

Shorter Features

CHRISTOPHER BEAM, *Editor*

The Shorter Features department serves as a forum for sharply focused archival topics which may not require a full-length article. Members of the Society and others knowledgeable in areas of archival interest are encouraged to submit papers for consideration. Shorter Features should range from 500 to 1,000 words in length and contain no annotation. Papers should be sent to Christopher Beam, Shorter Features Editor, the *American Archivist*, National Archives and Records Service (NNFD), Washington, DC 20408.

The Appraisal Policy of the Ohio State Archives

DAVID LEVINE

For the past two years the State Archives at the Ohio Historical Society has been engaged in a reevaluation of both its holdings and its accession policies. An important result of this self-analysis was the preparation of two documents that have clarified the institution's appraisal and accessioning activities. Since 1959, when the State Archives was formally established, state agency records have been accessioned fortuitously. Because of the immediate need to identify valuable nineteenth-century records and prevent their destruction, the initial practice of taking in anything old was not entirely ill advised. Now, however, with virtually all extant nineteenth-century records safely

in the archives' custody, a more selective approach is essential.

Originally, the archives staff planned an appraisal policy that would both specify criteria for evaluating records series for possible transfer to the archives and, at the same time, rank state agencies according to their relative importance. The task, however, turned out to be so complex that it was divided in two. The result was that the staff produced two policy statements: "State Archives Appraisal Policy" and "Documenting State Government: Relative Importance of State Agencies." The appraisal policy guides the evaluation of individual records series, and the ranking of state

agencies specifies which agencies are to be documented first and most thoroughly in light of their overall impact on the government and people of Ohio. Taken together, these two statements provide the framework within which the staff of the State Archives will make the decisions necessary to assure proper documentation of Ohio state government activities of the second half of the twentieth century.

The appraisal policy specifies that four questions be asked and answered affirmatively before a records series may be transferred to the archives. The first question is: Are the materials government records as defined by Ohio law? If the answer is yes, the next question is asked: Does statute require that the record be kept permanently? These two questions usually require little professional judgment. The final two questions call upon the ability of the archivist to appraise the historical value of a series and follow closely the evidential-informational dichotomy developed by T. R. Schellenberg. First, the archivist determines if the record documents the "organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, or significant operations of the agency." Next, the archivist determines if the record contains "significant historical information about either the state or its citizens." To answer both of these questions, the policy guideline requires the archivist to consider the likely research potential of the series. This part of the evaluation includes a determination of whether the series is complete, usable, and unique.

"Documenting State Agencies" establishes and defines the criteria for evaluating the relative importance of state agencies from the point of view of the State Archives staff. The purpose of preparing this report was to determine which agencies "ought to be most fully documented in State Archives holdings by virtue of their dominant role in setting

and executing state government policy."

Initial attempts at ranking the agencies were impressionistic and could not be sustained, so a set of three criteria was devised: influence of the agency on legislation, formulation and implementation of state government policies, and impact on the citizens of the state. These three criteria proved too few, however, because they artificially boosted the rankings of large agencies such as the Department of Transportation and the Department of Highway Safety. Additional criteria were added, bringing the total to eight, which proved to be too many. Three of the eight criteria—impact on public health, impact on public safety, and regulatory authority—were too similar, again giving some agencies artificially high scores while giving others inappropriately low scores. Finally, a list of the five following criteria was made:

1. Importance in establishing and carrying out state policies and procedures. The ability to create, adopt, implement, and enforce rules and regulations affecting large numbers of people and broad policy areas.
2. Influence on legislation. The ability to write, promote, and influence bills being considered by the General Assembly and to interpret laws passed by that body.
3. Educational impact. The effect of the agency's educational services on the citizens or its role in developing educational or cultural programs or policies.
4. Influence on general welfare, including health, safety, regulation, and economic development. The impact of the agency on Ohio citizens when enforcing laws and regulations and setting policy affecting public health and safety, commerce, public utilities, building regulations, and licensing; impact upon the economic growth of the state.
5. Historical significance. The impact of the agency on Ohio's citizens and events over an extended period of time.

During the appraisal process, each agency was given a numerical score, ranging from 0 to 10, for each of the criteria. The scores were not judgments about the political importance of the agency to the general public; rather, they showed each agency's position relative to the other agencies. The agencies were then ranked according to their total scores. The State Archives staff agreed that because the General Assembly, the governor's office, and the Supreme Court were more important than the other agencies, no attempt was made to rank them by the five criteria.

Because of its efforts to reassess its policies, the State Archives staff discovered the value of articulating its appraisal criteria. In the past, the staff had worked on the assumption that its practices were sound and well thought out. In reality, however, they were not part of a

systematic plan. As has been common in other institutions, much of the work was done simply in response to external stimuli and on an ad hoc basis; and appraisal judgments, although far more sophisticated than they had been twenty years earlier, were not being systematically applied to the mass of documentation confronting the staff. Thus, staff members relied almost wholly on their intuition, which was not consistently reliable. Furthermore, staff members were not always able to articulate to others the criteria for selecting records. By taking a hard look at its own assumptions, by explaining in writing what was meant by such terms as "historical value," the staff took a major step toward assuring that the Ohio State Archives would indeed become the repository of all the state's valuable records.

Reflections on the Problems of Access to Archival Literature

DAVID MOLTKE-HANSEN

In America, as elsewhere, most archivists are ignorant of international archival literature. Bibliographic access is inadequate, and even the literature mentioned in the bibliographies is largely unavailable in the libraries accessible to most archivists. Moreover, few archivists are schooled in an international perspective; and once out of school, a great many—perhaps the majority—work largely in professional isolation.

In the course of the last ten years, the international archival community has shown increasing concern over the problem of professional literacy. Prompted by

that concern, the International Council on Archives (ICA) devoted the 1978 volume of *Archivum* (vol. 25) to Michael Duchein's *Basic International Bibliography of Archive Administration*. A year later, Frank B. Evans' bibliography, *The History of Archives Administration*, was published with funding from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). More recently, the ICA has arranged to have as much of the current archival periodical literature as possible abstracted on a regular basis. This action followed the 1980–81 publication of an abortive *Inter-*

David Moltke-Hansen is associate director of the South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, and acting head of special collections, College of Charleston. This essay was written during a three-month study of Norwegian archives and archival practices funded by the Norwegian Marshall Fund and sponsored by the Norwegian National Archives, the Norwegian National Office for Research and Special Libraries, and the American Institute of the University of Oslo. Thanks go to Asa Rubenstein, Gene Waddell, and Greg Williams for their comments on an earlier draft.

national Journal of Archives under ICA auspices and the issuance in 1981 of Brenda White's study of "Archival Journals" for UNESCO's Records and Archives Management Programme. (RAMP). As White noted, in the past only six archival journals have been abstracted around the world with any frequency; yet at the time of the study, there were approximately 100 archival journals in circulation.

The bibliographies by Duchein and Evans provided only partial access to this literature. The degree of incompleteness is suggested by the fact that in their sections on Denmark the two volumes together included less than 1/500th of the entries in Grethe Ilsøe's *Dansk arkivbibliografi, 1889-1981*. Part of this discrepancy can be explained by differences in coverage: Duchein, for instance, included few items published before 1940 and, like Evans, excluded finding aids. Also, both Duchein and Evans emphasized writings in the most widely read languages, and so skimmed Scandinavian publications, among others. It is possible, therefore, that French, Spanish, English, German, Russian, and Italian writings were better represented. Nevertheless, there were important gaps. As Brenda White noted, Duchein included at best about two-thirds of the archival journals then in circulation, missing some even in English, French, and German.

Bibliographic access is not the only area of inadequacy, however. As White also noted, in 1981 the libraries in London with the largest holdings of archival literature collectively held not quite two-fifths of the archival journals then in circulation. It can be assumed that the percentage of the world total of archival newsletters held in London, or in any other city, was—and remains—much lower. One may also ask what library or cluster of libraries has complete, or even partial, runs of the range of journals in related fields, such as libraries,

reprography, conservation, and information management?

Making still more serious the problem of physical access is the fact that most archivists are much less well served by periodical and book holdings in their specialties than those working in Washington, London, or Paris. Even if they read the major archival languages, they normally have regular access to at most a handful of journals. Consequently, most archivists are unaware of much of what their colleagues have been doing and thinking even in their particular areas of interest.

Compounding this problem is the professional isolation in which many archivists work. In the United States, according to David Bearman's "1982 Survey of the Archival Profession" in the Spring 1983 issue of the *American Archivist*, half of the profession works "with no more than one other person sharing their interests." The situation in much of the Third World is worse. Moreover, archivists are given little incentive during their formative years to range through the archival literatures of other countries. As Charles Keckskemeti noted in his 1966 UNESCO study of archival training, *La formation professionnelle des archivistes* ("The Professional Preparation of Archivists"), the training programs of most countries have been largely useless to foreigners because of their emphasis on national institutions, records, and histories. Even since UNESCO's 1979 promulgation of standards to harmonize archival training programs around the world, this has been the case.

Clearly, then, the majority of archivists would seem to be condemned to some degree of continued professional illiteracy. The recent efforts of the ICA and UNESCO have been useful, if not always entirely successful; however, there is more to be done. Regional and national

archival collections must be developed and made available in microform, through loans, or in other ways. Archival education programs must follow library schools in giving attention to the international and comparative dimensions of their discipline. Junior and middle-level archivists need to join their senior colleagues more often in international discussions and studies, perhaps through expanded fellowship and scholarship op-

portunities. The back issues of the journals covered in the ICA-originated abstracting project should be abstracted as well as filmed. More subject collections of seminal articles should be gathered, translated when necessary, and published with an international audience in mind. As these things are done, the corporate and professional identity sought by archivists will become more of a reality.



PAIGE BOXES

for people who know
all about Records Storage

Paige Boxes are for professionals, experienced people who have learned all about the equipment available for handling, transporting, and storage of records, microfilm, data processing material, and computer printouts. Those people know that Paige files are durable equipment at lowest possible cost. **Available Acid Free.** Prices at wholesale level. No Sales People. No Distributors. No Stores. Write for Brochure, Prices, Case Histories.

THE PAIGE COMPANY
432 Park Avenue South
New York, N.Y. 10016 □ OR 9-6626