

That We Shall Truly Deserve the Title Of "Profession":

The Training and Education of Archivists, 1930-1960

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Abstract: The founders of the Society of American Archivists faced tremendous challenges as they attempted to standardize archival practices through educational programs. They grappled with problems that still plague us. When the National Archives was founded, standardized training was seriously discussed. Samuel Flagg Bemis was appointed to chair the first SAA Committee on Education and Training. Beginning in 1939, American University offered courses in archival administration, but no attention was paid to the needs of manuscript curators. During the 1950s some archivists questioned their professional status and identity and proposed certification and rigorous SAA membership requirements. Their proposals were not implemented. Since a considerable number of archivists are trained historians, it is surprising that we have neglected to examine our own history before embarking on solutions to the lack of standardized education for archivists.

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FOR MORE THAN FIFTY YEARS archivists have been concerned with education and training for custodians of primary source materials. This concern has been reflected in sessions at annual meetings of the Society of American Archivists and in articles published in the *American Archivist*. Yet, the issue of appropriate education and training for archivists has not been given adequate attention. Archivists have failed to resolve such major issues as the history department versus library school setting for archival training or the controversy over individual versus institutional certification. In a recent article on archival cooperation, Frank G. Burke noted that since 1938 only twenty-two articles on education had been published in the *American Archivist*, while fifty-five articles had been devoted to arrangement and description. Burke added, "It would seem that the leaders of the Society are not concerned about the future of the profession and that they are not interested in having the Society lead the movement for regularization."¹

The founding fathers and mothers in the SAA faced tremendous challenges as they attempted to standardize archival practices through the establishment of education and training programs, but they grappled unsuccessfully with problems that still plague us today. Their reluctance to come to terms with these

problems resulted in the creation of countless committees and task forces on education and training staffed with archivists holding diametrically opposed views. Personalities, individual vanity, and SAA politics frequently inhibited various committees from making effective contributions.

Peter Wosh recently surveyed articles on education and training in the *American Archivist* and concluded that archivists had reached a consensus on major issues by the 1960s.² These articles are misleading, however, for archivists apparently wanted to convey an impression of togetherness and consensus on education when, in fact, a consensus never really existed. Examination of the personal papers of leading archival administrators and the records of the Society of American Archivists reveals that archivists have continually engaged in a struggle over the issue of appropriate education and training. Wosh, like other archivists before him, examined education and training within the context of the sociological literature on professionalization, in which it is emphasized that a group of individuals becomes a profession after a separate organization is created. The organization then establishes standards that restrict and control entry into the profession through some type of licensing or certification pro-

¹Frank G. Burke, "Archival Cooperation," *American Archivist* 46 (1983): 302.

²Peter J. Wosh, "Creating a Semiprofessional Profession: Archivists View Themselves," *Georgia Archive* 10 (Fall 1982): 1-13. Among the leading articles on education and training published in the *American Archivist* prior to 1960 were: Samuel Flagg Bemis, "The Training of Archivists in the United States," 2 (1939): 154-61; Solon J. Buck, "The Training of American Archivists," 4 (1941): 84-90; Bertha E. Josephson, "Improving our Historical Societies," 8 (1945): 194-201; Philip C. Brooks, "The First Decade of the Society of American Archivists," 10 (1947): 115-28; Christopher Crittenden, "The Archivist as a Public Servant," 12 (1949): 3-8; Karl L. Trever, "The Organization and Status of Archival Training in the United States," 11 (1948): 154-63; Waldo Leland, "The First Conference of Archivists, December 1909: The Beginnings of a Profession," 13 (1950): 109-20; Philip C. Brooks, "Archivists and their Colleagues: Common Denominators," 14 (1951): 33-45; G. Philip Bauer, "Recruitment, Training, and Promotion in the National Archives," 18 (1955): 291-305; Morris L. Radoff, "What Should Bind Us Together," 19 (1956): 3-10; Ernst Posner, "What, Then, is the American Archivist, this new Man?" 20 (1957): 3-11; and Everett O. Aldredge, "Archival Training in a Record Center," 21 (1958): 401-07.

gram.³ One of the more useful accounts of professionalization has been written by Thomas J. Haskell, who defines the process of professionalization more broadly as the search for authority and the creation of a community of the competent within a discipline. By Haskell's definition, archivists are not professionals, possibly because we are, in his terms, "a controversial community" of practitioners, and because we cannot agree on the appropriate criteria for admittance of new members into the community of the competent.⁴

Long before the establishment of the Society of American Archivists in 1936, custodians of primary source materials discussed standards for appropriate education and training for archivists. At the American Historical Association meeting in 1909, Waldo Leland organized the first conference of archivists. A Public Archives Commission had been organized by historians in 1899, but archivists met for the first time ten years later to discuss common problems faced in the care and administration of primary source materials. Every year after the first meeting, theoretical and practical

matters were given attention. At the 1912 meeting Leland presented a paper entitled "Some Fundamental Principles in Relation to Archives," and Victor Paltsits proposed that an archives manual be written to assist custodians of primary source materials.⁵

It was not until the National Archives was established, however, that systematic and standardized training for archivists was seriously discussed. In 1934, Robert C. Binkley, an academic historian from Western Reserve University and chairman of the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council's Joint Committee on Materials for Research, wrote to R.D.W. Connor, the new Archivist of the United States, to suggest that a summer institute be established for the training of staff at the National Archives. He expressed surprise that systematic training programs had not yet been established: "It is a rather remarkable fact that the training in archival administration has not been a part of the higher academic center in America, a situation that contrasts to our disadvantage with the situation in Europe."⁶ T. R. Schellenberg, a member of the staff

³Rue Bucher and Anselm Strauss, "Professions in Process," *American Journal of Sociology* 66 (January 1961): 325-34; Mark Abrahamson, *The Professional in the Organization* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1967); George H. Daniels, "The Process of Professionalization in American Science: The Emergent Period, 1820-1860," *Isis* 58 (Summer 1967): 151-66; William J. Goode, "Community within a Community: The Professions," *American Sociological Review* 25 (April 1960): 194-200; Harold C. Wilensky, "The Professionalization of Everyone," *American Journal of Sociology* 70 (September 1964): 137-58; Ernest Greenwood, "Attributes of a Profession?" *Social Work* 2 (July 1957): 45-55; Margatti Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Wilbert Ellis Moore, *The Professions: Roles and Rules* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970); William J. McGlothlin, *The Professional Schools* (New York: The Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1964); Talcot Parsons, "The Professions and Social Structure," *Social Forces* 17 (May 1939): 457-67; Phillip Elliot, *The Sociology of the Professions* (New York: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1972); Amitai Etzioni, *A Sociological Reader on Complex Organizations* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1969); and Thomas J. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

⁴Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science*, pp. 18-19, 64-77, and 162-89.

⁵See Charles H. Haskins to Waldo Leland, 11 April 1912, American Historical Association records, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (American Historical Association records hereafter cited AHA records); Haskins to Leland, 13 April 1912; Buck to Paltsits, 7 October 1913; Leland to Lewis Simon, 4 July 1916; and George H. Fuller to Clarence Alvord, 17 September 1917, AHA records.

⁶Robert C. Binkley to R.D.W. Connor, 6 December 1934, Joint Committee on Materials for Research records, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (Joint Committee on Materials for Research records hereafter cited JCMR records).

of the National Archives, agreed with Binkley that a summer institute should be established, and he stated: "The seminar, arranged almost immediately after the opening of the archives, would have the desirable effect of giving scientific direction to the administration of the archives from the outset."⁷

More practical matters consumed Connor's energies, however. The new building needed to be properly furnished and equipped, and staff members were immediately confronted with the overwhelming task of getting control over 150 years worth of records created by the federal government. The training program proposed for the summer of 1935 was not held.⁸

Leading archival administrators at the National Archives began to talk of establishing a professional organization apart from the American Historical Association. Beginning in 1935, they wanted recognition of the distinctiveness of their work. The archival administrators were historians who were custodians of records, whereas most members of the American Historical Association were historians who used records. Archivists all over the United States looked to the National Archives for leadership. They expected staff at the Archives to set standards for education and training and to provide information on archival practices. Solon J. Buck, then the director of publications at the Archives, believed that if a separate professional organization, i.e., "an American Institute of Archivists," were created, one of its major tasks would be the establishment of standards for education and training.⁹

Margaret Cross Norton, Director of the Illinois State Library, voiced a similar concern:

I think we are ready to develop an archival science. One of the greatest handicaps I have in getting proper assistants appointed to my department is that I cannot say, "Here are the qualifications for assistants, nationally accepted standards; here are the schools and training courses." No two archivists in the country have the same training, and I have never heard an American definition of what an archivist is. We need recognized standards for archival training, and some place to get that training.... Unless we make ourselves into a recognized profession, doing recognized professional work ... and not glorified filing, we are not going to progress very far. That is why I am in the group anxious to form some sort of organization.¹⁰

At the meeting of the American Historical Association in 1935 a committee was formed to discuss the creation of a separate professional organization for archivists; and in 1936, the Society of American Archivists was formed. Two of the first committees established were those on terminology and on education and training.¹¹

A.R. Newsome, the first president of SAA, appointed Samuel Flagg Bemis to chair the Committee on Education and Training in March 1937, because Bemis was purported to have had a great interest in the education of archivists. Bemis' committee was comprised mainly of academically trained and practicing historians, only one of whom had actually worked in an archives. The committee

⁷Theodore Schellenberg to Solon J. Buck, ?December 1934, JCMR records.

⁸Schellenberg to Leland, 13 December 1934 and Leland to Binkley, 19 December 1934, JCMR records.

⁹Buck to Theodore Blegen, 15 October 1935; Buck to Margaret Cross Norton, 23 October 1935; and Buck to Blegen, 27 November 1935, Solon J. Buck Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹⁰Margaret Cross Norton to A.R. Newsome, 15 April 1935, AHA records.

¹¹"Committee of Ten on the Organization of Archivists," December 1935, Buck Papers.

was “to consider the education and training appropriate for those desirous of entering the archival profession, both general and technical, and to promote projects for making such training available.”¹² The committee never met, but its members corresponded; and in July 1937, just four months after he was appointed, Bemis issued his report. He proposed a two-class structure for the training of archivists. Archivists of the first class would plan, direct, and administer the work conducted in libraries, historical societies, and archives. This group should be trained in American history and hold the Ph.D. degree. They should be competent in several European languages and have conducted research for the Ph.D. using a wide variety of primary sources. Archivists of the second class should hold master’s degrees in history or the social sciences and supplement this coursework with library techniques in cataloging and bibliographic methods. Archivists in this group would perform the more technical aspects of archival work. Bemis concluded:

Associating the training of archivists with work for the doctorate in American history will afford the student some latitude of choice for a later career: after he receives the degree, if he does not prefer to go into archival work or does not find the proper opportunity to do so immediately, he would still have an avenue of teaching American history open to him.¹³

This is quite an interesting contrast with

the situation facing history Ph.D.’s today.

Bemis presented the report at the annual meeting of the SAA in 1938, and it was published in the *American Archivist* in 1939, virtually unchanged from the version issued in July 1937. Apparently, few members of the SAA questioned the two-class structure Bemis proposed, because no further discussions were held. Bemis resigned as chairman of the Committee on Education and Training in 1939 and was congratulated for a job well done. His report continues to have influence today.¹⁴

Although Bemis emphasized training in American history as being the most important, other archivists had considered library school training to be viable. Before the establishment of formal archival training courses, Solon J. Buck argued that training in library schools might be appropriate. In 1936 he wrote to Austin P. Evans, of the library school at Columbia University:

While it is true that the work of archivists is very different from that of librarians, I am inclined to think that it might be desirable for would-be-archivists to take some work in classification and cataloging in a library school, at least until such time as courses in the classification and cataloging of archives are worked out. After all, the fundamental principles in handling the two types of material are virtually the same.¹⁵

Buck later abandoned this view and

¹²Trever, “The Organization and Status of Archival Training in the United States,” *American Archivist* 11 (April 1948): 154; Philip C. Brooks to Samuel Flagg Bemis, 2 March 1937, and Bemis to Brooks, 14 July 1937, Society of American Archivists records, University of Wisconsin, Madison (Society of American Archivists records hereafter cited SAA records).

¹³Report of the Committee on Education and Training, enclosure, Bemis to Brooks, 14 July 1937, SAA records.

¹⁴Samuel Flagg Bemis, “The Training of Archivists in the United States,” *American Archivist* 2 (July 1939): 154–61; and Brooks to Bemis, 9 March 1939, SAA records.

¹⁵Buck to Austin P. Evans, 14 February 1936, Buck Papers.

argued against the training of archivists in a library school setting. It was also in 1936 that Margaret Cross Norton proposed the establishment of a two-year Master of Library Science in Archives degree program. The first year would be a traditional library science program and the second year would be devoted to training in archival methods. Norton recommended undergraduate training in history, government, or political science. Unfortunately, Norton's proposed two-year degree program was never seriously pursued.¹⁶

In 1937, Evans recruited Buck to teach the first course in archives administration at Columbia. "Archives and Historical Manuscripts," offered during the winter semester in 1938-39, was described as "A study of the character, significance, and use of archival and other manuscript materials, of European and American practice in the administration of collections of such materials, and of the principles of archival economy with special reference to the problems of American archivists."¹⁷ Buck noted, "I expect that my course will be rather scrappy the first year, for there is no organized body of knowledge of archival economy that is applicable to American conditions."¹⁸ He spent considerable time in the course lecturing on techniques in arrangement, description, preservation, and selection of equipment and supplies. He offered the course only once; it was not repeated because of a lack of funds.¹⁹

Norton taught a summer course at Columbia in 1940. She surveyed the

"American practice and administration of archives" and paid particular attention to similarities in the nature of the work performed by archivists and librarians. Norton maintained that, "One of the problems which needs clarification is the distinction between training in the use of archives by scholars and training in the techniques of archival administration."²⁰ This was aptly demonstrated by the fact that administrators at Columbia recruited Abbot Smith, of Bard College, to teach a course called "Archival Sources of American History" after Buck's course was not repeated. Apparently, they felt that the two courses were comparable.²¹

The lack of professionally trained staff at the National Archives enabled Buck to persuade American University to offer courses in archival administration. Beginning in 1939 American University offered course work, and the National Archives provided internships. Thus, both the theoretical and the practical aspects of archival work were fused together. Course content in the American University program was virtually identical to that included by Buck in the earlier course at Columbia. He recruited Ernst Posner, who had been a professionally trained and practicing archivist in Germany, to assist him. While Posner was certainly well qualified to administer European archives, he was probably not the best person to lecture on archival administration in the United States, because he had never worked in an American archives. Of seventeen lectures in his course, five

¹⁶Margaret Cross Norton, "The Archives Department as an Administrative Unit of Government," ca. 1936, SAA records.

¹⁷Buck to Blegen, 4 February 1937; Buck to Evans, 13 February 1937; Buck to Evans, 24 February 1937; and course description, "Archives and Historical Manuscripts," Buck Papers.

¹⁸Buck to Theodore Pease, 28 May 1938, Buck Papers.

¹⁹Course outline for "Archives and Historical Manuscripts," Buck Papers.

²⁰Norton to Robert C. Binkley, 6 October 1939, JCMR records; and announcement of Norton's course, February 1940, SAA records.

²¹R.D.W. Connor to Waldo Leland, 13 March 1940, Buck Papers.

were devoted to the history of archival administration in various European countries.²²

The American University courses in archival administration served as models for courses later established by other institutions. In 1941 Buck was invited to serve on the Social Science Research Council's Committee on Research in the History of Administrative Institutions, and he used the appointment to promote training in administrative history for archivists:

The relationship between archival work and administrative history is a very close one. Archivists cannot understand, arrange, describe, and service the materials in their custody without considerable knowledge of the history of the agencies that created or assembled those materials.²³

Buck and Posner changed the course content periodically to reflect the changing nature of archival work. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, increasing attention was paid to business records and records management, and more field trips were scheduled to different repositories. The American University program had serious limitations, however, since it was directed primarily toward custodians of large masses of public records. Most students in the program were employees of the National Archives who needed some theoretical underpinnings for their on-the-job experience. Few students majoring in history took the course with the intent of being archivists, and virtually no attention was paid to the needs of manuscript curators in small local reposi-

tories. This realization may have prompted Posner to redirect the focus of the Committee on Education and Training when he assumed the chairmanship in 1942.²⁴

The W.P.A. Historical Records Survey revealed that large masses of local records were not being properly cared for because "lay custodians," as Posner called them, were untrained. Posner was satisfied that the educational needs of practicing archivists were being met through the American University's courses, and he turned his attention to proposals that would promote short-term training for lay custodians of records and librarians, maintaining that "the administration of manuscripts in a general library lacking a special manuscript division and trained personnel is in great need of proper guidance."²⁵ Posner believed that if regional training centers were established and bibliographies and how-to-do-it manuals were prepared, a great deal would be accomplished. He asked Alexander Wall, of the New-York Historical Society, to serve on the Committee on Education and Training, and Wall drew up a list of repositories and universities that might be approached to offer training in other parts of the country.²⁶

Not all the members of Posner's committee agreed with this shift of priorities. Clarence E. Walton, former professor of history turned library director at Harvard College, contended that, "it is time we considered the necessity for establishing proper instruction on the nature and use of archives in our universities and in

²²Waldo Leland to Robert C. Binkley, 14 April 1938, JCMR records; Buck to Charles Williamson, 3 November 1939, and Buck to John E. Casewell, 19 February 1940, Buck Papers; and "A Programme for the Training of Archivists in Washington, D.C.," SAA records.

²³Buck to William Anderson, 14 January 1941, and "Preliminary Suggestions Concerning Broad Lines of Research in the Evaluation of American Administrative Institutions," 15 February 1941, Buck Papers.

²⁴Brooks to Posner, 7 March 1940, and Buck to Lester Cappon, 29 November 1940, SAA records; Buck to Leland, 11 April 1941, and Buck to Leland, 20 March 1942, Buck Papers.

²⁵Posner to R.D.W. Connor, 2 December 1942, SAA records.

²⁶Philip C. Brooks to Alexander Wall, 24 January 1942; Posner, memorandum to Committee on the Training of Archivists, 16 March 1942; and Wall to Posner, 1 April 1942, SAA records.

centers of advanced study. This instruction should be from the point of view of the scholar, not of the archivist."²⁷ Posner agreed that attention should be paid to scholarship to avoid training a "species of mere technicians and higher grade file clerks,"²⁸ but maintained that technical training was lacking.

Norton was also appointed to the Committee on Education and Training and endorsed Posner's plan for the establishment of regional training centers. She also thought that the SAA should establish a speakers bureau and tap the resources of women's voluntary organizations to assist in processing organizational records. Norton maintained that "mere theoretical discussion of an ideal training program would be of little avail as long as our basis of practical experience could not be broadened because of the war."²⁹

Financial constraints during World War II prevented the establishment of regional training centers, and Posner exercised less leadership and direction over the Committee on Education and Training because the American Council of Learned Societies had appointed him to serve on its Committee on the Preservation of Cultural Treasures in War Areas. Norton was elected president of the SAA in 1943; and in December, with the SAA Council's permission, she replaced the Committee on Education and Training with the Committee on Local Records. She hoped that the new committee would prepare a manual of archival techniques for distribution to lay custodians and

librarians, but the manual was never prepared.³⁰

In November 1944, the Society of American Archivists joined with the American Association for State and Local History to form a Joint Committee on Internships. Members maintained that practical experience in the application of archival techniques was an essential component of archival education. The Joint Committee noted that physicians underwent internships before they earned the M.D. degree and that anthropologists and archaeologists conducted field work to earn their degrees. Although it never worked out a program to establish internships, the Joint Committee may have prompted the National Archives to begin offering summer institutes in cooperation with American University and the Maryland Hall of Records. The first summer institute was held in 1945.³¹

In 1946, the SAA/AASLH Joint Committee on Internships proposed the creation of a "National Council on Specialized Library Techniques" which would offer fellowships for students in the social sciences and humanities to pursue a three-year program that would train them to assume positions in libraries, archives, museums, and historic sites. The National Council would work with these agencies and local universities to establish coursework and internships. A placement service would be created to ensure that these well-trained graduates would obtain employment. Although a budget was proposed, no specific courses were suggested. Buck, then the president of the

²⁷Walton to Posner, 4 April 1942, SAA records.

²⁸Posner to Walton, 6 May 1942, SAA records.

²⁹Lester Cappon to Posner, 22 December 1942; Posner to R.D.W. Connor, 2 December 1942; Posner, Report of the Committee on the Training of Archivists, 1943, SAA records.

³⁰Edwin Davis to Posner, 2 February 1943; R.D.W. Connor to Posner, 23 February 1943; Norton to Posner, 15 March 1943; Norton to Posner, 19 March 1943; Posner to Norton, 18 May 1943; Posner to Norton, 1 August 1943; and Norton to Posner, 8 December 1943, SAA records.

³¹Lester Cappon to Herbert Keller, 21 November 1944, and Announcement of the National Archives Summer Institute, 1945, SAA records.

SAA, appointed Norton and Oliver W. Holmes to serve on the National Council. Holmes half-heartedly endorsed the proposal, and Norton declined to serve, maintaining that she was not in agreement with the objectives and that the unpaid labor of the student-trainees would be exploited. Some SAA members maintained that by appointing Norton and Holmes, Buck killed the program before it had a chance to get underway. The National Council never met and nothing was accomplished.³²

In 1952–53 the American Historical Association and the Society of American Archivists joined forces to prevent the removal of Wayne C. Grover from the position as Archivist of the United States. President Dwight D. Eisenhower apparently wanted to make the position a political appointment. Although the joint efforts of archivists and historians prevented this from happening, the incident may have prompted archivists to question their professional status and identity. In 1953 Dolores C. Renze wrote to leading archival administrators to propose the creation of separate membership categories within the SAA. She maintained that the SAA needed to create standards that would make archivists into a more “professional grouping,” and she suggested three categories of membership: *Certified Professional Archivists*, *Registered Archivists*, and *Associate Members*. An “American Institute of Archivists” would be created within the SAA to offer annual examinations and oversee the certification process. Renze was aware that her proposal would create controversy: “We should, I think go

slowly, be careful not to be too restrictive as to general membership in the Society, but at the same time offer some incentive to those who really wish to attain professional distinction as ‘Archivists’ rather than ‘Assistant Librarians’ or ‘Records Clerks.’”³³

Most of those responding to Renze’s proposal felt that membership in the Society should not be restrictive, yet they were concerned with the recognition of professional stature and accomplishments and with the need to establish standards for education and training. One respondent wrote:

I am sympathetic with the idea that membership in the Society should include anyone sufficiently interested in the subject of archives to pay dues and want to keep informed on developments in the field, but I do feel also that one of the purposes of the Society is to exercise certain controls over the profession ... that ... is usually one of the main purposes of all professional associations ... to establish standards in the field and to exercise some surveillance over those qualified to pass as members of a profession.³⁴

A number of the responses that Renze received reveal a thinly-veiled insecurity and reservations about the establishment of a certification program under which individual archivists may not have been able to qualify. Norton wrote: “Naturally we are all interested in upholding such standards for archivists that we shall truly deserve the title of professionals.”³⁵ She believed, however, that SAA membership should be unrestricted and that it

³²“Preliminary Report of the Committee on Internships of the Society of American Archivists and of the American Association for State and Local History,” 1945–46; Margaret Cross Norton to Lester Cappon, 18 January 1946; Oliver W. Holmes to Cappon, 15 January 1946; Herbert Brayer to Virginia Gambrell, 29 January 1946; and Christopher Crittenden to Cappon, 26 August 1946, SAA records.

³³Renze to Philip C. Brooks, 26 May 1953, Buck Papers; and American Historical Association Resolution, 27 December 1952, Waldo Gifford Leland Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³⁴Enclosure, Summary of Responses, Renze to Brooks, 21 August 1953, SAA records.

³⁵Margaret Cross Norton to Renze, 14 October 1953, Buck Papers.

would be difficult to impose standards on untrained, but practicing, archivists. She proposed that the SAA establish a committee to evaluate the civil service requirements for archival personnel. Noting that previous SAA committees on education had limited success, she added: "If we get it further this year than to have each archivist set down in black and white the qualifications he thinks his successors should have, and what sort of assistants he would employ if he had a free hand, the study would be most helpful."³⁶ Wayne C. Grover replied:

No one is more interested in raising the professional standards of archivists than I am, but I am very dubious of any scheme that would put the Society of American Archivists into the business of making certifications as to the qualifications of particular individuals.³⁷

Grover was president of the SAA in 1953, and he was interested enough in the problem to establish a Committee on Professional Standards and Training, although its composition was flawed from the start. He asked Buck to chair the committee and all the living past presidents of the SAA to serve on it. This group, which in the past had had few innovative ideas on education, could not have been expected to accomplish much. The committee had a new chairman each year, thus ensuring that there would be no continuity of leadership and direction. Buck's committee met only once, at the annual SAA meeting in 1954. He assembled all of the comments that Renze had received and issued a report. The committee was against the establishment of separate membership categories within the SAA, but Buck did succeed in

generating interest in Norton's plan to discern what qualifications employers of archivists desired. Although Buck also asked the committee to propose a plan for individual awards or certificates for outstanding members, this was not pursued. It was in Buck's committee, however, that the idea for SAA Fellows originated.³⁸

Grover succeeded Buck as chairman of the Committee on Professional Standards and Training. In his view, one of its principal tasks was to formulate guidelines on education for entry-level positions and to disseminate them to employers. To obtain information on the qualifications employers of archivists desired, Grover called on Mary Givens Bryan, State Archivist of Georgia and chairman of the SAA's Committee on State Records. Bryan was appointed by the Secretary of State, who gave no thought to the qualifications of personnel. Her makeshift staff was comprised of typists, technicians, and file clerks. The situation she confronted in Georgia was probably not unusual. The lack of professional cohesiveness and visibility in the larger society, combined with a low status in comparison with other professionals, was an even more pressing problem thirty years ago.³⁹ Committee member Philip C. Brooks sympathized with Bryan and other state archivists who were forced to contend with untrained staff. He wrote: "What I believe is wanted is something that will aid archivists in obtaining recognition chiefly from those about them—for example state officials in their own locality."⁴⁰ Brooks, however, avoided discussion of the difficult problem of establishing standards to measure the competence of prac-

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Grover to Renze, 19 October 1953, Buck Papers.

³⁸Buck to Grover, 26 February 1954, Buck Papers.

³⁹Grover to Mary Givens Bryan, 3 December 1954, and Bryan to Grover, 5 January 1955, SAA records.

⁴⁰Brooks to Grover, 15 March 1955, SAA records.

ting archivists; but he added, "We ought to be able to tell people in allied disciplines why we call ourselves archivists, what we do, and what kind of qualifications one should have to join us."⁴¹

Grover's committee accomplished very little. Renze was greatly discouraged by these continual failures and contended that the committee was too eager to solve complicated, long-range problems in a few meetings. She insisted that, "We must sooner or later establish for ourselves certain and proper standards against which we can measure the work of the individuals who engage in archival practice in the broad sense of a profession."⁴² In correspondence with Ernst Posner she asked: "Do you think it is worth while continuing the effort to do something? Or is it best annually to just make fine speeches and gestures with the hope that exposure and the mere passage of time will produce the qualitative achievement that we all must surely desire to a greater or lesser degree?"⁴³ Renze compared her role as Membership Chairman to that of a glorified magazine subscription agent: "In inviting individuals of worth and substance to submit applications [the SAA] offers little of promise or dignity to indicate that our sole requirement is a vague interest in records/archives and six dollars; that our principal objective is to attract members in quantity."⁴⁴ Renze's plan for the establishment of rigorous admission standards for the SAA and her proposal for

individual certification for members were not implemented.

In 1956 Morris Radoff chaired the Committee on Professional Standards and Training. The proposal to honor individual archivists who made outstanding contributions to the SAA was only reluctantly accepted. The committee did not establish rigorous criteria for fellowship awards; devoid of high standards, the awards were practically meaningless to those outside of the SAA. The committee did not acknowledge or deal with the difference between personal recognition for achievements in the society, on the one hand, and the establishment of standards for the training of archivists in entry-level positions, on the other. Once the committee agreed to make individual awards, they spent the next year quibbling over the selection process—who would do the selecting, the number to be selected, and the criteria for selection. The criteria included at least five years of archival experience, writings of a superior quality, and at least five years of membership in the SAA. In 1957 the first SAA Fellows were selected.⁴⁵

Since a considerable number of archivists are professionally trained historians, it is surprising that we have neglected to examine our own history before embarking on proposed solutions to the lack of standardized education and training for archivists. The same ideas that were tried and found wanting in the 1940s and 1950s were once again resurrected in the 1960s and 1970s. Without a

⁴¹Ibid. Also see Grover, "Report of the Chairman, Committee on Professional Standards and Training, Society of American Archivists, for the period ending September 1, 1955," SAA records.

⁴²Renze to Ernst Posner, 19 October 1955, SAA records.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵See Grover, Resolution on Fellows, 24 August 1955; Renze to Posner, 20 October 1955, Brooks to Renze, 4 January 1956; SAA records; Radoff, form letter to committee members, 28 February 1956, SAA records; Radoff, form letter to committee members, 9 May 1956, Leland Papers; Buck to Radoff, 13 May 1956, Buck Papers; Radoff, form letter to committee members, 14 June 1956, SAA records; Radoff, form letter to committee members, 20 August 1956; Radoff, "Report," October 1957; Renze to Buck, 14 November 1957, Buck Papers; and Christopher Crittenden to Posner, 23 October 1959, SAA records.

knowledge of our history, we are condemned to repeat the mistakes of the past. Perhaps an awareness of what transpired in the formative years of the SAA will prevent us from repeating the

mistakes of our predecessors and enable us to begin our transformation from a "species of mere technicians and higher grade file clerks" to a genuine profession.