

THE SEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

NOVEMBER 15 AND 16, 1943

AT THE REQUEST of the Office of Defense Transportation the seventh annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists was held not in October as originally contemplated but in November. With the exception of the initial session, which convened in the Trustees Room, Chancellor Green Library, Princeton University, all sessions were held in the Nassau Tavern. The registered attendance was eighty-three. This total was made up as follows: Canada, 1; Colorado, 1; Connecticut, 2; Delaware, 1; District of Columbia, 33; Illinois, 3; Maryland, 3; Michigan, 2; Mississippi, 2; North Carolina, 4; New Jersey, 4; New York, 10; Ohio, 3; Pennsylvania, 2; Texas, 1; Tennessee, 1; Virginia, 5; Vermont, 4; Wisconsin, 1. An unofficial count of attendance at the respective sessions produced this result: first morning, 60; first luncheon, 69; first afternoon, 78; annual dinner, 89; second morning, 56; second luncheon, 82; second afternoon, 64; second evening, 70. It is understood that attendance at informal sessions was likewise maintained at a high level.

The initial session was presided over by Leon de Valinger, Public Archives Commission, Delaware. The first speaker was Victor Gondos, Jr., the National Archives, whose topic was "Archivists and Architects: The Nature, Scope, and Degree of Co-operation of the Archivist, Architect, and Public Authorities in the Planning and Execution of the Archival Building Program." Archivists should consider now, it was emphasized, the structures they should like to see erected as one phase of the anticipated post-war reconstruction program. Preliminary plans and outline specifications are prerequisites for allocations of funds. Methods to be employed in the selection of the architects were pointed out. Not until preliminary drawings have been approved does the architect prepare working drawings. The archivist should supply the architect with tables of estimated space requirements and with a complete survey of the building site. In planning, the architect must take care to provide efficient space distribution, service facilities, and damage prevention. The archivist can assist the architect by supplying him with information concerning weights of

records and their containers. Even though it be necessary in planning stack areas to restrict them to artificial lights and air there appears to be no sound reason for the extension of this restriction to offices.

Mr. Gondos was followed by William J. Van Schreeven, Virginia State Library, who presented "Equipment Needs to be Considered in Constructing Post-War Archival Depositories." According to this speaker, a prerequisite is that archivist and architect determine the kind of building needed. Of prime importance is stack equipment, the goal in selection of which should embrace interchangeability of parts and protection of records. Experiments led to the decision to employ in the new Virginia State Library Building shelves of only two widths and to engage them by means of brackets below rather than above. Cardboard containers are preferable to metal ones. It may be desirable to arrange containers of some types of records, for example maps and photoprints, around the walls of the reading room. Requirements of reading, catalogue, and restoration rooms were touched upon. The Barrow laminating machine was recommended. Needs of the photographic laboratory, both for large and small institutions, were discussed in some detail. The preferred fumigation vault is the vacuum type using a mixture of ethylene oxide and carbon dioxide gas. Cleaning by air pressure was endorsed. The type of flattening device selected should depend upon volume of work to be done.

The third paper at this session was "Some Observations on the Planning of Archives Buildings" by Louis A. Simon, of the Public Buildings Administration. In the writer's absence it was read by the chairman. In the beginning it was noted that an archives building has the special characteristic that it must be so planned as to accommodate not only the records initially placed in it but an annual increment difficult to estimate. The arrangement of the building should not be determined until after the archivist has been appointed. Successive future enlargements must be assumed and the first of these may be arbitrarily fixed at from twenty-five to fifty years. A rapidly increasing volume of records would justify construction of a larger building initially than would otherwise be the case. For a local building the site chosen may be sufficiently large to permit additions; for a national building, such as the National Archives building, the site may be so restricted in size as to require construction of future additional units at other locations. To achieve protection against high explosive bombs requires the outlay of sums generally regarded as

prohibitive. Serious consideration should be given to plans calling for archival buildings to serve in part as shrines, for example, the National Archives building, since amount of space available for records will be affected.

Presiding over the first day's luncheon conference was Edna Louise Jacobsen, New York State Library. The managing editor of *THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*, Theodore C. Pease, had prepared a paper, "An Editor Looks at his Non-Contributors," which in his absence was read by Karl L. Trever, of the National Archives.

The unpopular craft of editor was wittily defended. The principle followed in editing *THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST* has been that a contributor has no rights which an editor is bound to respect. Virtually all writers may misquote, get dates wrong, or otherwise be found guilty of nodding; it is a duty of the editor therefore to assist the scholar in the telling of the actual factual truth. Uniformity of presentation is essential. Delays in publication have been owing to necessity of editorial rechecking and styling and to failures of persons to submit copy on time. A plea was made for submission of news notes and articles to the editors, it being pointed out that this publication had continually been struggling against a shortage of manuscripts despite the fact that archivists in this country have been and are doing many things worth telling one another about.

The chairman of the first afternoon session was James E. Downes, New Jersey Public Record Office. "The Archives of Princeton University" were described by Thomas J. Wertenbaker of that institution. Of these archives, housed on the campus in Nassau Hall, the most valuable are the trustees' minutes, which date back to 1748 and therefore virtually to the inception of the institution. These reflect the development of educational policy, changing concepts of discipline, curricular trends, building construction, and such intramural controversies as that between President Woodrow Wilson and Dean Andrew F. West. Of only lesser value are the faculty minutes, running from 1787 to date. Numerous financial records include series of ledgers and an account book, beginning in 1750, maintained by President Aaron Burr. Presidential correspondence, unhappily, has not been retained by the university, although it has been presented with the official correspondence of two presidents, John McLean and Francis L. Patton. Series of somewhat less moment are minutes of academic departments and of the university's two literary societies;

of the latter, there are more than two hundred volumes, the earliest reaching back to Revolutionary days.

Attention shifted from university to railroad archives when Herbert O. Brayer under the title, "I've Been Working on the Railroad," portrayed his activities as archivist of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad. The economic history of the Rocky Mountain region can almost be written in terms of railways. Citing numerous topics on which railway records would throw new or additional light, it was remarked that "the vast quantity of official . . . documents . . . of almost every American railroad constitute one of the most important unused reservoirs of source material for the history of this nation." That they have remained unused is in large measure owing to the deplorable conditions under which they have been stored. Illustrations were drawn from the records survey undertaken by the speaker as his initial project when appointed archivist on November 15, 1941. A subsequent project was the installation of a program dealing with noncurrent records; this includes not only microfilming on a grand scale as part of an adequate disposal system, but also setting up a "historical collection" of some five thousand documents and fifteen thousand photographs. Another project has been the establishment of a "current records division" with authority transcending department and bureau lines.

At the annual dinner Christian Gauss, Princeton University, presided. "The Navy Department's War Record" was set forth by Robert G. Albion of that department. The speaker explained that the motive underlying his appointment in February, 1943, as "recorder of naval administration" was to insure a contemporary, planned record of naval administration during the second World War. Tribute was paid to the Office of Records Administration, headed by Lieutenant-Commander Emmett J. Leahy, and its aggressive program which includes elimination of accumulations of noncurrent, valueless records and the "birth control" of records by such devices as the streamlining of correspondence. A contrast was drawn between the practice of the Office of Naval Records and Library in segregating certain operational naval records of the first World War and the current effort to retain records collections as unified wholes on the basis of provenance. The second World War records are "tailor-made" as exemplified by the application of the requirement for war diaries to all units afloat and some units ashore. The administrative reference

service seeks to place in the hands of administrators as aids to the solution of current or anticipated problems studies of the manner in which similar first World War problems were attacked.

Owing to his inability to be present in person, the paper on "British Archives and the War" prepared for the occasion by Hilary Jenkinson, Public Record Office, London, was read at the annual dinner meeting by Solon J. Buck, archivist of the United States. A distinction must be drawn, it was explained, between British archives and English archives, from which latter illustrations were chiefly drawn. English archives fall into five categories: public (central); public (local); semi-public; private; and ecclesiastical. England differs from other leading European "archives-owning countries" in that it has "no central control of all this mass of archives." Progress toward effecting co-ordination of efforts by controlling authorities was notable and prospects for future progress bright when war came in September, 1939. Through enemy action archives suffered from fire and water. Precautions against enemy action that have been practised on a large scale include removal from built-up areas and distribution of risk. A positive gain from the war has been the extensive use of microphotography. Campaigns for paper salvage have kept archivists alert to prevent serious losses, but they have co-operated by urging prompt disposal of valueless archives. The general work of the British Records Association, although restricted by the war, has not lapsed at any point. Its membership has declined, but it has still been able to hold its annual conference in London each year. Archivists are already thinking of reconstruction in which it is believed that the keynote should be co-operation among offices and persons whose activities will affect archives. War-time planning for reconstruction is justified by the archivist's creed, which is the sanctity of evidence, and aim, which is to provide, without prejudice or after-thought, for all who wish to know, the means of knowledge.

At the annual business meeting the following were elected for the ensuing year to the indicated offices: Margaret C. Norton, president; Julian P. Boyd, vice-president; Lester J. Cappon, secretary; Helen L. Chatfield, treasurer. Solon J. Buck was likewise elected to the council, but for a five-year term.

Serving as chairman of the morning session on November 16 was L. E. Donaldson, of the United States Department of Agriculture. Owing to illness his paper on "The Federal Disposal Act of July 7, 1943" could not be completed by Marcus W. Price. With scant warn-

ing therefore Philip C. Brooks, also of the National Archives staff, was requested to present this subject. He took note of the initial disposal act of 1889, the executive order of 1912, and the statutes of 1939 and 1940. Shortcomings of this earlier legislation were summarized and it was emphasized that the act of 1943 is designed to insure the retention of federal records possessing "administrative, legal, research, or other value" and expedite the disposal of federal records lacking such value. The "scheduling" provision of the measure, novel in federal experience, was explained and it was pointed out that on the basis of estimates supplied by agencies several millions of dollars can be saved annually by effective utilization of the new legislation.

"The Disposal of Useless State Archives" was discussed by Christopher Crittenden, North Carolina State Department of Archives and History, who took note of the fact that seventeen states have enacted no legislation concerning disposal of non-current state archives. A few states have authorized records custodians to dispose of enumerated series of records. Fifteen states have authorized disposal upon approval by a designated competent office or official or by a commission of which a designated competent official is a member. A few states permit disposal merely upon approval of the state archival agency. The speaker favored that type of statute authorizing disposal by office of origin or custody following approval by the archival agency. The problem receives chief attention in states where there are efficient archival agencies. In a number of states disposal schedules are being worked out. The speaker concluded with a description of disposal procedure in his own state of North Carolina.

Although unable to attend the meeting, C. D. Crandall, Interstate Commerce Commission, had prepared a paper on "Regulations Governing the Preservation and Destruction of Records of Persons Subject to Parts I, III and IV of the Interstate Commerce Act." This was read by Roland P. Monson, Civil Aeronautics Administration. The Interstate Commerce Act as amended authorizes the Interstate Commerce Commission to regulate the preservation and destruction of records of carriers, lessors and other persons subject to its jurisdiction. The initial regulation, issued in 1907, required preservation of all statistical and accounting records except for seventeen listed categories, disposable after specified periods of time. At present preservation periods range from six months through fifteen years to permanency. Unless listed records may not be destroyed. Regulations

provide for appointment by carriers of officials to supervise the destruction of records. Although the commission is not concerned with the method of destruction, a certificate, identifying the records destroyed, is required to be filed with the commission. In a number of instances the commission has authorized petitioning carriers to dispose of paper records when microfilm copies were to be retained. To illustrate the importance of the work it was pointed out that recently, as a prerequisite to petitioning the commission to revise or rewrite its applicable 1915 regulations covering destruction of records, regional and general committees of pipe line carriers spent almost three years in research. The consequent recommendations received about six months of study and review by the commission before the rewritten regulations were issued effective January 1, 1943.

Following his reading of the paper by Mr. Crandall, Mr. Monson briefly described the analogous work of the Civil Aeronautics Board in regulating the preservation and destruction of the records of air carriers subject to the board's jurisdiction. Foundations were laid, it was explained, in 1930-1934, when the postmaster general prescribed the system of accounts to be kept by airlines operating under mail contracts. In 1938 statutory authority was conferred on the Civil Aeronautics Board to prescribe retention periods for records of air carriers. On March 1, 1942, the board issued a schedule in which were specified the records that might be destroyed after the lapse of a specified time. On November 15, 1943, a revised schedule became effective, the revision embodying many suggestions made by carriers on the basis of experience. In this schedule retention periods range from one to ten years except for records to be permanently retained.

James Fesler, War Production Board, was presiding officer at the second luncheon conference. The speaker was Vernon G. Setser, Department of War, the topic "Can the War History Projects Contribute to the Solution of Federal Records Problems?" Federal, state, local, business, and other classes of records are accumulating and will continue to accumulate at a great rate. As an experiment in the utilization of masses of recent records the federal war history projects possess chief significance for the archivist. The trend appears to be that comprehensive research projects can only be carried out by teams of research workers and auxiliary personnel. Standards are lacking for reports of recorded experience prepared for improvement of current administration and administrators generally are not clear as to type of report needed by them. The fact that researchers have found

that the usual administrative records of an agency are not sufficient to provide a complete story of its administrative development suggests the requirement that, when needed, supplementary types of records be produced. In order to reduce bulk of mammoth record groups brutal decisions regarding disposal of record groups or portions thereof will have to be made. If war history workers shall have written the appropriate story of administrative development, such will possibly make less necessary the indefinite preservation of large portions of affected record groups. The answer to the question posed in the title is in the affirmative.

At the afternoon session on November 16 the chairman was Harold S. Burt, Connecticut State Library. In his paper, "Librarians and Archivists—Some Aspects of their Partnership," Herman Kahn, the National Archives, pointed out that in the case of his agency, and probably to the surprise of many persons, most services on collections of transferred records are rendered to agencies of origin. The notion that transferred records of a governmental agency should be arranged by subject content, much as are books in a library, is fallacious since that which is comparable to the individual book is not a single paper or dossier but the entire group or records received from the agency. For the archivist to dismember and distribute a record group would be analogous to the librarian's breaking up a book and distributing its chapters, according to their subject matter, on his shelves. Because no one can ever know to what use records may be put in future the breaking up and reorganization of record groups according to a preconceived scheme is always a catastrophe. To solve the searcher's problem of locating record groups or parts thereof containing information on a given subject the archivist must provide checklists, guides, and other types of finding mediums.

In discussing "Archival Needs to be Considered in Planning an American Post-War Stabilization Program with Special Reference to the Needs of the States and Their Subdivisions," Hermann F. Robinton, New York State Education Department, used his state to illustrate a type of post-war planning that may be applicable elsewhere. It is planned to set up regional archival depositories in buildings at Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, Albany, Poughkeepsie, New York City, and on Long Island. Each of these regional centers was selected as the result of a survey of economic trends and needs. To cover the counties in each region would be assigned a records supervisor. To the regional depositories would be transferred noncur-

rent but valuable records. The financing of such depositories can be facilitated by their being planned as war memorials. For any long range archival program the assistance of a state planning commission is desirable if not necessary. Also needed is the co-operation of the office of state controller; if it can be demonstrated that by records administration savings to the treasury have been effected, an allocation to archival activities of perhaps one-half of one per cent of the state tax can be promoted. Of potential value would be the introduction into state colleges of courses for the training of archivists.

On the evening of November 16 the Society's program reached its finale in the joint session with the American Association for State and Local History. This "town meeting" session, presided over by Herbert A. Kellar, McCormick Historical Association, was devoted to a discussion of practical questions pertaining to archives and materials for state and local history. Miss Margaret Norton and James F. Kenny addressed themselves to the question "What distinctions should be made between archives and historical manuscripts?" The former, in a paper read in her absence by C. Kenneth Blood, pointed out that in the case of true archives custody is unbroken; the latter concluded that classification into one or other category depended upon the individual document or documents and the application of common sense. Herbert E. Angel, in discussing "What principles of selectivity should be used with respect to the collection and preservation of archival materials?" suggested as criteria three questions: Who will use the records? For what purpose? Within what period? In reply to "What principles of selectivity should be used with respect to the collection and preservation of materials for state and local history?" William Francis English maintained that a collecting agency should seek institutional materials, papers of lesser lights as well as of persons of prominence, documents of regional or local significance, and relatively current records whether of peace-time or war-time. "What is the function of the college librarian with relation to the collection and preservation of materials for state and local history?" was answered by Clarence Paine by stating that in the absence of any other agency of collection and preservation the responsibility should be assumed by the college librarian in so far as resources permit. If two or more such agencies exist within the locality, co-operative effort should be the goal; control over collections within two or more agencies can be exercised by means of a union catalogue.

In discussing "What is the function of the manuscript and book

dealer in relation to the collection and preservation of materials for state and local history?" Forest H. Sweet observed that the dealer's interest is commercial; his prices are his chief concern, being fixed at the highest level the traffic will bear; and in order to prosper he must learn considerable of the lore of the historian and archivist. The scheduled discussion of "What is the relation of the Bibliography of American Imprints to the collection and preservation of archives and materials for state and local history?" by Douglas C. McMurtrie unfortunately did not take place.

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The National Archives