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*On the cover: The Roman god Janus, pictured with two faces looking in opposite directions, may be seen as symbolizing the archivist's dual role in appraisal, looking backward to events of the past and looking forward to needs of the future. The Janus symbol is the logo of International Archives Weeks throughout the world. International Archives Week is being celebrated in the United States April 15–19, 1985. Photograph courtesy International Council on Archives Section of Professional Archival Associations.*

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# The Forum

## TO THE EDITOR:

Maynard Brichford demonstrates very little love for "Uncle NHPRC and Aunt NARS" and very little understanding of the purpose of the state assessment projects and NHPRC's programs. NHPRC funded the state assessment projects not to "Paint a bleak picture of vast unmet needs," but to help each state examine public and private archival programs and to identify needs and strategies to strengthen these programs. There are real needs, real inadequacies. The consultant reports (the main portion of *Documenting America*) are not based on the authors' imaginings but on the first twenty state assessment reports. The assessment studies were designed to foster data gathering, analysis, and planning. They were intended to be, as the reviewer recognized, an advocacy tool. But the focus of the advocacy and the fund raising is not directed back to NHPRC and the federal government, but to the states themselves. NHPRC and the federal government alone can not solve the nation's archival problems.

Though the reviewer's criticism implies favoritism, examination of the data compiled by the NHPRC staff demonstrates that funds have been given to public and private archives in all sectors of American society including 22 percent of all funds (and 26 percent of all grants) to

colleges and universities. NHPRC funds are not used to run programs but rather to start programs where there is institutional support to continue these activities (most college and university archival grants fall into this category) as leverage to expand programs and to carry out research that will benefit the entire archival community.

Though there are many false statements and misconstrued facts in Brichford's review, the most disturbing is his contention that cooperation and coordination are intended to create a "unitary national archival system." He criticizes the use of federal funds for these purposes. "A large part of documented America is, and should remain, unrelated to federal and state government support, coordination, and planning." Archival practice has been hindered for too long by such views. We have seen ourselves as unique separate institutions with little to say to one another. We have suffered and so have the researchers who depend on our collections. National databases of information on archival and manuscript holdings will now allow us to locate material more efficiently. Even more important, such databases will allow us to share appraisal information and coordinate collection decisions. Sharing information and coordinating activities—



cooperative efforts—do not make a “unitary system.” We do not need to be uniform to work together. Cooperative efforts strengthen each archival repository and also form a stronger national system. American archival institutions—underfunded and understaffed—are challenged to run their operations most efficiently. We must proselytize, but we must also work together to improve our knowledge and our methods.

HELEN W. SAMUELS

*Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Member, NHPRC*

## TO THE EDITOR:

What better argument for the work of SAA's Task Force on Archives in Society could be found than the statements in certified genealogist Mary N. Speakman's article in the Spring 1984 issue? And what better argument for the publication of more articles by users of archives than the two letters in the Fall issue critical of Speakman? Her critics are upset apparently because she does not fall prostrate before the mighty archivist. A profession that cannot agree even on what an archivist is, or how that person should be trained, should not be hasty in its judgements of those critical of us.

I think that it is useful for archivists to be reminded that many—perhaps most—of our users are not particularly impressed because we are *archivists*, and further, that these users indeed exhibit “little appreciation for the constraints under which most archival institutions operate.” It is a fine dream to conjure up “better-educated researchers”—but it is only a dream. In an era when few holders of Ph.D.s in history receive training in research methods, how can we expect others to be so trained? How can we expect researchers to be aware of “archival

realities”? Most of the people of the United States have no idea what an archivist is, and certainly have no appreciation of “archival realities.” Performing research in archives does not automatically confer such appreciation. The work of the Task Force is vital to our profession. We must create public awareness of our profession and its problems because there is painfully and embarrassingly little today.

Speakman responded to the critical letters that she has “not complained about the service or equipment” to which she has been subjected in “research facilities” over “thirty years.” But she should have, both to the archivists and to those with the overall authority over these “research facilities.” Her failure to complain is one thing for which I think she may be fairly criticized.

EDMUND BERKELEY, JR.

*University of Virginia Library*

## TO THE EDITOR:

MIT was quite honored that the Whirlwind computer was chosen to appear on the cover of the *American Archivist* issue on automation. Institutional pride, however, forces us to add some information to your caption. The Whirlwind computer was not only completed but also started and developed at MIT. Project Whirlwind was directed by Professor Jay W. Forrester, the developer of magnetic core memory. As the first machine to use core memory instead of vacuum tubes, Whirlwind is recognized as the first high-speed digital computer.

Following its initial use and testing at MIT, Whirlwind moved around. The final user, the MITRE Corporation, gave part of the huge machine to the Smithsonian's Museum of American History, Science, Technology and Culture where it

is on permanent display. The three institutions have also joined forces to assure the preservation of the records of Project Whirlwind.

KATHY MARQUIS

*Massachusetts Institute of Technology*



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