



### Margaret Cross Norton

Margaret Cross Norton was a founding member and a fellow of the Society of American Archivists. She served as the Society's first vice president (1936–38), its fourth president (1943–45), a Council member (1937–42), and editor of the *American Archivist* (1946–47). Her contributions to the Society came relatively late in a career that began when she obtained a master's degree in history from the University of Chicago (1914) and a library science degree from the New York State Library School (1915). After several years' work in historical libraries, she accepted the position of archivist for the State of Illinois in 1922. She retired from

the Illinois State Archives in 1957 and remained in Springfield until her death on 21 May 1984.

Before the Society was founded, Norton served on the American Historical Association's Public Archives Commission and as an officer of the National Association of State Libraries. Respected by her professional colleagues, she played a major role in establishing archival practice as a separate and distinct profession in the United States. Her papers at the American Historical Association's 1929 meeting and the 1930 meeting of the National Association of State Libraries were landmarks in the archival campaign for

professional recognition.

As she worked to establish the archival profession on a national level, Norton built an outstanding state archival program in Illinois. Little had been done to implement Waldo G. Leland's 1912 report on archives in Illinois. With careful planning and tactical skill, Norton assembled the archives, secured a magnificent new building (1938), and launched a comprehensive state records management program (1956). A champion of business efficiency in a state government that sometimes lost sight of both of these objectives, Norton not only survived, but commanded the respect of her colleagues in state offices.

Capable of defining the archivist's mission and establishing a first-rate archival program, Norton was an articulate individual. The collection of her writings published in 1975 was hailed by Ernst Posner as the "first American manual of archives administration." Selected and edited by Thorton Mitchell, *Norton on*

*Archives* contains writings with a clarity that was drawn from experience. She warned of "the fallacy of treating archives merely as historical records," charged archivists with "a paramount duty to preserve the integrity of" the use of records "as acceptable legal evidence," and advised that records of enforceable legal rights must be preserved. Her sound advice was based on hard-won experience gained by maintaining administrative histories.

In addition to her accomplishments in the public domain, Margaret Norton was a source of encouragement and inspiration to her colleagues. There was no eulogy at the services in Springfield. As the priest noted, we are all alike in the eyes of God. New generations of archivists will meet the challenges of the future. They can take profound comfort from her example and the knowledge that they, too, are like Miss Norton.

MAYNARD BRICHFORD  
*University of Illinois*