Introduction

EVA S. MOSELEY, Guest Editor

THE FIVE ARTICLES IN this issue are the fruit of several years of discussion, planning, writing, and editing by various members of New England Archivists (NEA), some nonmembers, and even nonarchivists. The impetus behind this project was similar to that which resulted in the formation of the Society of American Archivists' Task Force on Goals and Priorities (GAP) and in discussions of documentation strategy: a growing belief that, in addition to acquiring new technical knowledge, archivists also need to consider their work in a wider and more cooperative context. Although the NEA project emphasizes systematic planning less than the task force did, it does help to further some of the GAP objectives, especially those on understanding the characteristics of records, influencing records creators to think archivally, promoting cooperation, and disseminating information about holdings.[1]

These articles explore five topics in New England's regional history, summarizing both past history and history in the making, so that one can better determine what must be documented. Rather than looking first at the record (using the term collectively) that happens to exist, some of it acquired by repositories and some not, the authors were asked to delineate the record in terms of the history. The intent was to discover what is needed to give this and future generations an adequate documentary basis for understanding the recent history of New England's six states: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

The history of this project is roughly contemporary with that of the concept of

[1]See *Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1986), especially objectives IA1, IC, IIC2, IIIB, and IIID1.

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documentation strategy, which appeared on the archival scene when Larry Hackman and Helen Samuels presented the idea at a session at the 1984 SAA meeting in Washington; they and others have since explored the idea in articles in the *American Archivist.*[2] A documentation strategy begins when one or more interested individuals select and carefully define an area to be documented. They proceed to assemble a varied group of experts, who further define the area, investigate existing sources and resources, define needs, project solutions, and eventually recommend both actions and actors to oversee—if possible on an ongoing basis—the improvement of the documentary record for the defined area (e.g., nursing in New York State, the Detroit auto industry, or, as in one of the articles here, post-World War II science and technology in eastern Massachusetts). The emphasis and scope of the New England project are somewhat different, though overlapping. Because the articles consider documentation in various subject areas in relation to the history, especially the recent history, of those areas, they provide some of the information needed for a documentation strategy, especially in its early stages, even though most were not written with this framework in mind.

Unlike the ideal documentation strategy, this project did not begin at a precise moment, but evolved from earlier plans. In 1982 representatives of the Mid Atlantic Archives Conference (MARAC) and NEA discussed the possibility of a joint publication to celebrate the two regional associations' tenth anniversaries: both had been organized at the 1972 SAA meeting and formally launched in their regions the next year. Despite initial interest on both sides, the publication did not materialize. At the spring 1983 meeting of the NEA board, the present editor, who had represented NEA in the discussions with MARAC, and others proposed that NEA publish a book on its own. Some board members saw this as a part of NEA's growing education initiatives, and the board as a whole approved.[3]

An editorial committee consisting of Mark Jones (Connecticut State Archives), Diane Kaplan (Yale University), and William Koelsch (Clark University) had been appointed for the MARAC-NEA project; it first met in the summer of 1983. Jones later had to withdraw, and the committee chose T. D. Seymour Bassett (retired from the University of Vermont), who had been feeding the committee useful information, to take his place. At the initial meeting all agreed that the book should consider documenting the region by topic, and that the chapters should focus on more recent history where possible. Most important, each chapter was to review the history of the topic as the basis for understanding existing records, discovering gaps in the record, and proposing both remedies for those gaps and ongoing, cooperative efforts to collect and describe documentation. The committee readily produced a long list of potential subjects; among those that later fell by the wayside were business, the environment, families, health care, immigrants, labor, social protest, and transportation. Identifying potential authors was more difficult. The history of the search for authors and of their adherence to the project cannot be discussed in detail, but the difficulties should prove instructive for other cooperative enterprises, perhaps especially for documentation strategy itself. These difficulties fall into three interrelated categories: finding the

[2]See Helen W. Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986): 109–24, and Larry J. Hackman and Joan Warnow-Blewett, "The Documentation Strategy Process: A Model and a Case Study," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 12–47.

[3]Successive NEA boards have continued to provide support, which has been essential both financially and psychologically; the authors, editorial committee, and editor are all enormously grateful.

right authors, the extent and limits of expertise, and the incentive—or lack thereof—to remain with the project.

Committee members agreed that ideally there would be two coauthors for each chapter or article: a historian or other scholar to present the history, and an archivist to discuss existing and needed sources. Even a scholar and an archivist who already know one another may not, for any of a number of reasons, be willing or able to work together; a partnership suggested by a third party might be even more difficult to begin or to sustain. It is clear from the table of contents that in this project only one such arrangement succeeded. Without such pooling of expertise, one must hope either that an archivist-author is unusually expert in the history of a subject area, or that a scholar is unusually concerned with the issue of research sources in his or her field. This statement is meant to be realistic, not insulting. Archivists do of course know a good deal of history, but to write an overview of a particular segment of regional history of adequate scope, with sufficient detail and balanced emphasis, may require a deeper, more intimate familiarity than most archivists—who must also acquire and administer collections and keep abreast of developments in archival administration—can muster. And few scholars, even those who use archival sources, are sufficiently aware of archival issues to be able (or perhaps interested enough to be willing) to write usefully about the creation, identification, selection, and maintenance of a wide variety of sources. The foregoing underlines an important difference between the New England project and documentation strategy: in the former, one author (or in one case two) was expected to write about both history and sources, while the documentation strategy group pools the knowledge of a variety of experts, all focusing on one subject.

The editorial committee eliminated some of the subjects it had originally listed because neither its own "brainstorming" nor inquiries among colleagues suggested possible authors. In this project, and in documentation strategy, people are the most important factor determining success or failure, progress or stagnation. Beyond finding people with the needed knowledge and interests, the NEA project depended on the willingness and dedication of volunteers. The authors and the editorial committee had to believe and feel that it was worth their while to devote many hours to often very hard work. Continued participation meant not only the usual agonies of writing an article but in addition the demand to try to conform to a model developed by the editorial committee.

Among those who sooner or later decided that the effort was not worth their while were scholars and archivists. To have an eminent professor at a major university drop out was disappointing but not surprising; it was more distressing to lose archival colleagues (and of course with them some very important topics). The reasons varied, but the underlying theme was that it was too difficult and time consuming to research and write the history, and to investigate the sources at repositories other than the potential authors' own. The tale of archivists' total absorption in the daily acquisition and management of holdings to the exclusion of research and planning is all too familiar.

The foregoing discussion should answer the question: why these five topics? If there were ten or twenty, the question would remain. Despite the element of chance, each of the five has a special significance in contemporary life, and each presents challenges and opportunities to the aware archivist. Such challenges can be met in different ways: where the necessary resources exist, with a full-fledged documentation strategy; or with less formal cooperative efforts among several repositories; or even by a single repository planning a deliberate collecting effort in an

underdocumented area, perhaps with an advisory committee that includes other archivists and records creators and users. Each requires that one or more individuals step back from the daily routine, take a good look around, and make some plans.

On another level, some of what is proposed in the five articles can be accomplished by more thorough—even more imaginative—description. In many cases, it is not necessary to collect separately for different topics; archivists are well aware that virtually every collection provides information on several subjects. McReynolds (rural life) and Bassett (tourism and recreation) both mention business and denominational records as documenting aspects of their topics, although they do not discuss business or religion as such. Their brief discussions of religion in rural life and "church camping" complement O'Toole's article on religion, while McReynolds mentions records of high tech companies, the focus of the Alexander/Samuels article. In other words, collections acquired for one purpose will serve many others. In view of the deluge of paper, film, and magnetic tape archivists face, it is doubly useful to remember that the command to "document" can often be satisfied by identifying relevant records already collected, describing them with new topics in mind, and cataloging them with every possible subject term. To cite just one example from the editor's repository, the Schlesinger Library acquired the papers of Annie Ware Winsor Allen because she was the daughter of a prominent Massachusetts family, an educator, and the sister of three other founders of schools. Editing these articles served as a reminder that the Allens summered on Mount Desert Island in Maine; the collection includes papers about their summer place and therefore calls for subject entries in the areas of tourism and rural life.

The overlapping among articles indicated above (and there is much more) is an inevitable and satisfying aspect of focusing on a region. Also evident is enthusiasm, even regional pride, feelings that can spur archivists on to plan and implement cooperative efforts. And not just in New England. When it became clear that there would be only five articles, the editor proposed publication as an issue of the *American Archivist.* This provides access to a much wider audience (and enables NEA to avoid most of the effort involved in production and distribution), but writing for a national audience presented the authors with some additional challenges. Archivists in Illinois or California will not be enchanted by references to Vermont dairy farms, Boston landmarks, or Newport clubs, which are so evocative for New Englanders; they will want ideas and information to use in their own regions. Except perhaps for the Route 128 article, there are no blueprints here, and the Route 128 blueprint, as the authors point out, is speculative and suggestive rather than tried and true.

"Suggestive" is perhaps the key word. The basic model used in these articles is a rather simple one: investigate, largely through published sources and even personal observation and memory, what has been happening in a topical area—defined by subject, time, and place; investigate what published and unpublished sources exist and which have been or will be preserved; and determine what else needs to be done to document the topic adequately, and what need not be done. The articles follow the model variously, and each has particular strengths.

Schrock made a special effort to collect up-to-date information on the condition of architectural records in the five states with which she was less familiar, as well as on landscape architecture. She had been project director for the Massachusetts Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records (Mass COPAR) and so knew its work and the situation in Massachusetts best; in fact it was her work with Mass COPAR that suggested her as an author.

O'Toole summarizes the history of religion, which was once fundamental to public and private life, then seemed to become less important, and more recently has experienced an unexpected resurgence. He emphasizes, and synthesizes, recent changes, changes that are familiar in a fragmented way to most newspaper readers; he also considers trends in research on religion. His overview would be helpful to a group setting out to document religion in New England, or even in another region.

Alexander and Samuels put "Route 128" in a broad historical context, although with less detail than the other authors; they then develop an application of the documentation strategy model to an interrelated group of companies and laboratories that has figured prominently in the history and economy of New England and made its mark nationally.

McReynolds clearly knows about rural life, especially in Vermont. As a sociologist, McReynolds is particularly aware of recent changes and current trends, and of sources that help one track such changes and trends. Although his usual work rarely demands that he look back more than a decade or two, or that he think about the *long-term* preservation of sources, were there an effort to organize a documentation strategy for rural life in New England, he would be an obvious participant.

Bassett's wealth of information had to be trimmed to fit into this issue. Having researched tourism sources for an SAA session, he became a catalog (not in the library sense) of information, and his playful enthusiasm is well suited to his subject. In addition to the history and existing sources, he has investigated research use of sources in considerable detail.

While discussing records needs and problems, the authors have omitted, or at least played down, themes that are common to all contemporary collecting. All archivists must appraise large quantities of documentation and try to retain only what is necessary. The notion of uniqueness is crumbling as the same information is found in different media and formats, and as much of what was once considered private and personal appears regularly in print or on film or broadcast tape. Automation also challenges the notions of the unique document and of the "original" versus the copy: is the disk or tape the original? are the potentially endless numbers of identical "hard copies" all originals? In addition, the computer presents technical questions of compatibility of hardware and software and impermanence of tapes and disks, the need for documentation to gain access to automated files, and frequently the absence of a "paper trail." Because these have become universal problems—and because they have been often and ably, if sometimes inconclusively, discussed in print and at meetings—they are mentioned in the articles that follow, but are not discussed in detail.

There is detail—more or less, as indicated above—on five subjects: architecture (or the "built environment"), religion, rural life, science and technology, and tourism and recreation, but there is actually no blueprint even for New England. NEA presents this issue with the hope that, with all the vagaries of its genesis, its inherent incompleteness, and the variations in the authors' approaches to their topics, a picture of the region and some of its documentation does emerge, a picture that is suggestive for archivists inside and outside New England.