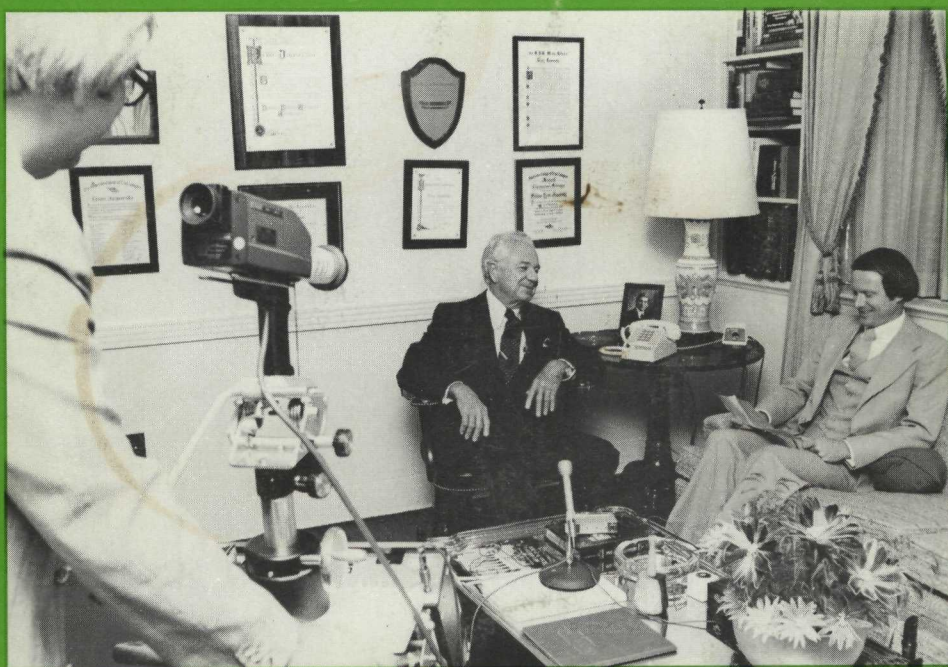


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On the cover: The opening moments of an oral history interview with Leon Jaworski. Thomas Charlton is behind the camera, Jaworski in the center, and W. Frank Newton, professor of law at Baylor University, is at right. See Charlton's article, "Videotaping Oral History: Problems and Prospects," p. 228. Photograph by Chris Hansen, Public Affairs, Baylor University.

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The Forum

FROM THE EDITOR:

After two consecutive issues devoted to single topics—one to collection management and one to outreach—this issue is a return to the more familiar format of articles on a variety of subjects. The pleasures, problems, and pitfalls of videotaping oral history interviews are described in the lead article by a leading practitioner. A review of the archival literature on sampling is provided in the second article. The third article is a review of the education and training of American archivists over three decades. Both archivists and librarians face the problem of deciding whether a particular item should be cataloged and included in the library or should be retained with other materials of the issuing agency and included in the archives. Thus both professions should be interested in the fourth article on fringe or grey literature. The fifth article will serve as an introduction to the Fall 1984 issue, which will be devoted to the topic of automation. That issue is being coordinated by the co-chairs of SAA's Automated Records Task Force.

Of the five articles in this issue, three are revised versions of papers presented at the 1983 annual meeting. The other two articles were written specifically for publication. One of our goals has been to increase the number of articles of the latter type. With this in mind, I am interested in hearing from anyone who

wants to submit a manuscript devoted to the contributions of women (or a particular woman) to the archival profession. Manuscripts should be between fifteen and twenty pages long, and authors should follow the guidelines in the editorial policy published on page 103 of the Winter 1984 issue. If sufficient acceptable manuscripts are submitted, the Fall 1985 issue will be devoted to the contributions of women to the archival profession. Completed manuscripts should be submitted by 1 January 1985. Ideas for articles are welcome at any time.

CHARLES SCHULTZ
Editor

TO THE EDITOR:

Several years ago in another journal two historians, in response to an article I had in the previous issue, devoted nine pages to pointing out the errors of my ways. In a rebuttal I used four lines just to list the terms, not necessarily of endearment, they applied to my article and to me.

In "Invitation to a Bonfire . . . A Reply to Leonard Rapport" (*American Archivist* Winter 1984) Karen Benedict has taken to task "No Grandfather Clause" (*American Archivist* Spring 1981), but with such moderation as to suggest I may be losing the ability to arouse strong feelings.

Ms. Benedict found "No Grandfather Clause" the only article on archival inter-

nal disposal. To Grandfather she has added Bonfire. Keepers of public records can now pay their money and take their choice, a good thing.

LEONARD RAPPORT

National Archives and Records Service

TO THE EDITOR:

I was pleased to see Karen Benedict's response to Leonard Rapport's "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," *American Archivist* 44 (Spring 1981) in the Winter 1984 issue of the *American Archivist* because I believe that such debate is healthy for our profession and because the subject of appraisal needs more attention.

I was not pleased, however, with Ms. Benedict's misreading of the Rapport essay. First, Rapport's article was about *public* records programs where fiscal efficiency and management are not only important but part of our responsibility to the public. Although I agree wholeheartedly with Ms. Benedict that reappraisal must be approached with caution, her case appears much stronger because she has ignored the context of Rapport's article, that it is about public records. Reappraisal, collection transfer, or destruction of records has been, and always will be, an "accepted professional approach to handling space or budgetary constraints" in public records programs. It is, of course, not the only approach.

Ms. Benedict also considers Mr. Rapport's argument as part of "crisis management," an element that is hardly evident in his original essay. Indeed, Rapport argues very cogently that reappraisal is to be part of a regular, systematic effort, not a quickly thrown together, last-minute attempt to open up storage space or to reduce costs.

What bothers me the most, however, is Ms. Benedict's seeming reluctance to make difficult decisions about the fate of records. Rapport states that "unless we

save ... a record copy of every document, there is no way of appraising except according to what we at the time believe to be the correct standards." Benedict is so cautious as to lean in the direction of saving *everything*. She questions usage as a factor, criticizes the questioning of previous appraisal criteria, and worries about the subjectivity of all appraisal standards. Certainly appraisal is subjective and it needs substantial improvement, but this should not deter us from making difficult decisions, exercising every possible caution, unless we can save every shred of documentation.

Finally, I cannot let pass without comment Ms. Benedict's concluding statement that "society" values institutional records, that this "makes the archivist's job significant," and that "society feels that it is not the amount of research conducted in archival records that determines their value but rather the contribution to human knowledge and to the public good that result." I wish that this were true, and I certainly covet the society that she has discovered. If it were true we would not be fighting for the independence of the National Archives, or working for archival institutions that can only be described as "impoverished," or witnessing the destruction—through neglect and abuse, not reappraisal—of much of our documentary heritage. Ms. Benedict has certainly overstated her case with her conclusion.

Leonard Rapport's essay was not intended to be an absolute statement of archival canon but to stimulate further thought and writing. Karen Benedict has provided us with some things to ponder, but unfortunately has misread Rapport's essay and overstated much of her case. Obviously, more needs to be written about this subject.

RICHARD J. COX

*Alabama Department of Archives
and History*

AUTHOR'S RESPONSE:

Since Richard Cox feels that, "debate is healthy for our profession," I will respond to his criticism of my article. First, I want to correct his misapprehension that I did not comprehend that Leonard Rapport was discussing public record programs. I understood that full well, and my comments were also directed to public record programs, as well as others. Perhaps in Richard Cox's estimation my case will be re-strengthened because the context is the same for both articles. I hope so.

I wish to make clear my point that reappraisal, collection transfer, or destruction of records do have a valid place in a responsible, professional collection management program for an archives. However, they are not a panacea for space or budgetary problems. I feel that this type of application constitutes crisis management. They should be an integral part of a cogent, well-reasoned, and systematic, written appraisal policy for an institution. That does not mean periodically walking through the stacks searching for little used records which can be disposed of from the collection. It means having a formal policy which reflects the purpose and goals of the institution; it means having a clearly articulated policy which guides the archivist in the initial selection of records to be accessioned. Without such an appraisal policy it is easy to see how egregious mistakes in judgment can occur.

I feel that Mr. Cox misread my statements on appraisal. I definitely do not favor saving *everything*. In fact, unlike Len Rapport, I would never favor saving every document, however trivial, if it were possible to do so. I believe that appraisal is the archivist's most important function. Appraisal policies deserve much more attention than most institutions appear to allot them. My main concern is the archivists who like to think of

themselves as hard-headed pragmatists, and who want cut-and-dried solutions to the problems we face. Use of records seems like a good, hard-headed statistic to use in reappraisal. I question its validity. To me evaluating records on the basis of use is anathema to the nature of archives. If a group of records has intrinsic historical value, that value is not diminished if no one uses those records for one hundred fifty years.

As archivists for public and private institutions we do have responsibilities, both fiscal and managerial, to our respective constituencies. However, those responsibilities are not bound by time. The decisions that we make will affect future generations of researchers. It is, in my estimation, myopic to rely upon present use as a criterion for reappraisal of records.

As for my conclusion, I will stand by it. Perhaps I am extraordinarily fortunate that in my circle of academic friends and business associates the overwhelming majority have esteem for archives and archivists. Or perhaps it is because I believe that being an archivist is a truly worthwhile and intellectual endeavor which makes a valuable contribution to society, that other people share my estimation. For those archivists who dwell upon their impoverished state and lack of respect it may be a self-fulfilling prophecy that others share their point of view.

KAREN BENEDICT
Nationwide Insurance

TO THE EDITOR:

As the Chairman of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference I appreciate Connell B. Gallagher's favorable review of *Guidelines for Archives and Manuscript Repositories*, (*American Archivist* Winter 1984). It is reassuring to have the valuable educational work performed by the regional archival associa-

tions so recognized. I would like to identify those who labored to prepare the *Guidelines*: Cynthia G. Swank chaired the task force and served as principal author. The task force consisted of Mary Ellen Gleason, S.C., Barbara Hearn, Margaret Jerrido, Terry McNealy, and Erika Thickman Miller. The second edition of the *Guidelines* is priced at \$2.50.

BRUCE AMBACHER
Chairman
Mid-Atlantic Regional
Archives Conference

TO THE EDITOR:

Frank Burke, in his "Archival Cooperation" (*American Archivist*, Summer 1983), substantially mis-states the original and present mission of the National Information Systems Task Force (NISTF). The record should be set straight.

NISTF never set out "to recommend a universal software system for archives and manuscripts," if for no other reason than we did not believe that was possible or desirable. Frank did believe for a while that we were attempting to displace SPINDEX, and perhaps that is the basis for his assertion. Moreover, NISTF did not "retreat to the point where it is now attempting to recommend standards for description." On the contrary, we considered and rejected the option of attempting to define descriptive standards.

NISTF has provided the potential for information exchange among archives by establishing a data element dictionary and a MARC format for archives and manuscripts. The data element dictionary is permissive, rather than prescriptive, and it is intended to encompass existing descriptive standards. NISTF flirted with the notion of a prescriptive data element standard as the initial step in establishing descriptive standards, but we rejected that

route because it is a bog, as Frank notes in his paper. Archivists can use NISTF's data elements and the new MARC format whether they use AACR-II, a NHPRC survey descriptive standard, or something else.

Returning to software, NISTF never attempted to look for a "universal software system" for very good reasons. We knew that we had to divorce software from data in our solution because there is no possibility of universal software in the foreseeable future. Many archival institutions will use many different kinds of software because they have different needs. Archivists must reject the notion of universal software which has gained acceptance because of a naive assumption that common software is a prerequisite for information exchange. SPINDEX supporters also promulgated the doctrine that archives are somehow so unique that only software designed especially for archives will do. This dysfunctional myth lives on even though SPINDEX is moribund.

The NISTF products (data element dictionary and MARC format) provide an opportunity for archivists to exchange data. The MARC format in particular opens up the great potential of library software for archives. Archivists should explore and develop these potential benefits of NISTF's work.

Because we hope that NISTF's work will prove beneficial to the archival professions, it is important to correct Frank Burke's interpretation of what we were doing and what we have produced.

Richard H. Lytle
Smithsonian Institution