly during a particularly fermentative period in the history of the American archival profession. The relationship between these newly founded organizations and the SAA had yet to be determined. It would be an understatement to say that there existed in the early 1970s a climate of mutual apprehension between many of the founding members of the new organizations and an important segment of archivists traditionally and exclusively committed to the SAA.

Perhaps the best way to re-create this climate would be to quote an editorial that appeared in the January 1973 issue of the *Midwest Archives Conference Newsletter*. In the editorial, entitled simply "MAC and the SAA," the relationship between the two organizations was discussed.

Junior partner? Constituent Member? Competitor? These are a few of the possible forms that the future relationship between MAC and the SAA can take. At MAC's founding meeting last May in Chicago an attitude of suspicion and in some instances outright hostility toward the SAA was evidenced by a sizeable number of those in attendance. On the other hand it became clear at the SAA Annual Meeting in Columbus that a number of long-time SAA members viewed the emergence of regional archival organizations such as MAC as a distinct threat to the SAA. At this point the question of how the regional groups will relate to SAA is open. Those who are less than enthusiastic about the SAA maintain that it

is an elitist organization composed in the main of administrators who have little concern for the problems of the secondary level personnel, archivists from smaller institutions, and para-professionals. Other criticisms of the SAA range from the contention that the SAA is a "do nothing organization" to the allegation that it is impossible for less well-heeled archivists to attend functions because of the prohibitive costs.

Some SAA members are equally apprehensive about the regional organizations. They view MAC and its counterparts as an attempt to circumvent, undermine, and even destroy the SAA. They see the new organization as a challenge to the authority and prestige of the SAA.

Given these antagonisms, what course should MAC take? It is clear that while there is some overlap between the SAA and MAC, the two organizations serve distinctly different purposes. The regional organizations are in a position to be in closer touch with the hundreds of archivists who are not members of the SAA. As MAC and the other organizations prosper the SAA necessarily will become more responsive to the needs of the lower layers of the archival pyramid. As the SAA becomes more attractive it too will prosper by drawing in many of the members of the regional organizations. In sum, MAC and the SAA are not and should not be competitors. MAC and the SAA should complement and reinforce each other's functions. A spirit of cooperation and reciprocal trust should be fostered between MAC and the SAA. MAC should develop a working relationship with the SAA wherever possible but should not affiliate either as an institutional or constituent member at this point. A harmonious relationship ultimately will evolve as each organization defines its own role and recognizes the other organization's merits.

The benefits of mutual respect and cooperation will eventually prevail.³

It is obvious that the regionals have flourished during the intervening decade. Indeed, as suggested earlier, the process of localized archival self-organization is not yet complete. While, with the exception of the south, we shall probably see no further multistate organizations emerge, it is quite likely that additional state groups will be organized and even more likely that we will witness the formation of many more local groups. These groups, which are usually much more informal and less structured than their state or regional counterparts, serve primarily social functions and as forums for the discussion of local archival issues and problems.

The growth of the regionals, both in terms of the number of organizations and their total membership, points to the conclusion that, in the words of the song from the movie *Nashville*, "they must be doing something right." Indeed, as the author of the MAC editorial predicted, the regionals and the SAA have developed an informal division of labor, each complementing the other.

The regionals, as smaller and more intimate organizations that usually meet twice a year, are attuned particularly to the needs of their members. A spirit of collegiality prevails within them, making it possible to tackle common problems in concert. Most important, the regionals depend upon a high degree of voluntary participation, involvement, and commitment of their members.

The SAA, too, has grown and matured as a professional organization over the past decade, particularly by establishing a national headquarters administered by a highly competent and dedicated full-time staff. The SAA cen-

tral office has served the SAA membership and the archival profession well. At the same time, however, the existence of the central office has contributed to diminishing membership participation in the affairs of the society. This is especially true of those archivists who comprise a substantial portion of the membership of regional, state, and local organizations: young, entry-level archivists from small shops and parttime and paraprofessional archivists. Thus, the regionals have largely supplanted the SAA as the vehicle by which younger archivists gain much needed organizational experience and professional maturity.

As the SAA dues continue to increase and the expense of attending its annual meeting also grows, especially when it is held on either coast, the regional, state, and local organizations will become even more important for increasing numbers of archivists. Moreover, the regionals have assumed the responsibility for imparting much of the basic archival training that formerly was available only at SAA meetings.

One may be tempted to draw an analogy between archives and baseball, in which the regionals become the minor leagues and the SAA becomes the majors. Upon closer scrutiny, however, such an analogy is proved false. Baseball players do not play concurrently in both the major and minor leagues. Many archivists, on the other hand, are active members of both the SAA and regional organizations. Almost three-quarters of the SAA members belong to regionals, while almost half of the members of a representative selection of regionals are also members of SAA. Many archivists hold concurrent membership in the SAA, in a regional, in a state organization, and in a local group. Based upon these figures it seems that, while the re-

³Midwest Archives Conference *Newsletter*, Vol. 1 (January 1973): 3.

regionals serve an important constituency outside of the SAA, members of the regionals also make up an overwhelming majority of the ranks of the SAA. Certainly the SAA should make a concerted effort to recruit more of the regionals' members and members of the SAA should be encouraged to become active in the regionals.

As to whether the SAA should strive to develop more formal ties with regionals, it seems wiser to leave well enough alone. The relationship between the SAA and the regionals has evolved very much in consonance with the projection of the *MAC Newsletter* editorial quoted above. To formalize ties between the SAA and the regionals, whether this might entail establishing a joint dues structure or incorporating the regionals as sections or satellites of the SAA, would deprive the profession of an important counterweight to the SAA. The more informal, intimate environment prevalent in most regionals has tended to foster the development of innovative, progressive ideas that were later brought into the SAA by members of the regionals. The regionals, as separate entities, allow for the fermentation of ideas that might initially encounter tough sledding in SAA.

As organizations with a common mission, however, the SAA and the regionals should maintain close, cooperative relationships. Such relationships cannot help but benefit the entire archival profession. Moreover, the SAA, as a national organization with a national outlook and one that has substantial resources at its disposal, should take the initiative in insuring that collegial ties with the regionals are established and maintained. Specifically, these cooperative ties might assume a number of forms. In assisting the regionals to perform their important function of providing basic education to

newer archivists, the SAA would, whenever possible, continue its practice of holding jointly-sponsored basic workshops in conjunction with meetings of the regionals. SAA might also explore the possibilities of holding more advanced workshops at regional meetings and of seeking grant funding to support these advanced workshops. In addition, the SAA should make available to the regionals at cost whatever educational or instructional aids it has in its pedagogical arsenal.

Another important function of the regionals is communication. Newsletters published by the regionals often include a wealth of broadly pertinent information that, unfortunately, reaches only a limited readership. The *SAA Newsletter* should devote space to summarizing or excerpting salient articles and information that appears in the regional newsletters. At a minimum, the *SAA Newsletter* should carry an expanded section on news of the regionals. The regionals themselves should become more conscious of sharing each other's newsletters and the valuable information they contain. Similarly, the editor of the *American Archivist* might wish to consider reprinting particularly useful articles that have appeared in the *Midwestern Archivist* or *Georgia Archive*.

In certain instances, the SAA might provide the regionals, at cost, technical assistance such as computerized membership mailing lists and mailing labels.

Finally, the SAA should seek funding to sponsor a national conference at which regional leaders could address common problems faced by their organizations, including finances, membership services, publications, planning of programs and local arrangements, and education. Such a conference would serve not only to further strengthen informal ties with the SAA but would also greatly assist the

regionals in defining and refining their functions and goals.

The SAA and the regionals perform distinct but compatible functions. Their separate missions will best be served by a continuation of the regionals' organizational independence combined with close working relationships with the SAA. The regionals comprise a very uneven group, given differences in their age, size, geographical location, and percentage of experienced archivists among their ranks. As they mature at varying rates, the SAA can be of immeasurable assistance by providing services. By fostering increased communication between the regionals, the SAA can help those of more recent vintage to avoid continually reinventing the wheel.

The dramatic growth of the regionals, both in terms of numbers of organizations and total membership, offers graphic testimony to the fact that they serve a very real need. The SAA, by assisting the regionals wherever possible and encouraging and supporting their continued growth, will benefit in turn as members of the regionals become acquainted with the functions of, and necessity for, a national professional organization. Indeed, in these "circle-the-wagons" times, the more opportunities archivists have for common association the better we will be able collectively to survive the current economic difficulties and carry out our respective missions.

LOCAL, STATE, AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Regional Organizations	Year Founded	Number of Members	Individual Dues	Meetings per Year	Newsletter
New England Archivists	1972	300	\$5.00	spring/fall	NEA Newsletter
Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference	1972	600	\$5.00	spring/fall	The Mid-Atlantic Archivist
South Atlantic Archives and Records Conference	1966	125	none	spring	no
Lake Ontario Archives Conference	N.A.	N.A.	none	spring	no
Midwest Archives Conference	1972	700	\$7.50	spring/fall	MAC Newsletter
Society of Southwest Archivists	1972	127	\$5.00	spring	SSA Newsletter
Conference of Intermountain Archivists	1973	N.A.	\$3.00	spring/fall	CIA Newsletter
Northwest Archivists	1972	150	\$5.00	spring	Easy Access

<u>State Organizations</u>	<u>Year Founded</u>	<u>Numbers of Members</u>	<u>Individual Dues</u>	<u>Meetings per Year</u>	<u>Newsletter</u>
Society of Alabama Archivists	1977	50	\$5.00	spring/fall	Access
Arkansas Archivists and Records Managers	1979	60	\$5.00	fall	Quarterly
Society of California Archivists	1971	300	\$7.50	spring/fall	SCA Newsletter
Society of Colorado Archivists	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Society of Florida Archivists	1983	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Society of Georgia Archivists	1969	300	\$12.00	spring/fall	Quarterly
Society of Indiana Archivists	1972	100	\$3.00	spring/fall	SIA Newsletter
Iowa Historical Materials Preservation Society	1976	130	\$5.00	spring/fall	IHMPS Newsletter
Kentucky Council on Archives	1977	93	\$6.00	spring/fall	no
Society of Mississippi Archivists	1977	256	\$7.50	April	The Primary Source
Society of Ohio Archivists	1968	160	\$7.50	spring/fall	SOA Newsletter
Tennessee Archivists	1977	N.A.	\$5.00	N.A.	N.A.
<u>Local Organizations</u>					
Boston Archivists Group	N.A.	N.A.	none	several	no
Chicago Area Archivists	1982	60	\$3.00	4	News from CAA
D.C. Archivists	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Grand Rapids Archives and Museum Professionals	1982	35	\$5.00	none	no
Kansas City Area Archivists	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Long Island Archives Conference	1974	70	\$3.00	spring/fall	no
New York Archivists Roundtable	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Association of St. Louis Area Archivists	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Twin Cities Archives Roundtable	1982	80	N.A.	3-4	no