

Presidential Address

Shaping the Future: SAA Leadership in a Changing World

ANNE R. KENNEY



About the author: Anne R. Kenney is associate director, Department of Preservation and Conservation, Cornell University Library. Prior to coming to Cornell in 1986, she was associate director for the St. Louis branch of the Joint Manuscript Collection of the University of Missouri and the State Historical Society. This article was delivered as her presidential address at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in New Orleans on 1 September 1993.

Abstract: This past year has offered the Society of American Archivists (SAA) unprecedented opportunities to begin to change public perception about archivists' proper place and the value of records. The challenge for the next few years will be to capitalize on these opportunities to build a sustained leadership effort. SAA's recently adopted strategic plan calls on the Society to exert leadership on significant archival issues by shaping policies and standards, building effective coalitions, and improving public awareness of the value of archives. The author discusses some issues that the Society should address as it moves to implement this goal.

AS I PREPARED MY REMARKS for this evening, I thought about my son's doctor. Because Michael will enter kindergarten this fall, we took him to his pediatrician a number of weeks ago for a physical and booster shots—the DPT in his left arm, measles, mumps, and rubella in his right. Several days later, while Michael was still nursing his bruised biceps, we ran into Dr. Kiernan in the grocery store. Michael's initial response was, "What are *you* doing here?" While we know that doctors have to eat and sleep like the rest of us, it still comes as a surprise when we actually *see* them outside their office. Similarly, as the archival community endeavors to increase its sphere of influence beyond the individual repository, it too will face the question "What are *you* doing here?"

This year has offered the Society of American Archivists (SAA) unprecedented opportunities to begin to change public perception about our proper place and the value of records. The role and function of archival documents have been front-page news and, more significantly, have become wrapped up in what a nation thinks about itself—in relation to such events as the disclosure of Kennedy assassination materials, the CIA files on Cold War operations, the Nixon tapes, the White House electronic mail files, the Senate's report on mismanagement, the Martin Luther King papers suit, the proposed closing of the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, the Marshall papers controversy, and the resignation of Don Wilson and the search for a new archivist. Many of these events have offered SAA and individual archivists alike an opportunity to exert leadership, for the archival point of view has been sought and considered seriously. As the feminist Lucy Stone once remarked, "Our Cause is half won when we find that people are willing to hear it."¹

Having demonstrated the potential for SAA to exert renewed national leadership, the real challenge in the next few years will be to capitalize on these opportunities to build a sustained effort. Fostering public and legislative recognition of the value of archives to our society is a role well suited to our national organization. The momentum must not be lost.

Certainly our intentions are clear. Yesterday Council adopted a strategic plan, significantly entitled "Leadership and Service in the 1990s." SAA's strategic plan embodies both those elements in its four key goals: to exert leadership on significant archival issues, to improve educational opportunities, to lead the archival profession in advancing electronic records issues, and to increase overall organizational effectiveness. These are commendable, necessary, and realistic goals.

I believe this plan represents a clear statement of our vision, and its adoption should ensure, perhaps for the first time, that all SAA members will have a relatively consistent understanding of SAA's purposes and goals. Our success in implementing it will provide a valuable yardstick against which to measure the continued vitality of SAA over the remainder of this decade. Having succeeded so well in articulating our priorities, we must now focus on the *deed* rather than the word—a step far more critical than the adoption of the document itself.

This year must be devoted to identifying courses of action to accomplish the plan. It falls to all SAA groups to commit to its success, for this is SAA's strategic plan, not the profession's and not Council's. Implementation will also require sacrifice. Some worthy initiatives will have to be put on hold and SAA's finite resources must

inist Quotations: Voices of Rebels, Reformers, and Visionaries (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1979), 177.

¹Carol McPhee and Ann FitzGerald, comps., *Fem-*

be directed toward achieving our stated goals. We can take a lesson from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), which in 1991 issued an impressive research agenda for electronic records. More important, NHPRC is putting its money where its thoughts are in giving priority to applications that seek to address the ten central issues identified in its report.² By adopting this new strategic plan, SAA must be committed to aligning resources with priorities and must give notice that we will not be continuing business as usual.

The first of four goals embodied in the plan contains three objectives, to "exert active leadership on significant archival issues by shaping policies and standards, building effective coalitions, and improving public awareness of the value of archives." I would like to take each of these three objectives in turn and suggest some issues that should be considered as SAA moves toward their implementation.

The first objective is to develop and disseminate policy statements and standards concerning significant issues that affect historical records and the people who use and care for them. This is a critical objective if SAA is to become *the* recognized and authoritative voice on archival issues of national and international importance.

Events of the past year have certainly demonstrated the value of developing and promulgating policies and standards. The *SAA Code of Ethics* was cited in a number of recent controversies, including that surrounding the Thurgood Marshall papers. Shortly after Marshall's death in January, the Library of Congress opened his papers to researchers engaged in serious research. Journalists then began publishing articles based on those papers that revealed some

of the decision-making process behind recent cases before the Supreme Court. At that point, Chief Justice William Rehnquist criticized the Library of Congress for exercising bad judgment in making the papers widely available so soon after Marshall's death, and he threatened that he and a number of other Supreme Court justices might look elsewhere when it came time to donate their papers. Members of the Marshall family also expressed concern. They were supported by a number of senators who pressed Librarian of Congress James Billington to impose severe restrictions on access to the material. Despite such pressure, Billington held fast to the decision to keep the papers open. In the midst of all this, the Senate Subcommittee on Regulation and Government Information decided to hold a hearing on the matter.

SAA was contacted by the Senate subcommittee staff, who wondered about the protection of third-party rights covered in the *SAA Code of Ethics*, and I agreed to testify on behalf of SAA. While the code provided some guidance for me as I prepared my remarks, it was the *Joint ALA/SAA Statement on Access to Original Research Materials* that formed the basis of my testimony and helped shape Council's resolution on access to the Marshall papers. Although SAA supported James Billington's stand on keeping the papers open, we also called for the Library of Congress to embrace a policy of equality of access to collections, to adopt clear and unambiguous language for future agreements with donors, and to limit the archivist's discretion regarding access and use to concerns associated with the physical protection and security of the materials. In making these proposals, we believed the Library of Congress might avoid similar situations in the future.³ Having previously developed and

²Research Issues in Electronic Records: Report of the Working Meeting (St. Paul, Minn.: Minnesota Historical Society for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1991).

³Anne R. Kenney, "From the President's Desk," *Archival Outlook* (July 1993): 3; "SAA Resolution

promulgated the *Code of Ethics* and the *Joint Statement on Access*, we were able to take clear, unambiguous, and timely *archival* positions on this controversy.

Policy statements represent the underpinnings for exerting a national voice, and we must develop those in areas where archival interests are distinct, where they are challenged, or where they are of significant current and ongoing importance to the profession. The new strategic plan calls for SAA to develop such statements in three critical areas: electronic records, declassification, and requirements for maintaining archival materials. The plan also calls for the Society to identify key areas where standards should be developed, to establish the Society's presence on appropriate standards bodies, and to initiate activities to ensure that standards are widely adopted and implemented.

Standards work is an extremely time-consuming activity, as those who have served on the Standards Board or as representatives to the National Information Standards Organization (NISO) or the Association of Image and Information Management (AIIM) can attest. And so we must be careful not to spread ourselves too thinly. The Society also needs to use the resolution sword sparingly so as not to dull its leading edge—to consider what is germane to the work of archivists, to avoid expending effort in areas where archival interests are not clear cut or will lead to fragmenting the Society, to gauge what impact the resolution will have, and to assess implications beyond its mere promulgation.

In taking a public stand on issues of concern to the profession, timing becomes every bit as important as the message itself. It stands to reason that the chance of exerting influence is greatest when a course of ac-

tion is being considered rather than implemented. For SAA to exercise influence, it must be alerted early and must be able to respond quickly as well as knowledgeably.

In addition to timing, events of the past year also suggest that SAA can be most successful if it coordinates action with other stakeholders, which leads me to consider the second area in which SAA will exert active leadership in the coming year: the building of effective coalitions. Implicit in this, of course, is determining when to act in concert and when to act alone. In a rapidly changing world, we cannot assume that there is any one coalition that can adequately represent the greater archival perspective over time. I would suggest that none of our traditional alliances, including those with both the historical community and information professions, should be exempt from a close reexamination. Certainly SAA has had a long relationship with the historical profession, having been formed at the 1936 annual meeting of the American Historical Association. But we are also closely allied with records managers who are the stepchildren of archivists, having seceded from SAA to form the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA) in 1956. More recently, many individuals are entering the archival profession from a library background, and employers increasingly require the M.L.S. degree, as evidenced by job announcements in *Archival Outlook*. ALA maintains a Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, which attracts a growing number of archivists to its ranks. Many government archivists left SAA when the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) was formed in 1984.

Most government archivists may feel a closer kinship with county clerks than with historians or rare books librarians, although archivists at state historical societies may be more likely to support the activities of the American Association for State and Lo-

on Access to the Thurgood Marshall Papers at the Library of Congress," *Archival Outlook* (July 1993): 4.

cal History. Another natural ally could be museum professionals, as the growth of the SAA Museum Archives Section attests. But as we archivists enter the information age, and as more records come to us in electronic form, shouldn't SAA be forging alliances with information managers through such organizations as the International Association for Social Science Information Service and Technology (IASSIST), the American Society for Information Science (ASIS), or the Library and Information Technology Association (LITA), a division of ALA? Questions such as these have informed debate within the archival profession itself since its birth and complicate our relationships with other organizations.⁴

Given the numbers involved in these various professions, it would be difficult to form one coalition to represent all our interests, even if we wanted to. The challenge for SAA, then, is to make strategic—not static—alliances among these various groups, alliances that are based on programmatic direction rather than tradition and that support SAA's constant mission in a changing world: the identification, preservation, and use of the nation's historical record.

In choosing alliances based on professional interests, some coalitions will offer us a greater opportunity to secure public support for maintaining our cultural heritage. Such coalitions represent an advantage in the same manner that the United Way offers an easy choice to individuals who wish to make their charitable contributions in a manner that provides the greatest good for the greatest number. Coalitions enable the pooling of resources, insights, and expertise to achieve common goals,

combined clout, and credibility.⁵ Such strength, however, comes at a price. At times, the interests of the majority take precedence over those of the minority, and efforts to distinguish the archival perspective can be viewed as antithetical to the shared common good. The Society will be expected to support agendas that are broader in scope than our particular concerns and may be called on to devote resources to issues that are tangential to our mission. Building effective coalitions cannot be seen as a substitute for SAA's taking an independent stand on some issues, particularly those that cut to the heart of the archival enterprise.

The strategic plan specifically calls for SAA to concentrate on building more effective relationships with three allied organizations: the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History (NCC), NAGARA, and ALA.

SAA has been a member of NCC since 1982 and has been well served by this coalition. NCC has not only kept us informed but has played a key role in a number of major archival issues, most notably in the fight for National Archives independence and in its consistent support of funding for the National Archives and NHPRC. I believe, however, that SAA's role in NCC has been fairly passive. We have essentially followed rather than initiated action. Moreover, NCC's purpose is to promote history, so while it addresses a great number of archival issues, the interests of historians tend to dominate the agenda. This is natural, given their numbers and the financial resources they devote to the coalition. In working to build a more effective relationship with NCC, SAA must consider three important points:

1. We will get out of the coalition what

⁴A thoughtful essay on this issue by Luke J. Gililand-Swetland won the 1990 Pease Award. It is entitled "The Provenance of a Profession: The Permanence of the Public Archives and Historical Manuscripts Traditions in American Archival History," *American Archivist* 54 (Spring 1991): 160–77.

⁵ Frederick D. Hunt, Jr., "How Coalitions Work: Learn What You're Getting into Before You Sign Up," *Association Management* 45 (June 1993): 93.

we put into it. For SAA to nurture this relationship, it must assume greater responsibility in bringing archival perspectives to the table.

2. Our participation in NCC can help keep the historical community in touch with archival perspectives on a variety of issues.
3. SAA must recognize that our participation in NCC is necessary and vital but not sufficient. SAA must exert a more active leadership, particularly at the legislative level.

Some issues will require the presentation of a distinct archival perspective, thus the call for strengthening our relationship with NAGARA and for building coalitions with regional, state, and local archival organizations. Although in many ways this goal seems the most obvious, it has also been the most elusive. Part of the problem lies in our common missions and the ensuing competition for members, forcing us in some measure to stress our differences over our similarities. In coalitions with other professional groups, we identify ourselves as archivists first; in a coalition with archival groups, our identification as government employees or midwesterners can take on significant weight. And for SAA to assert that it will become the recognized and authoritative voice on archival policies of national and international importance implies that other archival groups will not have that role. Surely this could rankle, and we must recognize that competition will limit the extent and scope of cooperation.

This year has offered SAA and NAGARA a number of opportunities to cooperate—the most obvious of which was in the adoption of a Joint Statement to the Clinton Administration on selection criteria for the appointment of the Archivist of the United States—but our good relationship has been motivated by individual rather than formal ties. I would suggest that the attempt to build a more effective relationship must begin with frank discussions between

SAA and NAGARA leadership on how to avoid duplication of efforts and how to move beyond our separate identities as organizations to reach a cooperative relationship that promotes both our missions.

Our strategic plan also recognizes that not all is well in our relationship with regional, state, and local archival organizations. Although the SAA Committee on Regional Archival Activity was established to “serve as liaison between SAA and the various regional archival organizations and works with these organizations in order to improve archival cooperation,”⁶ I would suggest that what archival cooperation there has been to date has been more ad hoc than systematic. In recognition that reality has fallen short of expectation, the committee set aside a three-hour time block at this meeting to discuss issues of mutual concern. I want to thank those of you who were able to attend this meeting for providing some fresh perspectives on how we can stimulate cooperative initiatives. Building a consensus on the value of membership in both SAA and regional archival organizations is a good beginning. Encouraging our members to consider both, rather than one or the other, can do much to minimize the competitive wedge that separates us from closer cooperation.

Finally, in the area of building effective coalitions, the strategic plan calls for strengthening our relationship with the American Library Association. We have a lot we can learn from ALA about exerting leadership and much to gain from fostering closer ties. ALA’s size, focused strategic initiatives, communication network, and strong Washington presence have been most effective in recent years. ALA has exercised leadership by “calling the attention of the nation to increasing censorship, the

⁶“Guidelines, Committee on Regional Archival Activity,” *Society of American Archivists Council Handbook*. Approved by Council June 1988: 7.29.

library's role in developing a literate nation, and the need for legislative and community action to ensure improved funding for libraries."⁷ ALA's single focus "Read" campaign has been quite effective in uniting the profession's highly diverse membership and in reaching outside constituencies.

We can learn much from ALA in improving public awareness of the value of archives. Perhaps part of our problem stems from our apparent inability to come up with simple messages that are easily understood, compelling, and self-referential. Where is the archival equivalent of the imperative "Read" campaign? I do not think it is "Research." First, I still have a problem using the term as a verb, and second, I do not find it a particularly compelling campaign slogan. Neither is "Remember," which sounds like a rallying cry for those with memory blocks, nor "Investigate," which the FBI might lay prior claim to. It appears that our beliefs—that archives are fundamental to a democratic society, that access to archival sources are a public good and right, and that archival materials support sound and efficient management—do not lend themselves well to sloganeering. In her presidential address, Sue Holbert drew attention to this problem, stating that "big causes require popular phrases which we seem unable to coin."⁸

But there are dangers attendant with reducing complicated issues to simple messages. For a number of years now, ALA has taken a strong stand against censorship of any kind. Last summer, the ALA Council voted in favor of a resolution, submitted by a Task Force of the Social Responsibilities Round Table, condemning Israeli censorship, primarily in cases of Palestinian communities on the West Bank. Reaction

to the Israeli censorship resolution was intense. The resolution was sent to a number of international agencies, including the United Nations, and led many to question why ALA had decided to censure Israel specifically, when censorship is prevalent elsewhere in the Middle East and throughout the world. Individual ALA members demanded that their association "focus on bedrock library issues and abandon this foray into the development of a foreign policy."⁹ After lengthy turmoil and debate, the ALA Council attempted to rescind its resolution but was told by the parliamentarian that it could not technically rescind anything it had previously done. Council could, however, revoke its previous censure of Israeli government censorship, which it promptly did, all the while avowing its opposition to censorship whenever and wherever it occurs. This is the first time in its history that ALA has taken such an action.¹⁰

The lesson here is that as we pursue the goal of leadership and give voice to the archival perspective at the national level, we must look beyond the immediate action and consider the long-term ramifications. Our success in establishing archival credibility and the legitimacy of our perspective on issues of archival concern will not be measured by what we do in the next twelve months. Our success will be measured by our sustained efforts, our careful assessment of issues, our sticking to priority areas of concern, and our capability to articulate those concerns effectively to nonarchivists. It will be up to us to translate these concerns to those who might not otherwise appreciate their relevance. For instance, although archival interests may appear pertinent to such legislative and executive initiatives as reform of declassification or expediting public disclosure of records re-

⁷Marilyn L. Miller, "Open Letter to ALA Members," *Memberline* (Autumn 1992): 1.

⁸Sue E. Holbert, "Searching for Common Ground," *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 147.

⁹"ALA's 112th Annual Conference: Upbeat and Hopeful in New Orleans," *American Libraries* 24 (July–August 1993): 613.

¹⁰"ALA's 112th Annual Conference," 618.

lated to President Kennedy's assassination, there is no guarantee that they will be heard. In the case of the assassination records, for instance, legislation passed last fall called for the establishment of a five-person assassination records review board (which has yet to be appointed by the president) to "ensure and facilitate the review, transmission to the Archivist [of the United States] and public disclosure of government records related to the assassination of president John F. Kennedy." Legislation called for the president to make nominations after considering persons recommended by the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, the Society of American Archivists, and the American Bar Association, but, significantly, the board must include at least one professional historian and one attorney.¹¹

Archival interests are no less relevant, albeit less obvious, in legislation submitted in support of the Clinton-Gore initiatives to make information accessible electronically. This legislation includes, for example, the High Performance Computing and High Speed Networking Application Act, introduced by Representative Rick Boucher; the Electronic Library Act, introduced by Senator Bob Kerry; and the Paperwork Reduction Reauthorization Act, introduced by Senator John Glenn. The last of these outlines each agency's responsibility for "applying records management policies, principles, standards, and guidelines, including requirements for archiving information maintained in electronic format."¹²

Having worked closely with both industry and information technology specialists for the past three years, I can tell you that their understanding of the requirements for "archiving" information are vastly different from ours. Who better than SAA, representing the greater archival community, in collaboration with NAGARA and regional archival associations, could articulate the needs and value for maintaining information over time?

If modern records of enduring value are to endure, SAA must become an active voice in ensuring that measures that affect such records reflect a truly archival perspective. I can think of no better place to begin than in the political arena. SAA's strategic plan recognizes that it will be "especially important for SAA to expand its advocacy efforts to reach legislators and government officials." Toward this end, SAA Council yesterday approved the establishment of a Congressional Liaison Working Group to identify means for enhancing congressional relations and increasing SAA's presence on legislative matters of concern to the archival profession. This initiative will not address the entire range of leadership challenges facing SAA, but it is a realistic beginning.

In closing, I am reminded of Victor Mature's best line in one of his gladiator movies of the early 1960s. As he languished in a prison cell plotting his escape, Mature mused, "If we had some horses we'd have a cavalry, if we had some men." It stands to reason that to exert leadership, the profession must also have leaders. SAA must place special emphasis on identifying future leaders, through such means as student chapters of the Society, a mentoring program, the continuation of internships on committees, task forces, and boards. And

¹¹ *Assassination Materials Disclosure Act of 1992 S. 3006*, 102d Cong., 2d sess., 22 July 1992. In early September 1993, President Clinton nominated four individuals, one representing each of the four professional associations, including William L. Joyce, past president of the Society of American Archivists.

¹² U.S. Senate, *Paperwork Reduction Reauthorization Act of 1993 S. 681*, 103d Congress, 1st sess., 31 March 1993; U.S. Senate, *Electronic Library Act of 1993, S. 626*, 103rd Congress, 1st sess., 22 March

1993; U.S. House, *High Performance Computing and High Speed Networking Applications Act of 1993, H.R. 1757*, 103rd Congress, 1st session, 21 April 1993.

it must provide leadership training to all SAA members, a task that the Committee on Goals and Priorities has specifically identified for itself as an important goal in the next few years. As a British politician once observed, leaders are evolved not elected.¹³ Leadership training comes in the form of program offerings such as this week's workshop on making archives newsworthy, which is designed to help archivists "improve their ability to participate in news interviews by crafting a message, using information and outreach to entice the media, and delivering the message intact."¹⁴ Next year's annual meeting

in Indianapolis will include a leadership development seminar that will build on the work of the leadership conference held in Montreal.

As we become comfortable with our role outside the repository, so will others. In a time of change, SAA must act on behalf of both the profession and the public if it is to be a strong national advocate for the identification, preservation, and use of the historical record. But it is something we will have to do together. It is an important time for SAA to exert leadership. It is an important time for archivists to be members of SAA.

¹³Robert Stewart, comp., *A Dictionary of Political Quotations* (London: Europe Publications, 1984), 135. Paraphrase of quote by Ernest Pretyman, English Conservative politician.

¹⁴"Making Archivists Newsworthy, 53W," as de-

scribed in the program for the Society of American Archivists 57th Annual Meeting in New Orleans, 1-5 September 1993, 37.