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About the Cover

The cover illustration is an 1875 reissue of an 1869 U.S. postage stamp (Scott Catalogue # 124). Its depiction of a mail carrier on horseback illustrates the importance the postal system had assumed in the United States in the late-nineteenth century. Peter Wosh's review essay in this issue discusses the impact of the postal system on American life in the nineteenth century. (Photo courtesy of Cedco Publishing Company, *Fascinating U.S. Stamps* calendar.)

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FROM THE EDITOR

A New Era for the *American Archivist*

With this issue, the *American Archivist* enters a new phase in its history of service to the archival profession. After sixty years of publication as a quarterly journal, it now becomes a semi-annual publication. This change follows recommendations made in 1996 by the SAA Task Force on the Future of the *American Archivist*. The task force sought answers to problems that had been plaguing the journal for a long time, most notably a declining number of submissions and many years in which publication lagged behind schedule. These two problems were not seen as unrelated, for authors would understandably be hesitant to submit material to the *American Archivist* when the length of time to publication seemed interminable, even by the normally slow standards of academic journals.

The move from quarterly to semi-annual publication, therefore, seemed to hold the best prospect for enabling the journal to get back on schedule and, more importantly, to remain on schedule. Cutting in half the number of times we must go through the production cycle each year is bound to have a positive effect on the work flow of editing and publishing the *American Archivist*. Whether restoring the journal to a regular publication schedule will help generate more submissions is more problematic, however. As always, the size of the pool of submissions is dependent on the willingness of archivists and those interested in things archival to undergo the hard but satisfying work of writing for publication.

Perhaps more dramatic than the shift to semi-annual publication is the physical transformation of the journal. The last major redesign of the *American Archivist* was in 1979, and I feel certain that most readers would agree that a design change was long past due. We have changed our typeface from Times Roman to Baskerville, an elegant, classic, and eminently readable typeface. We have also slightly increased the size of the body type, added a little more white space between the lines, and made other small changes, all in the interest of making the journal easier to read. Biographical notes on authors have been moved to a new "Gallery of Contributors," complete with pictures, adding a more personal touch to the journal.

As part of the design change, we have also eliminated the categorization of articles into "Research Articles," "Perspectives," or "Case Studies." Assignment of articles into these categories was often somewhat arbitrary. Furthermore, readers of the *American Archivist* are certainly intelligent enough to know a research article or a case study when they see one. Although we have abandoned these categories as a way of formally organizing the articles in each issue, they still remain indicative of the kinds of articles the journal seeks to publish. Therefore, the editorial policy published in each issue will continue to use these terms as a way of helping potential authors think about their contributions. The book review section, edited by Barbara Craig, will continue to publish a mix of reviews of new books and other publications as well as in-depth review essays. Timely publication of the *American Archivist* will help to make the book review section more useful than it already is.

Although there will only be two issues a year, the hope is that these two issues will bulk as large as our four issues have in recent years. One advantage of semi-annual publication is that it will provide more flexibility to include longer pieces, should a subject merit more extended treatment. With only two issues a year, however, it is less likely that special issues devoted to one topic will be published. On the other hand, special sections that group together four to six articles on a particular topic are welcome, and anyone interested in serving as a "guest editor" for such a section should contact the editor.

The articles in this first semi-annual issue of the *American Archivist* treat a wide variety of archival topics, ranging from archival practice in Elizabethan England to harnessing the power of the Internet in today's archives. A brief overview of the contents of this issue will demonstrate the diversity of topics and approaches that the journal will continue to look for in submissions.

The *American Archivist* will continue to publish the presidential address given at the society's annual meeting. Nicholas Burckel's address at the 1997 meeting in Chicago reflects on the growth of SAA since its establishment in 1936 and thus certainly makes an appropriate opening piece for this issue, which marks the sixtieth anniversary of the journal's first publication. Similarly, it is also appropriate that this issue carries the latest winner of the Theodore Calvin Pease Award, named for the first editor of the *American Archivist*. The Pease Award paper, along with the presidential address, will be regular features of the spring issue of the journal. The 1997 prize-winning paper by Karen Collins is an interesting study that collected empirical data on how people look for photographic images in archives so that archivists can improve the subject access they provide to their collections of images.

Archival history should be of intense interest to readers of the *American Archivist*. Archivists are somewhat notorious, however, for not paying as much attention to our own professional history and the history of records and

recordkeeping in general as we should. Maggie Yax's study of Arthur Agarde takes us back to a time before Schellenberg, even before the French Revolution, to show that concerns for maintaining reliable archival records are as old as recordkeeping itself.

Meanwhile, the ongoing revolution in information technology continues to affect archives and archival practice in various and sundry ways. Richard Kesner provides a personal perspective on what the role of archives and the archivist will be in the "electronic workplace." It is a perspective that may make some archivists uncomfortable, but it is perhaps one worth listening to for just that reason. Wendy Duff introduces the concept of the "warrant" for recordkeeping and argues that archivists can use existing laws, regulations, and standards as a means of buttressing their case for maintaining records as evidence, particularly in the electronic environment.

Two articles specifically address the use of the Internet by archives. Jean-Stéphen Piché discusses how archivists can use the Internet to integrate descriptive information on their records and in the process improve their understanding of records and record creators. Andrea Watson and P. Toby Graham provide a case study of the development of a website making available a collection of important historical materials. This is one example of how digitization can help archives to reach a larger audience. Anne Gilliland-Swetland explores the needs of the K-12 school community for primary source materials and ways in which archivists can help meet those needs through digitization projects.

Preservation is always a pressing concern for archivists. Tyler Walters' research looks at preservation management practices in archives and manuscripts departments located within libraries that are members of the Association of Research Libraries. The degree to which archival preservation efforts are integrated into overall library preservation management may have an impact on the quality of the archives preservation program. Preserving paper records is a familiar, if not always easy challenge, but other formats can cause myriad headaches for archivists. What archives, for example, does not have some cassette tapes or long-playing records? Christopher Paton provides the kind of basic, up-to-date, factual information on audio recordings that archivists always need and don't always know how to find.

Finally, Peter Wosh returns us to the area of archival history with a review essay that looks at the development of the postal service in the United States in the nineteenth century. He reminds us that the World Wide Web is not the first communications revolution that Americans have experienced and suggests that a better knowledge of changes in nineteenth-century communications will give us a clearer perspective on the current revolution in communications and information transfer.

For sixty years the *American Archivist* has served the archival profession in general, and the Society of American Archivists in particular, by publishing research, reflections, opinions, reports from the archival trenches, and general information to enhance the work of archivists and the development of the archival profession. It will continue to do this, and with its new publication schedule will be able to do it more effectively. We hope you like the *American Archivist's* new look, but even more importantly we hope that you will continue to read it and that you will continue to find it a valuable resource in your work as an archivist.

—Philip B. Eppard