

Introduction

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This issue of the *American Archivist* has been coordinated by the Society's Automated Records and Techniques Task Force. During the past decade the members of the ART Task Force and its predecessor committees have devoted a great deal of time and energy to various activities associated with machine-readable records and automated applications in archives. These have included the development of educational programs and the sponsoring of half-day as well as one- and two-day workshops in both subject areas at SAA annual conferences and at regional meetings of archivists. The work has also included the preparation of publications, the most notable being the annotated bibliography prepared by Richard Kesner and a basic manual on machine-readable records written by Margaret Hedstrom. In addition, Task Force members have undertaken a number of surveys over the years in state and provincial archives, business archives, and college and university archives in order to determine the extent and nature of automated support systems, machine-readable records, and automated finding aids in the various repositories.

This issue of the journal forms part of the long-range work plan of the Automated Records and Techniques Task Force. It has as its theme the past, present, and future of automation in archives. This theme is particularly evident in the six major articles which appear in the issue. Richard Lytle has provided an overview and analysis of the work of the National Information Systems Task Force, as well as an outline of what the Committee on Archival Information Exchange will be undertaking in terms of follow-up action. Thomas Brown describes the involvement of the Society of American Archivists with automation from approximately 1966 to the present, demonstrating the sometimes painful and slow progress which the Society has made in this field. In her article, "Archival Principles and Records of the New Technology," Trudy Peterson argues that traditional archival principles and practices do not need to be discarded in order to deal with machine-readable records, but that in certain areas they may have to be modified or revised slightly. The article by Donald Baird and Leon Stout describes and analyzes the results of a survey of automation in college and uni-

versity archives in Canada and the United States which the authors undertook, and shows clearly the increasingly important role which the computer is playing in such repositories. In his article, William Maher points out the benefits that can accrue from using the services of in-house computer personnel in the development of archival automated systems, but also emphasizes the importance of archivists determining their own requirements. Dominic Bui provides useful information on the application of videodisk technology in archival repositories, and challenges archivists to think of the implications of newer storage media. The diverse subject content of these articles provides a good example of the impact which the new technologies are having on the work of the archival profession.

There is one article in the Shorter Features section. Michael Fox outlines the purpose and results of a machine-readable records project undertaken at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin between August 1981 and July 1983. The experience gained through this project will be of considerable assistance to other

archivists responsible for state records. The International Scene consists of short items describing various automation projects in the national repositories of a number of countries. The items have been prepared by members of the Automation Committee of the International Council on Archives. A number of the items in the News Notes section describe the involvement of regional archival associations in the United States over the past few years in various educational endeavors associated with automated applications in archives and machine-readable records. Among the items assessed in the Reviews section are publications which Society members may find of interest and value as they become more involved with automation. The same thing holds true for the various software packages described in the Technical Notes section.

We would like to express our appreciation to all of those individuals who have contributed to this special issue, as well as to the members of the journal's editorial staff for all of their assistance and cooperation.