

the

AMERICAN ARCHIVIST



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About the Cover

In his article, "The Politics of Leo XIII's Opening of the Vatican Archives: The Ownership of the Past," Nicholas J. Tussing uses Leo's letter *Saepenumero considerantes* and the memoirs of the Protestant scholar Theodor von Sickel to explore the context of the opening. In 1881 the archives were located in three rooms of the so-called *Piano nobile*, next to the Sistine Hall of the Apostolic Library, and in six rooms of the second floor, granted by Alexander VII in 1660. This view of the second hall of the *piano nobile* shows the marble bust of Rev. Augustin Theiner, prefect of the *Archivio Segreto Vaticano* 1855 to 1870, and the coat of arms of Cardinal Scipione Borghese Caffarelli, librarian from 1609 to 1618, above the door. Copyright © Archivio Segreto Vaticano. See http://asv.vatican.va/en/arch/1_past.htm, accessed 7 July 2007.

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FROM THE EDITOR

American Archivist for All

This issue of the *American Archivist* is the first to be published both in print and online. This accomplishment required the hard work of many people. The Electronic Publishing Working Group, chaired successively by Rob Spindler of Arizona State University and Jackie Dooley of the University of California-Irvine, laid the groundwork. Their 2002 report identified the need to publish online and noted the many synergies that could be achieved by doing so.

In 2006–2007, the *American Archivist* Editorial Board working groups, led by Paul Conway of the University of Michigan and Bill Landis of Yale University, identified options and wrote an action agenda and budget. The SAA Council approved the plan in June and authorized funding for the work. Director of Publishing Teresa Brinati ensured the timely signing of the contract with MetaPress, who will host the journal online, and, with her usual competence and good humor, dealt capably with all the details that inevitably arise in doing anything digital. Board member Amy Cooper Cary of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee identified an LIS graduate student intern, Erin Hvizdak, to begin work at SAA performing quality assurance on the paper-only backfile (vols. 1–63). Keep watching *Archival Outlook* and the SAA website for more information.

This issue also experiments with reviews of Web publications as well as book reviews. The new association management software system recently installed at SAA headquarters and the *American Archivist Online* will allow us to explore ways to aggregate, disaggregate, and provide multiple pathways to professional discourse.

Many of us are practicing archivists, for whom it is a challenge to find time to do research and to write. As *American Archivist* is published only twice a year, with the normal lead times required for hard-copy publication, it is equally challenging to provide timely access to research results, especially in the fast-moving field of electronic records. The Editorial Board hopes that *American Archivist Online* will provide opportunities for additional and timely forms of publication.

"Archivists are the new macho heroes of Washington," declared Maureen Dowd in her *New York Times* column on 24 June 2007. I'm sure we archivists are glad to receive recognition, but I cringed nonetheless to continue reading that when Dick Cheney "tried to push around the little guys, the National Archive data collectors—I'm visualizing dedicated 'We the People' wonky types with glasses and pocket protectors—they pushed back." It seems that we still have much to do to educate the public about our work.

This issue of *American Archivist* relates to Dowd's column in several ways. Most notably, James David provides a timely and detailed description of the history and processes of declassification of government information in "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Mixed Progress Under the Automatic/Systematic Declassification Review Program." Dowd's column was sparked by the revelation that Vice President Cheney refused to comply with reporting requirements of Executive Order 12958. He denied the Information Security Oversight Office (ISOO) of the National Archives access to his office to conduct a routine inspection and even tried to abolish the office. From David's paper I learned, beyond any prior expectation, how cumbersome, convoluted, and tiresome it is to declassify any classified information—and conversely, how effective classification is in denying access to government records. I applaud the archivists who have the expertise and persistence to implement the declassification process that ensures proper government accountability. David urges archivists to unite with other stakeholders to make government information accessible to citizens, a bulwark of democracy. SAA is active in this effort.

David's article provides a timely illumination of the rapidly changing developments in this field. As this issue of *American Archivist* goes to press, the July/August issue of *Archival Outlook* includes three related articles: "Progress on Declassification at NARA," from Archivist of the United States Allen Weinstein; "Democrats Fail in Battle to Force Cheney to Comply with Declassification Order," as reported by Leland J. White, director of the National Coalition for History; and "Watchdog Groups Release Report on Government Secrecy." On 12 July 2007, OpenTheGovernment and People for the American Way Foundation released an update to the 1987 report on "Government Secrecy: Decisions without Democracy" cited in David's article. The report can be viewed online at www.openthegovernment.org.

This issue of *American Archivist* also speaks eloquently about the necessity and urgency of reaching out to the public, not only to educate newspaper columnists but also to mobilize support for the critically important work we do. Randall Jimerson, in "Archives for All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice," expands his inspiring presidential address published in the spring/summer 2006 *American Archivist*. He urges archivists to "use their power—in determining what records will be preserved for future generations and in interpreting this documentation for researchers—for the benefit of all members of

society.” Max Evans in “Archives of the People, by the People, for the People” envisions a commons-based future in which researchers are invited into the work of making archives accessible to all. The Web 2.0 environment provides tools by which interested stakeholders can help to establish processing priorities and collaborate with archivists to provide detailed processing. Archival digitization-on-demand will provide more documents online. Evans challenges us to think about what our reading rooms will look like in coming decades as the most commonly used materials are made available online. He suggests ways we might harness the power of our users and Web 2.0 to leverage and build a symbiotic environment in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

In their paper, “Interaction in Virtual Archives: The Polar Bear Expedition Digital Collections Next Generation Finding Aid,” Magia Ghetu Krause and Elizabeth Yakel evaluate one example of how archivists might harness the power of Web 2.0 technologies to provide mechanisms for engaging researchers in expanding and refining archival finding aids. Their preliminary evaluation of the “next generation” finding aid for the group of collections known collectively and affectionately as the Polar Bear Expedition Collections at the Bentley Historical Library shows that archivists may be able to find ways to leverage the knowledge of interested researchers to improve description, understanding, and acquisition of archival records.

To use the new technologies Evans and Krause and Yakel envision, and to thereby gain the ends Jimerson espouses, archivists must understand the theory, practice, and history of their profession. Geoffrey Yeo, in “Concepts of Record: Evidence, Information, and Persistent Representations,” provides an eloquent, cogent, and compelling examination of the theoretical discourse surrounding the definition of the *record*, the object central to our professional mission. The second part of his essay will appear in the spring/summer 2008 issue. In “From the College Democrats to the Falling Illini: Identifying, Appraising, and Capturing Student Organization Websites,” Chris Prom and Ellen Swain describe their practice-based research on capturing websites at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as essential documents of today’s students.

Nicholas Tussing illuminates an event in archival history in “The Politics of Leo XIII’s Opening of the Vatican Archives: The Ownership of the Past.” Understanding this event requires knowledge of both the broad world of Italian politics and the smaller political sphere of the archives itself. His paper is an example of a “study in documents,” defined in *Archivaria* as “archival documents or bodies of documents, including their origins (context of creation), functions (original, subsequent, and current), structure, evolution, and content.” I hope that *American Archivist* will publish more such studies in documents in the future.

In conclusion, Francis X. Blouin supplies a moving tribute to Robert M. Warner, sixth Archivist of the United States, who passed away at age seventy-nine in April 2007. Dr. Warner served as Archivist of the United States from 1980

through 1985, leading the agency during one of the most important periods in its history: its transformation from a division of the General Services Administration to an independent executive agency. His obituary appears in the July/August 2007 issue of *Archival Outlook*. The memorial is a tribute to Dr. Warner's life that captures the impact one person can have on the growth and practice of a profession. It also reveals how quickly the field changed in one lifetime. I am privileged to say that he was my own teacher, mentor, and exemplar. Except for medical doctors, it was unusual for faculty holding the doctorate at the University of Michigan to use that appellation. It was, however, the custom for directors of the Michigan Historical Collections to use it, perhaps because they wanted the work they did to be recognized on the campus. *American Archivist* usually refers to people by last name only, but this seems too cold for this memorial, and I have chosen to include the title his staff and colleagues used so affectionately.

I am always excited by the way authors in *American Archivist* guide us to archival literature and connect us to other disciplines. Kathy Marquis of the Albany County (Wyoming) Public Library has called reference archivists "tour guides among the finding aids." Certainly our authors are tour guides to the expanding literature in fields of interest to archivists. For example, Krause and Yakel and Evans guide us through the literature of LIS (library and information science), HCI (human computer interaction), sociology, and economics relating to the power of the Internet, especially Web 2.0 tools. Yeo's footnotes provide an extensive evaluation of the literature of the fields of philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, and law, among others, as well as international archival writing on the concept of the record, and David's citations offer signposts through the documentation of government information policy.

As a former reference archivist, I am particularly interested in the social dimension of information and how information connects people's lives. We learn first and foremost from face-to-face verbal and nonverbal communication with other people. We have developed evermore sophisticated tools to extend that connection through space and time. In 5,000 years we have extended our power to communicate from cuneiform tablets carried by messengers, to printed text carried through the postal service, to multimedia carried around the world over the Internet. Archivists are charged with making these diverse communications media accessible—now and into the future. Archivists connect us to the records, voices, and images of people who, in preceding us, developed our customs, institutions, and social relationships.

The power and promise of the Internet are that it can bring people together by sharing information. But that information is not always organized and accessible. The Internet vastly expands access to sources through online search engines. These may point to thousands of websites in a matter of seconds but provide little help in evaluating them. And, depending on the granularity of the search, they may not identify all potential sources, even those accessible

online. Although we are all surrounded by information, we need expert guidance to the best and most relevant sources. Here, the simple footnote may be powerful:

What is the power of the footnote? A footnote is information in context. The nuances of the subject reference can be very precise when the footnote barks at the heels of a sentence, in a way that Library of Congress subject headings in a catalog cannot. Further, the footnote evaluates a source in a way no catalog or finding aid can. That is, the author of a text that the reader finds useful cites further information. Thus, the source noted in a footnote is identified as a potentially useful source for the reader. Footnotes are a means of authenticating an argument, but they are equally, if not more importantly, a means for people to communicate about sources of information.¹

For seventy years, *American Archivist* spoke to a community of archivists and allied professionals, but it spoke only in print. It was available only by individual subscription or through libraries that subscribed to it, primarily university libraries. *American Archivist Online* will allow us to make the writings of three generations of archivists and the writings of current and future generations of archivists more broadly available. It will exponentially expand the community of archivists through time and space. It will be available to anyone with Internet access. It will be a more powerful tool for sharing information about the theory and practice, the history and future of our work, not only with archivists, but with all stakeholders and anyone interested in archives.



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¹ Mary Jo Pugh, *Providing Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2005), 66–67.