

# THE SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

OCTOBER 26 AND 27, 1942

ENTHUSIASTIC approval of local arrangements, the high caliber of the papers presented, genial program guidance by presiding chairmen, some lively discussions and the traditional hospitality of the Virginia State Library and historical Richmond, all combined to make the sixth annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists at Richmond, Virginia, very enjoyable for the seventy-four registered attendants. Everyone felt special responsibility placed on him by the war conditions, and found inspiration and solutions for many problems in the enlightening interchange of ideas not only in the formal program, but also during discussions and informal conversations. Especially significant was the fact that everyone scheduled to take part in the program appeared despite current difficulties of travel.

R. D. W. Connor of the University of North Carolina, president of the Society, and chairman of the opening session, introduced Oliver W. Holmes of the National Archives, whose comprehensive paper formulated in a masterly way the foundation for the general subject of this panel, "Planning a Permanent Program for Federal Records in the States." After reviewing past practices and experiences of the government in caring for the records of its field offices, Mr. Holmes discussed in turn the advantages and disadvantages of (1) a system of regional archival depositories, (2) a system of federal-state depositories planned and supported co-operatively by the federal government and the states, and (3) the centralization in Washington of all field records of permanent value. As a measure for handling vast accumulations of records of field offices of New Deal and war agencies, likely to demand attention immediately at the close of the war, Mr. Holmes suggested the establishment of temporary centers where the records could be studied, reduced in bulk through selection and microfilming, arranged, described, and, if necessary, serviced. The knowledge and experience gained through this program would help to determine the nature, location, and size of permanent field depositories, should they prove necessary and desirable.

William D. McCain of the Mississippi Department of Archives

and History argued against a system of regional depositories and the further concentration of records in overcrowded cities. He expressed the hope that further study would be given to the possibilities of federal-state depositories, and pointed out some of the advantages of such decentralization as well as some of the difficulties that would have to be overcome. He endorsed Mr. Holmes' suggestion of temporary concentration centers "until we make up our minds."

Army field records were discussed by Captain Jesse S. Douglas of the Adjutant General's Office, War Department, formerly regional director of the Survey of Federal Archives for Oregon and Washington. He pointed out that local historians fail to realize the importance of the records of the executive departments in Washington and consequently have tended to overemphasize the value of field records and local depositories. Because of the army's organization and record system its field records are of relatively little use for historical purposes except in conjunction with War Department records, and Captain Douglas concluded that historical interests would best be served by centralizing them in Washington.

The hazards in war-time to records centralized in Washington were emphasized by Richard B. Morris, professor of history in the College of the City of New York. "We must plan our archival buildings not only for peace but for war-time as well," he said. Professor Morris felt that in most cases it is practicable to distinguish between records that might best be placed in a regional depository and those that ought to be centralized in Washington, and cited a number of examples of each type. He felt also that centralization was impossible because of the bulk of the field records, and discussed in detail problems presented in caring for enormous accumulations of court records which have high research value.

Lillian Kessler, of Washington, D.C., in charge of the disposition of Historical Records Survey product files in the states, announced that arrangements for their housing had generally been undertaken on a deposit basis by state or local officials, and that the final inventory would be forthcoming soon.

The Monday luncheon speaker, Gaston Litton of the National Archives, was introduced by William J. Van Schreeven of the Virginia State Library. Mr. Litton's paper, on "Record Problems and Responsibilities in the Canal Zone, Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico," painted a vivid word picture of his recent extended visit in these important outposts of the United States where he surveyed federal

records, considering their character, quantity, conditions, and degree of protection. Climatic conditions create a real problem in records storage in those areas. Mr. Litton described valuable records in the Canal Zone dating back as far as the French effort to build the canal. The Danish records of the Virgin Islands have already been brought to the National Archives. Many of the records of the Spanish régime in Puerto Rico have been lost by fire. In both these latter two territories there are valuable recent materials of considerable local interest.

Solon J. Buck, archivist of the United States, presided over the afternoon panel session under the general subject "Records Administration and the War." The first paper read was by Philip C. Brooks of the National Archives who emphasized the importance to archivists of the way in which records are originally created and filed. He described the records administration program of the National Archives, which is designed to assist in developing throughout the government principles and practices in filing, selection, and segregation that will facilitate the disposal of records or their transfer to the National Archives as they become noncurrent. He said that both current administrative and archival needs would best be served by the designation of a competent records officer in each agency of government, with adequate authority and staff to advise administrators in the planning of forms and procedures in order to prevent the creation of unnecessary papers and to have those that are created properly identified for record purposes; to study and apply filing schemes; to train the personnel doing mail and records work; and to know the bases of evaluation of records and to administer the whole records retirement program. He quoted Mr. Buck's statement that the fundamental objective of the National Archives "is to make the experience of the government and people of the United States as it is embodied in records of the federal government and related materials available to guide and assist the government and the people in planning and conducting their activities."

Lieut. Comdr. Willard F. McCormick, U.S.N.R., formerly of the Carnegie Illinois Steel Corporation, set forth many helpful ideas regarding the creation and control of records. He remarked that instead of people keeping records, records sometimes keep people—from essential war work. To prevent unnecessary records from coming into being, he propounded six questions which officials should ask themselves: "Why is the item needed? Who needs it? What will it

contain or consist of? When will it be required and how often? Where will it be prepared or distributed? How will it be prepared or produced?" He designated the first as most important. Following a discussion of this matter, he advised that forms should be kept to the standard sizes produced by the paper manufacturer and the manufacturers of files in order to avoid use of odd sizes and to save space. His statement that Donald Nelson approves the transaction of business by telephone as much as possible had repercussions in the remarks that followed the formal panel program.

Robert H. Bahmer, loaned to the Navy Department by the National Archives, gave an enlightening discourse on the disposition of records from the point of view of the agency. In the eight months since the first of February, the Navy Department has increased its filing cabinet space by almost a third. He emphasized the importance of surveys in government agencies to identify records, and of determinations as to which records are of temporary and which of permanent value. The following steps are necessary, he said: first, establish a standard of value; second, provide for regularity in the retirement and disposal of records and archives; third, give protection to valuable records retained; fourth, inform archival institutions as to what material they may expect to receive; fifth, provide a records officer with an inventory so that the reference service of the department may be made more available; and sixth, provide filing officials with a sound basis for formulation of classifications so that records may be sorted according to their value at their source.

The paper on "The Development of Adequate Records of War Administration" by Harry Venneman of the Committee on Records of War Administration, in the Bureau of the Budget, disclosed the plan of the federal government, through this committee, to provide adequate accounts of administrative activities in the war. A part of this program is to gather data on decisions of policy made orally that are not normally reflected in official records. The committee has staff members assigned to study current developments in each of several major fields of government activity. Mr. Venneman discussed the work of several federal agencies that have established historical officers within their organizations.

In the discussion that followed, Helen L. Chatfield, archivist of the Treasury Department, called attention to the need for incorporating in the official records memoranda implementing the formulation of policy, a type of document which is often retained in the

personal files of officials. Luther H. Evans, chief assistant librarian of Congress, spoke briefly of the library's collection of printed and processed material of the war. He said he hoped that the army and navy and other agencies would make available to the library their confidential issuances, under whatever restrictions might be necessary. He cautioned those writing histories of war activities that they should get all the facts before writing; otherwise their work would be inadequate. Fred W. Shipman, director of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park, told how he is working to assure the completion of records of activities at the White House.

Voice recording equipment and the making of typed copies of phone conversations were topics about Mrs. Virginia Leddy Gambrell, of the Dallas Historical Society, inquired. Lieut. Comdr. McCormick stated that records of conversations could be filed and typed later when wanted. He said that the first of the records were aluminum, but that they have now been replaced by plastics. Replying to a question by Miss Rogers of Illinois State Library about filing the aluminum records which were apt to warp, he stated that in his department the flat discs are placed in envelopes and filed like correspondence.

Alexander Weddell, former ambassador to Spain and also past president of the Virginia Historical Society, who presided at the annual dinner on Monday evening opened the program with pleasant reminiscences. R. D. W. Connor, first archivist of the United States, gave in his presidential address a very interesting and informative history of the vicissitudes through which he successfully guided the National Archives for seven years.

Mr. Connor presided at the annual meeting and the following officers were elected for the coming year: president, R. D. W. Connor; vice president, Harold S. Burt; secretary, Lester J. Cappon; treasurer, Julian P. Boyd; and member of the council, Philip C. Brooks.

The Society was invited to visit the Virginia State Library on Tuesday morning where the staff very graciously conducted the members through its different departments and showed the efficient manner in which the state of Virginia is caring for its records.

The general subject of the Tuesday morning session, led by Julian P. Boyd, librarian of Princeton University, was the conservation of cultural resources. An informative paper was presented by Dan Lacy, executive secretary of the Committee on Conservation of Cultural

Resources, in which he pointed out that it is impossible to disassociate records relating to the war from those dealing with pre-war and post-war periods and contemporary materials relating to normal activities. He felt that the collection of materials should not be connected with the writing of state war histories, and that it could best be accomplished by existing agencies having the facilities for the housing and care of records. He outlined six principles that should govern any program for the collection and preservation of research materials.

William D. Overman, executive secretary of the Ohio War History Commission, presented the second paper of the morning on the subject "State and Local Program for the Collection of World War II Records." He gave to those present an interesting pamphlet which his commission is using to obtain co-operation from individuals and institutions. The governor appointed a commission of about twenty people which included state officials, history professors, the state historian of the D.A.R., librarians, and newspaper men. The governor authorized emergency appropriations and the chairman has delegated responsibility to local historical agencies. Newspapers are being used for instructions and publicity. Radio stations are co-operating in their programs and are also preserving scripts relative to the war. The state Council of Defense has subscribed to a clipping service, and a scrapbook of clippings is being compiled. Each regional director keeps a file. A system for indexing and cataloguing as soon as material comes into the office has been devised. Copies of all pamphlets printed by the state defense council, camp newspapers, and publications of federal and state departments are among those being collected. All of this material will be transferred to the state archives at the end of the war.

In the ensuing discussion problems of federal records outside of Washington were discussed. Kenneth E. Colton of the Iowa Department of History and Archives asked what authority could be given a record supervisor to compel an agency to follow suggestions. Mr. Robinton of New York, aware of the need for prompt action, asked if the National Archives could deputize individuals in the states to supervise the assembling and care of official records. Dr. Buck made the statement that he has no authority over current record practices of federal agencies except to inspect, personally or by deputy, any records in the United States. He might deputize state officials to inspect federal records.



Dorsey W. Hyde of the National Archives, recommended that printing plants throughout the country be asked for copies of war-time publications, and that broadcasting stations be requested to keep copies of all of their scripts pertaining to the war. Replying to an inquiry by Mrs. John Trotwood Moore, state librarian of Tennessee, as to how the expenses of collection are being met in Ohio, Mr. Overman said that in addition to the appropriation made by the state government the services of a large number of volunteer workers were available as the result of an appeal which had been made on the basis that this assistance was a patriotic duty. Mr. Robinton of New York suggested that school children might help. He proposed contests, possibly in map making. Mr. Buck stated that the laymen should be impressed with the importance of this work so that a complete picture of this war will be recorded. Mr. Colton stressed the importance of soldiers' letters, and the need of impressing upon the service men that their reports and diaries are valuable. It was reported that Dartmouth and other colleges are collecting letters written by their alumni in the armed services.

Mrs. Elleine H. Stones, chief of the Burton Historical Collection in the Detroit Public Library, told of the many service men stationed in and around Detroit who are making extensive use of their genealogical records. Dorothy C. Barck of the New York Historical Society called attention to the fact that posters, leaflets, and newspapers will not last long unless paper is good or mounted or microfilmed. Social organizations in every state should be encouraged to preserve their own war records, advised Mr. Cappon.

At the Tuesday noon luncheon session Earl G. Swem, librarian of William and Mary College, presided, introducing Randolph W. Church of the Virginia State Library. In Mr. Church's paper on "The Relationship between Librarians and Archivists" he stated that the older records become the less likely they are to be referred to for their record status, and the more they become source material held for educational value. Therefore, "it is very definitely open to question whether such material should be filed and housed in the order in which received or even with material from the same agency of file." He approved the use of the dictionary card catalogue and recommended study of the field of serial cataloguing. He set forth that an archivist should be an administrative official in the broad field of education, subject minded, with a technical training in the fields of records and record making, as well as a sound basic training in

the principles of cataloguing and bibliography. Essentially, he is, even as the librarian, a custodian of knowledge and not of records.

The Town Hall session on Tuesday afternoon was presided over by Vernon D. Tate of the National Archives, and the first speaker, W. Edward Keegan, read an instructive paper on "Papers, Carbons and Ribbons." He said that until controversy between paper technologists comparing the longevity of chemically purified wood fiber and rag fiber paper is settled he recommended that 100 per cent rag paper be used for making permanent records. For transitory records, care should be exercised to select paper that is no more than adequate. At the National Archives a survey of the use requirements was made, and selection of the most suitable type of paper for various records has resulted in an estimated saving of 25 to 30 per cent in cost. He advised adapting the size of a record for specific uses to the stock sizes of paper, a list of which may be found in a Department of Commerce publication numbered R-22-40 entitled "Paper (Basic Sheet Sizes)." He pointed out that carbon papers and typewriter ribbons that employ carbon black for ink base display a fine degree of permanence. He recommended the following treatment to prevent smudging of carbon copies: Mix 25 grams of corn starch with a small amount of cold water and add this to a liter of boiling water. When cool pour the solution into a photographic tray, saturate the paper to be treated in the solution, drain, blot on the reverse side and set aside to dry. When nearly dry flatten and dry by application of heat and pressure.

The second afternoon paper on "Restoration Methods" was given by W. J. Barrow, of the Virginia State Library, who stated that acidity in paper is the chief cause of deterioration. He explained the methods used in preparing records for the laminating process and suggested that a special chemical bath previous to laminating would effectively neutralize the acids which have developed in paper through years of use, and would fill the paper so that the lamination process would make it practically indestructible. He stated that silking deteriorates within twenty or twenty-five years due to micro-organisms in the silk. Acetate foil used in lamination increases tear resistance. In a seventy-two hour accelerated aging test, a silked sample lost 52 per cent of its folding endurance and a laminated sample lost 31 per cent.

Mrs. Gambrell presented a paper on "Housing and Storage of Records" which was confined to a discussion of the different types of



filing equipment, vertical and horizontal. She suggested that a comprehensive history of the types of filing equipment which have been marketed in the United States would be a reference tool most useful to archivists. She also stated that for the past year the Society's special committee on filing equipment has been making a survey of the archival filing equipment currently manufactured and state archivists will shortly receive from the committee a detailed questionnaire on their methods of physical storage. She asked for co-operation on the part of all officials having the care and protection of records.

Morris L. Radoff, archivist of Maryland, then read a paper on "Misuses of Microphotography." Among the difficulties he cited in the application of microphotography were the problem of teaching people to read the films, inability to accommodate two people who want to use the same roll at the same time, and eye strain caused by continuously watching the film. The impossibility of providing a sufficient number of readers and the inability to get microfilm cameras at present because of war regulations were also mentioned. Mr. Radoff's experience in trying to microfilm or photocopy repaired material has proved unsatisfactory.

In the discussion which followed, Margaret C. Norton, archivist of Illinois, expressed her belief that microfilming is the solution to the problem of storage, and said that it had been used in their tax department. She also spoke of the need for a type of reader for microfilm which will allow comparison of material contained on two or more films. Mr. Tate said that experimentation was in process with a multiple projection head which would take care of just such a situation, but that thus far its cost is beyond the reach of most institutions. Mr. Swem suggested microprinting, a recent development in flat printing, as a solution to the problem.

At the close of the afternoon meeting the Society was given a much-appreciated complimentary tea by the hotel.

For their final meeting the archivists joined the American Association for State and Local History on Tuesday evening. The speaker was Mr. H. J. Eckenrode of the Virginia Conservation Commission, who discussed the subject "War History from Local Newspapers."

HAROLD S. BURT

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