

# The American Archivist

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MRS. EBERLEY FIRING OFF CANNON.

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## The American Archivist

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Cover note: Engraving of Angelina Eberley firing the cannon during the Archive War of Texas. See David B. Gracy II's "Our Future Is Now", p. 12. Courtesy of Texas State Archives.

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*Recipient of the 1983 Waldo Gifford Leland Prize, awarded by the Society of American Archivists, for its outstanding contribution in the field of archival history*

**Archival Theory and Practice  
in the United States  
A Historical Analysis  
by Richard C. Berner**

"Berner has done an excellent job of synthesizing developments in a field that has been noted . . . for its pragmatic approach. The result is a work of real value."—*Wilson Library Bulletin*

"[The book] will take a place among the best archival writing."  
—*Archivaria*

"Raises many good questions and provides an interesting framework for further debate and analysis."—*Journal of Academic Librarianship*

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## The Forum

### TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to respond to some of the issues raised by William Joyce in his review of my book, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (*American Archivist*, Summer 1984).

Two major issues merit special attention. One is his criticism that the approach I make is "normative." The second relates to my prescribing a solution in matters of arrangement and description. The two issues are related. First, in chapter 1, I set out the theoretical elements toward which a consensus has developed historically:

1. By 1950 an acceptance by major manuscript repositories that the principle of provenance should be the basis of arrangement; i.e., that papers should be kept together according to the source that generated them.
2. By the mid-1950s, an acceptance of the record series as "main catalogable unit"; i.e., that items derive their meaning by being linked with other items in the same series of the same origin, and can therefore be approached as parts of a collective entity, the series.
3. By the mid-1970s, most major manuscript repositories had come to accept the idea—however, ill-

defined—that manuscript accessions having the same characteristics as public records archives also could be treated hierarchically, and controls could be established progressively by hierarchical levels.

4. By 1978 an integrated system of controls was recommended by the SAA's Finding Aids Committee as a model for internal finding aids systems, with the inventory viewed as the main finding aid combined with cumulative indexes to them. The object was to provide a single comprehensive access point to each repository's holdings as an alternative to the bifurcated system that I describe in the book.

That the book should have "a curious normative tone" was intentional and I'm gratified that Joyce caught what I had tried to make unmistakably clear. What each of the above elements represents is a step in the direction of shedding the HMT and the gradual adoption of norms—or standards, if you will, without standardization—of the PAT. It, understandably, follows from my analysis that I should recommend a solution to the problems of arrangement and description. Briefly, these are:

- To adopt the PAT generally in

dealing with records/papers having integral/organic characteristics, while abandoning the HMT as being largely irrelevant to the task of bringing such records under control.

- To base description on arrangement.
- To provide a single comprehensive point of access to each repository's holdings.

The book would have limited value or purpose if I were not to draw conclusions and make recommendations from the analysis.

To be certain that the reader would not have to "extract" my bias I also included three pages (8-10) on my personal vantage point as a participant in these developments. That Joyce should feel a special compulsion to extract my point of view is mystifying given the content and purpose of the first chapter.

Turning to the AACR 2 and my evaluation of those cataloging rules, that evaluation has not been "outdated," certainly not by the 1983 publication of the Library of Congress's *Personal Papers and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries* (compiled by Steven Hensen). Hensen makes only a move in the direction of using the finding aids as the only practicable source for cataloging information. Entries are still to be made only from the scope and contents note, and that, in turn, is simply an abstract of information contained in the finding aids. No controlled source of information is used such as a properly constructed inventory. (See, for example, "Principles of Archival Inventory Construction" by me and Uli Haller, *American Archivist*, Spring 1984.) Another shortcoming of the Library of Congress's manual is that the series field is left vacant because librarians and archivists have different

definitions for series! The series field could be used to incorporate cataloging data from the container list section of the registers; the list is indeed the richest source for both topical subjects and proper names. Furthermore, until ALA accepts LC's modifications of the AACR 2 it is premature to consider them as the new cataloging standard. My critique remains timely.

As to the extensive treatment of SPINDEX it happened to be the one automation program of nationwide scope and effect. At the time of writing the results of the Midwest States Archival Project were not yet in. And I do not find the recommendations of the National Information Systems Task Force and its RLIN II spinoff to be a substitute for SPINDEX as a mode of interinstitutional information exchange. There are too many serious questions that the NISTF refused to address and that will plague the work of the SAA's Committee on Archival Information Exchange until it addresses them. For example:

- Who is interested in the internal administration information of the repositories, and how much of it is relevant for exchange purposes?
- Is the end user to be the beneficiary of the exchange? If "yes," then more attention might be directed to expanding the intellectual content fields and reformulating them.
- Will full-text searching allow the context of index/catalog terms to be preserved?

In archival education I find Joyce unduly optimistic about the 1977 graduate education guidelines and their implementation. Education must begin with the operational premise that distinguishes archival work from librarianship, beginning with the recognition that archivists work with records that are un-

published, for the most part, and these materials derive their meaning from their origins—a record produced in the course of human activity occurring in a social and historical context. The guiding principle is that of provenance, and archival education (as well as practice) must build upon that foundation. As matters now stand there is not agreement yet in the United States (or Canada, as well) on what is the meaning of provenance; it is still confounded with original order. (See Michel Duchein, “Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems of *Respect des fonds* in Archival Science,” *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), especially page 75, in which he indicates that in the absence of anything like a registry system the “principle of structure” [i.e., original order] is not applicable.)

As to appraisal being the only other aspect of archival work that is unique in the field and susceptible to theoretical treatment—writing on appraisal is only at a formative stage. The writing has only since 1980 begun to compare to that on arrangement and description. At the present rate I would guess that with five years of concentrated attention a literature will emerge that will lend itself to theoretical analysis, but in my opinion it must begin with collection development for manuscript collections and records/information management for institutional archives.

RICHARD C. BERNER  
*University of Washington*

#### REVIEWER'S RESPONSE:

Richard Berner's recent letter provides yet another occasion for restating, albeit with some different emphases, the point of view contained in his recent book, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis*. In responding to my review (found in the

*American Archivist*, Summer 1984, pp. 299–301), Berner has offered a number of rejoinders to which I will respond in the order in which he has presented them.

Berner notes that it was intentional on his part to invest his book with the “normative tone” that I criticized. Berner states that his book would have a limited value or purpose “if I were not to draw conclusions and make recommendations from the analysis.”

I agree with Berner that it is an author's responsibility to “draw conclusions” and argue a point of view. The problem in this case is that Berner's tone is tendentious and not analytic; rather than make recommendations based on his analysis, Berner criticizes what he describes as the dim perception of his colleagues, or their “indifference” or their “fixations.” Yet, by the nature of his own argument, he criticizes his colleagues with criteria that gained widespread acceptance only after the events he criticizes. To put it another way, Berner's criticisms are an example of the acuity, if not the equity, of hindsight.

I felt no compulsion to extract Berner's point of view from his book, but pointed out to prospective readers that the volume “reads more like a succession of summaries of archival literature rather than the analytic exposition of archival theory and practice that it promises to be.”

As to Berner's comments on AACR 2, he is simply mistaken that cataloging entries “are still to be made only from the scope and contents note.” Steve Hensen's *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts: A Cataloging Manual for Archival Repositories, Historical Societies, and Manuscript Libraries* (Library of Congress, 1983) states unambiguously that the “chief source of information for collections of manuscripts and archival records is the

finding aid prepared for those materials." 4.0B (p. 8).

The decision by Hensen and his Library of Congress colleagues to leave the series area blank reflects a desire not to confuse the issue by using differently the same terminology used by librarians. For the purpose of cataloging manuscripts and archival material, this area has an uncertain purpose in any case. The "note area" appears to contain any necessary information for cataloging that would otherwise appear in the series area. Hensen's manual, after all, is for cataloging archival and manuscript material and is not meant to replicate finding aids.

It is not clear to me what Berner means when he refers to the American Library Association's acceptance of the Library of Congress's modifications of AACR 2. Just as the library community has accepted AACR 2 cataloging rules as the "new standard," so, too, one expects that the Hensen revisions will be accepted as an LC interpretive tool for applying AACR 2 rules to cataloging archives and manuscripts. This is already underway, and no other claim for Hensen's manual has been made.

With respect to the National Information Systems Task Force (NISTF) and SPINDEX, Berner has labored under some misapprehensions. RLIN II is not a "spin-off" from the Task Force. Indeed, NISTF proposed a set of data elements that could constitute a useful system for the exchange of information about archives and manuscripts in machine-readable form. RLIN II is one such system that might benefit from such exchanges.

I am unaware that NISTF "refused" to address any issues. The results of the work of that group, and its successor, the Committee on Archival Information Exchange, continue to be reviewed, refined, and updated, according to the evolving needs of the archival profes-

sion. I do not understand the questions that Berner has posed, that he believes "plague" the work of that committee. I have never heard it suggested, moreover, that any archival database could permit "full-text" searching for terms to index.

On the matter of archival education, I did not refer to the implementation of SAA graduate education guidelines, but rather only to the fact that the SAA Council in fact approved the guidelines for a practicum. Berner misstated in his book that the practicum standard was proposed but not accepted. I was only correcting Berner, not making claims about the state of archival education.

As to his closing words on appraisal, Berner is here conducting a dialogue with himself; my review noted only his opinion on the subject which he has repeated in his letter.

WILLIAM L. JOYCE  
*The New York Public Library*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

Congratulations to Jacqueline Goggin for her copiously documented and perceptive article entitled "That We Shall Truly Deserve the Title of 'Profession': The Training and Education of Archivists, 1930-1960," *American Archivist* 47 (Summer 1984).

As history, the article mirrors the variegated occasions when many an appropriate proposal came to a dead-end. Fortunately, some ideas refused to die and such concepts as seminars, Library School courses in theoretical and practical facets of archival, manuscript and rare-book work, professional organizations, bibliographies and manuals, aborted in inauspicious times, now attest to the fact that we are providing the solid educational background required for a profession.

Ms. Goggin's essay inspired me to reflect, once again, on my brief decade as Special Collections Division Librarian

in Brooklyn College of the City University of New York in the 1970s and to offer a suggestion.

A reorganization in the late 1960s, mainly for budgetary reasons, of the structure of the Library, abolishing the Subject Divisional Arrangement, caused my transfer from the former Science Division to the room embracing the archives.

A tenure of almost a quarter of a century in the Library's Reference and Science Divisions, which afforded me the opportunity to accumulate a vast store of information about the campus, and Master's degrees in library science and in history were among the factors deemed to qualify me for campus archival work.

My new world required attention to such questions as: How can the college archives, including student archives, best be fitted into the teaching program? How can the archival resources, proliferating rapidly, advance student and faculty research? How can the latter benefit from computerization?

Since such vital responsibilities can the better be fulfilled with a strong educational background, it is recommended that the minimal educational requirements for the college archivist be undergraduate or graduate study in history and/or political science, and library school training. The college archivist is a *troika*: a blend of historian, librarian and archivist.

ANTOINETTE CIOILLI  
*Brooklyn College (retired)*

#### TO THE EDITOR:

A review of the literature and workshops generated for and by archivists shows clearly that conservation is the hot and sexy topic of the 1980s. It is glamorous, mysterious and alluring. Not only does conservation carry the aura of professional and conscientious attitude toward

collections, it also brings the impressions of scientific elevation. Institutions with conservation programs are considered progressive; persons capable of saying nonaqueous deacidification without stumbling over a syllable or two are obviously knowledgeable about conservation.

The great PR which conservation has received in the field of archives has produced both positive and negative results. To the positive, there has been an increase in the general awareness of deterioration and its causes; the need for proper storage and environmental conditions has received much deserved attention. On the other hand, few of the archivists in charge of conservation programs know very much about the subject. Conservation is being taught by archivists to archivists through workshops and articles; after a few days' exposure to the archivists' concepts of conservation theory and practice, the archivist returns home in glory as a conservation expert or officer. Somewhere in this archival fantasy, the fact that conservation is an autonomous profession with its own standards and ethics has been lost.

Conservation is a full-fledged profession concerned with all areas of preservation from paintings to archaeological basket fragments to contemporary sculpture. Conservators are highly trained and specialized individuals. Most have graduated from conservation training programs which consist of three years of classes and lab work running 40 hours a week, 11 months a year. Before acceptance into one of these master's programs, each student is required to have a double degree (or its equivalent in post-graduate courses) in chemistry and an art-related field. By the time a conservator receives a master's degree, he or she knows the chemical, physical and structural properties of the materials to be preserved, knows how they deteriorate (to the point of being able to

specify which bonds in the cellulose molecule are broken by acids and oxidants), knows how chemical treatments interact with the original materials, and knows how treatment may affect future stability.

The aging of artifacts is complex; many apparently unrelated factors and events influence the patterns of aging. The treatments required to treat an aged or damaged item must take all these factors into account if justice is to be done to the piece and damage from treatment is to be avoided. To consider treatment in simple terms of deacidification and mending is not only superficial, but also hazardous. The adage that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing has emphatic relevance to this situation. Most conservators will agree that the worst damages are caused by inappropriate treatments, usually executed by persons with fragmentary knowledge. Unless all aspects of the problem and solution are understood, it is downright dangerous to undertake anything beyond careful storage. When the original objects in question are unique, one-of-a-kind pieces a casual approach to treatment may prove particularly costly and fool-hearty. While a passive approach does not produce grandiose statistics, it is the only conscientious path for preservation by the layperson.

The professional publications and programs offered to archivists actively discourage caution. The SAA is a major culprit in promoting this enthusiastic, kamikaze campaign to *do something*. "Principles for Local Government Records" adopted by NASARA in 1982 (reprinted in the *American Archivist*, Fall 1983) is a prime example of this attitude. In section 6, the state archival and records management agency is urged to give workshops and publish manuals on conservation, develop conservation laboratories, and initiate conservation training centers. No hint is

given that trained conservators exist, let alone that there may be some benefit in hiring a conservator for the conservation lab, or in consulting a conservator for workshops, publications, treatments or training. It would appear that archivists can walk on water.

The SAA would not advocate that archivists treat their own personal ailments, ignoring the expertise, research and experiences of the medical profession. Yet, it commends itself for encouraging archivists to treat their collections without the assistance or advice of professional conservators. Collections are being exposed to unnecessary risks in the name of professional development. The individuals in control of these preposterous situations are impertinent enough to share their "expertise" with all who would listen. Such attitudes toward collection care constitute a significant breach of professionalism which will have long-term and serious consequences for the archival collections of this nation. It can only be hoped that some archivists and administrators will take a hard look at their conservation programs and determine what they are doing and why. Personal and institutional prestige are nice. Prestige does not increase the longevity of documents. Perhaps it is time to put some conservation into conservation programs.

Lest this letter be considered a simple outburst of professional jealousy, it should be pointed out that the conservation program was preceded by the preservation/restoration program. Most will recall the miracle treatment of this program—lamination. Zealous archivists were responsible for the lamination, and ultimately the demise, of 95 percent of all rare materials thus treated. Enthusiasm does not substitute for knowledge, caution and good judgment.

CHRISTINE YOUNG  
*Indiana Historical Society Library*

**RESPONSE:**

I am responding to your recent letter since SAA's NEH-funded Basic Archival Conservation Program, which I direct, is implicitly the subject of a number of your comments. Regrettably, your concerns are based on incomplete information.

The Society of American Archivists, through its Basic Archival Conservation Program workshops, consultations, and publications, has taken the stance that conservation is inherent in the very goal to collect records and make them available for use. Conservation must thus be considered at every level of archival responsibility, and appropriate measures taken to protect materials from damage or loss. Archivists and conservators are partners in this endeavor, and there are important and necessary roles for each.

It is obvious to me that you have not read *Archives & Manuscripts: Conservation*, published a year ago, which is the major end-product of our first NEH conservation grant. The manual emphasizes preventive maintenance, environmental controls, and proper storage and handling. In the portions of the manual discussing treatment procedures, appropriate cautions are given repeatedly and sources of professional conservation assistance are cited. I have no qualms about the level of treatment activity that we suggest archivists are capable of undertaking. Undergirding the basic archival conservation workshops, and the companion instructions for basic procedures that appear in the manual, is the realization that most institutions will never have their own staff conservator, nor the resources to send their materials for treatment to an outside lab or conservator. We also know that archivists and others responsible for historical records are deeply concerned about the preservation of their collections. With the guidance, training, ethical framework, and cautions that we provide,

records curators will be able to make sound decisions regarding the materials in their charge.

I have confidence in archivists and their ability to make appropriate decisions regarding the intrinsic and artifactual values of records, and the equally important decisions regarding the parameters of in-house treatment. I have a great deal of experience teaching conservation theory and practice to archivists and librarians. A large majority of records curators approach the whole area of conservation (and especially hands-on treatment) with a great deal of respect and sometimes even downright timidity. While there will always be a few exceptions, archivists that have benefitted from SAA educational programs in the area of conservation do not feel over-confident regarding their capabilities, but have an even healthier respect for the experts in the field.

There are several other reasons why archivists must be conversant with conservation theory and practice in addition to their responsibility for collections maintenance. In the first place, as you correctly state, a large number of archivists are unfamiliar with the broad world of conservation and the resources that can be brought to bear on the problems of preserving archival collections. In addition, however, archivists must be knowledgeable consumers of conservation services for which they may contract, in order to ensure that only qualified conservators are hired and that the highest standards of workmanship are maintained. Again, we are not working to set archivists up as conservators, but to enable them to function adequately as records custodians and partners with conservators in solving the broad problems at hand. I trust that you will grant that this is a two-way street, and that conservators must be equally willing to work with archivists. It is only in the very recent past that library and archival

materials have gained the attention of a slowly growing number of conservators. Still, I fear, the problems posed by the masses of, in some cases, highly repetitive records, do not spark the imagination of many conservators.

In your letter you specifically mentioned the "Principles for Local Government Records" adopted by NASARA and published in the Fall 1983 issue of the *American Archivist*. I will speak neither for nor against the statement, as I had virtually nothing to do with it. Nor did SAA, which was merely serving a reporting function in publishing the document. However, I think that most people recognize the principles for what they are: a spare outline documenting need, *not* means of implementation. I have every confidence that agencies involved in developing conservation laboratories would contract only with fully qualified and trained individuals.

SAA is meeting the conservation training needs of its members conscientiously and in a spirit of cooperation with allied professions. If there is a way you could attend one of our upcoming conservation workshops as an observer, you would be most welcome to do so. I am sure that your concerns about our program would thereby be put to rest.

MARY LYNN RITZENTHALER

*SAA Conservation Program Director*