

# The American Archivist

Volume 49  
Number 3  
Summer 1986



Published Quarterly by The Society of American Archivists

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## The American Archivist

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**Cover note:** *A humorous treatment by Sam Hughes of the serious issues explored by Richard J. Cox in "Professionalism and Archivists in the United States."*

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# The Forum

## TO THE EDITOR:

Susan D. Steinwall's article in the winter [1986] issue deserves comments about the first retention plan for the FBI and about archivists' responsibility for the appraisal of records.

The retention plan for the headquarters's records of the FBI was indeed prepared without examining any of its records at the agency. The 1950 Act that transferred the National Archives to the General Services Administration did not renew authority to the Archivist of the United States for reviewing records in the custody of executive agencies. On that basis the FBI refused access to the Records Appraisal Division though, as its director, I had access to the most secret intelligence and military records. The plan was based on legislation and regulations relating to the FBI and examinations of FBI reports among the records of other agencies. The FBI identified and listed all records included in the plan; however, I was permitted only a cursory examination of the list. Tangentially, the plan was designed to put the FBI on notice that the final decision on the disposition of records rested with NARS.

Steinwall refers to the "dogma" that leads archivists to consider the needs of government first. As records are the memory of an organization, the first duty

of its records manager is the retention of documentation required for its continuing operations. Likewise, archivists must give priority to the preservation of documents that show the essential policies, procedures and activities of the organization. Typically, these records have varied research uses. The circumstance that the value of records specifically for social, economic, political, and other research is secondary does not imply that these values do not receive very careful consideration. Archivists who neglect such values are in the wrong profession.

MEYER H. FISHBEIN

*Consultant, Information Systems  
(formerly, National Archives and  
Records Service)*

## TO THE EDITOR:

Compliments are offered to President Shonnie Finnegan and her flair for weaving gems of literature into the statement of her major goals for the coming year.

Compliments are also offered to the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities for the excellence of their report. *Planning for the Archival Profession*, with its



illustrious authorship, engaging illustrations, perceptive and exceedingly well-thought-out and well-organized contents, impels me to respond.

"Archivists need to . . . learn more about uses for archival collections," asserts page 27. This inspires me to reflect upon my brief experience with student archives and their cogency to college teaching. There I developed, during my assignment in the 1970s as Special Collections Division Librarian of Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, a marked interest in student and campus life as mirrored in the Library's archival collection.

Two factors sparked this interest: (1) the requirement of a member of the Sociology Department that his seminar students prepare a term paper on some aspect of student life on the Brooklyn College campus; and (2) the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Brooklyn College, in connection with which a History Department colleague mandated his seminar students to compose a substantial essay on some facet of the college's history (1930-1980).

The Special Collections Division

became an exciting source of primary information for such topics as Brooklyn College: its architecture and design; governance; the history of its fraternities and sororities; Jewish clubs; recruitment; tuition; the Women's Center; and why students are "joiners" or "non-joiners." Thus do archives bring to life the past and forge a living link with the present!

Of what value are college and student archives to society?

This question was answered in a fascinating article by David B. Potts, entitled, "College Archives as Windows on American Society," *The American Archivist* 40 (January 1977): 43-49. With copious research, documentations and richness of ideas, the author delineates ways in which college archives, as primary sources, may be used to study developments in American professional, political, social and cultural life.

This conception of college and student archives as windows may conceivably be re-explored during our fiftieth anniversary celebration.

ANTOINETTE CIOLLI  
*Brooklyn College (retired)*

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The *American Archivist* is published by the Society of American Archivists, 600 S. Federal, Suite 504, Chicago, Illinois 60605, four times yearly. Postmaster send all correspondence and 3579 forms to the address above. Subscription: \$30 a year to North American addresses, \$35 a year to other addresses, single copies \$8 to SAA members, \$9 to nonmembers.

Articles and related communications should be sent to Bill Burck, Managing Editor, Society of American Archivists, 600 S. Federal, Suite 504, Chicago, Illinois 60605. Telephone: (312) 922-0140. Advertising correspondence, membership and subscription correspondence, and orders for back issues should be sent to SAA at the address above. Claims for issues not received must be received by SAA headquarters within four months of issue publication date for domestic subscribers and within six months for international subscribers.

The *American Archivist* is indexed in *Library Literature* and is abstracted in *Historical Abstracts*; book reviews are indexed in *Book Review Index*.

The *American Archivist* and the Society of American Archivists assume no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

Typesetting for the *American Archivist* is done by Daamen, Inc., West Rutland, Vermont, and the journal is printed by Kirby Lithographic Co., Inc., of Arlington, Virginia.

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