The American Archivist

Volume 58
Number 3
Summer 1995

Katherine Anne Porter

About the cover: *American literary luminary Katherine Anne Porter poses in a Kimono in Corpus Christi, Texas, in 1912. Jodi L. Allison-Bunnell's article on page 270 investigates the issue of multiple copyrights represented in a collection, such as the Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, and the challenge presented to manuscript curators concerned with preservation and access. (Photograph courtesy of the Papers of Katherine Anne Porter, Special Collections, University of Maryland at College Park Libraries.)*

The American Archivist

Volume 58 / Number 3 / Summer 1995

 ISSN 0360-9081

Reviews

Society of American Archivists

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

The American Archivist (ISSN 0360-9081) is published quarterly by the Society of American Archivists, 600 S. Federal, Suite 504, Chicago, Illinois 60605. Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, Illinois, and additional mailing office. Subscriptions: $85 a year to North American addresses, $100 a year to other addresses. Single copies are $25 for magazine copies and $30 for photocopies.

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The American Archivist is available on 16 mm microfilm, 35 mm microfilm, and 105 mm microfiche from University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346. When an issue is out of stock, article and issue photocopies may also be obtained from UMI. *The American Archivist* is indexed in *Library Literature* and is abstracted in *Historical Abstracts;* book reviews are indexed in *Book Reviews Index.*

♾ *The American Archivist* is printed on an alkaline, acid-free printing paper manufactured with no groundwood pulp that meets the requirements of the American National Standards Institute—Permanence of Paper, ANSI Z39.48–1992. Typesetting and printing of *The American Archivist* is done by Imperial Printing Company of St. Joseph, Michigan.

Postmaster: send address changes to *The American Archivist*, 600 S. Federal, Suite 504, Chicago, Illinois 60605.

From the Editor

Archivists and Change

IN MY EDITORIAL INTRODUCTIONS to *American Archivist* issues, I have written about the need for research, reevaluation of archival practice and the assumptions underlying practice, the myriad complex issues facing archivists, and a host of related and often challenging matters. My essays have reflected both my own concerns, captured in my own research and writing and generated by my teaching and observations about the profession, and the substance of the content of essays published in the journal. This particular issue also prompts one to speculate a bit about the current state of archival practice, a continuing purpose of the *American Archivist.* The research articles, case studies, and perspectives are all, in their own way, calls for change and new approaches to some basic archival functions. As another *American Archivist* issue (Fall 1993) reflected, we are surrounded by controversial and troublesome concerns; we can add constant change to this litany.

As a group, archivists might seem unlikely advocates for change. There is a conservative aspect to the mission to preserve and manage records with continuing value to society. We are the "remembrancers" of society. Anthropologist Jack Goody has shown that, as writing increased in importance in particular societies, new professions developed to safeguard and even interpret the writing in a conserving fashion.[1] Archivists have often been in that role. As society and its institutions are rapidly transformed by technological, legal, fiscal, political, and other pressures and events, the primary roles of the archivist to identify, preserve, and provide access to the records of continuing value could appear to be anchors in an otherwise stormy present. Appearances can be deceiving. Not only must archivists capture the essence of the changing society as they appraise and acquire, these professionals must adapt their methods and even their message as needed in order to continue to strive for their mission. All of the essays in this issue concern, in some form and either directly or indirectly, change.

The Duff-Toms research article leading off this issue relates to an age-old archival tradition, the adoption and adaptation of technology to enhance practice. In this study, the authors consider a hypertext version of the Canadian *Rules for Description (RAD)* and its utility for assisting novice archivists to create archival descriptions. While the results are somewhat inconclusive, the creation of *HyperRAD* and its test-

[1]See, for example, Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

ing are two welcome indications of change. One is the creative use of technology to improve the work of archivists, while the other indication is the interest in evaluating the effectiveness of the technology and reporting the research results to the archival profession. I have written often about the need for research in our profession, so this enables me to focus on the subject of change.

Archivists have adapted through the centuries, across a variety of recording media and with the use of devices retrieved from outside the profession, from catalog cards to on-line public access catalogs and from pencils to laptops. The development of *HyperRAD* is another example of the use of automated mediation systems for archival work. Personally, I think it signals a shift from focusing on the labor of reducing unprocessed fonds by sheer brute effort to focusing on how to introduce design solutions to practical problems. *HyperRAD* might fail, but archivists should commit to investing the time of their best and brightest in the design of systems that improve basic practices. Writings by cognitive scientist Donald Norman and management guru Peter Senge have recently captured the way in which organizations throughout society are being more creative in solving problems of efficiency, effectiveness, reliability, and other related challenges.[2] Archivists should be well versed in technological techniques and their promises and pitfalls for their own work, a goal reflecting both the change of the world and change in the archival profession.

Two case studies in this issue also reflect change in the archival community. Faye Phillips's essay on congressional papers collection development policies is an able, straightforward description of how archival and historical manuscript repositories might approach the acquisition of such papers. Given that her essay is an amplification of her 1984 essay on collection policies, one might ask what has changed, especially since the original essay has not been improved on in the intervening decade. For one thing, her essay reflects and draws on a substantial body of work on the documentation of Congress completed in the recent decade. While her essay only alludes to the documentation strategy concept and other macroappraisal approaches, Phillips has brought forth a concrete set of guidelines for the acquisition of congressional papers. It is hoped that her essay will prompt individual repositories to reflect before leaping to acquire the papers of each and every member of Congress, ranging from one-term legislators to those who influenced one or more generations of politicians and citizens. From my own perspective, I hope the Phillips essay will lead to the writing of analyses of just what all this documentation really means, how it is being used, and how much it costs to manage and maintain. This essay is yet another benchmark in the sensible maintenance of such records, and it could be the basis for individual repositories developing even more restrictive and practical guidelines for the acquisition of such materials.

The case study by Jodi Bunnell on the Katherine Anne Porter collection at the University of Maryland captures another essence of change in the archival profession. When I entered the profession in the early 1970s, archivists seemed to have rel-

[2]See Donald Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), *Turn Signals Are the Facial Expressions of Automobiles* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1992), and *Things That Make Us Smart: Defending Human Attributes in the Age of the Machine* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1993); and Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990). These are but examples of the many volumes that appear nearly daily and that offer sound advice to the archivist in confronting the congested work-flow problems aptly described by David Bearman in his *Archival Methods* (Pittsburgh: Archives and Museum Informatics, 1989). Norman, Senge, and other such authors call for creativity, innovation, risk taking, and common sense; in other words, they argue for developing the ability to understand and adapt to change.

atively few concerns about copyright or access, except those resulting from negotiated agreements with donors. Recent court decisions in copyright suggest reason for alarm, as Bunnell describes, and at the least require archivists to proceed more cautiously and deliberately even when trying to do little more than to create a preservation microfilm copy of a particular fonds. Bunnell's call for more political lobbying by archivists for common sense copyright laws that protect the archival mission is a logical conclusion from her case study. It is not the first such action call, and another change would be archivists finally and effectively uniting to petition for revisions to the Copyright Act.

A healthy set of "perspectives" articles also graces this issue and fits into the overall theme of change. Michael Nash's interesting essay on appraising the records of small businesses represents a change in that we even have this essay to read. Nash states that "when archivists shift their foci from large corporations to small businesses, they enter the world of scarce records and infinite diversity." We could also state that when archivists shift to considering the literature on appraising the records of small businesses they enter the world of scarce studies and few methodologies. Hopefully, Nash's essay will stimulate other research and writing on business archives, an important topic that has long been neglected in our professional literature.

The remaining three essays all relate to the changes wrought on archives and archivists by electronic information technology, a topic archivists have been fretting about for more than a quarter of a century. Helen Tibbo's contribution explores the manner in which electronic mail and the Internet may transform archival reference. Tibbo's essay is valuable both because it presents a carefully thought-out set of issues for archivists to mull over and because it draws on the increasing research and reflection going on in the library and information science fields about the nature of the virtual or extended library or other information provider. Margaret Hedstrom also examines the networked archives, although her concerns focus on the implications of electronic records and their dissemination across networks for the integrity of these records. She speculates about the loss of the "recordness" of these records in a networked environment, and she raises numerous issues for archivists and the users of archives to ponder. There is a tension between the traditional notions of an archives and archivists and their roles and images in the modern information age. At the heart of Hedstrom's message is the sense of a dramatically changed archives. Finally, Lydia Reid has provided some practical advice for educating archivists in electronic records management. The diversity of graduate, continuing, in-service, and self-paced educational venues—many potential and some already established—that she describes reflects how the archival profession has shifted from reliance on just a few educational approaches to considering the potential of many different opportunities. The essays by Tibbo, Hedstrom, and Reid reiterate the notion that the archival profession, the organizations the profession works in, and the society the profession serves are all undergoing immense alterations.

The *American Archivist* should be both a vehicle for chronicling how archivists have responded to change and a means for assisting archivists to cope with change. As a profession, archivists are called to serve society in some important ways, and unless they are able to comprehend and deal with the change going on in that society, this service will be compromised. On listservs and professional newsletters, at professional conferences and seminars, and wherever archivists tend to gather, I have witnessed a deep concern about what is going on in society and organizations and the

implications for archival work. What I have not often heard or seen evidence of is the relevance of professional writings to these issues and concerns. This may mean a number of different things. Perhaps the literature is not relevant to these concerns. Or perhaps the literature is not thought about in this fashion. Or perhaps archivists simply do not read their own professional literature. My aim here is not to embrace any of these potential explanations. I do know, however, that anyone who takes a few minutes to read this one issue of the journal will find much of practical use and considerable stimulation for self-reflection about his or her own daily practice.