## P R O F E S S I O N A L   R E S O U R C E S

# Readers: What Do You Think about the *American Archivist?*

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Early in 2010, the *American Archivist* Editorial Board will send you a survey asking for your opinions about the *American Archivist* and its role in your professional development. As the journal of record for the Society of American Archivists (SAA), the *American Archivist* provides a formal and persistent platform for thoughtful writing on trends and issues in archival theory and practice, both in the United States and abroad, through peer-reviewed research articles, case studies, in-depth perspectives, and reviews of recent books, websites, and exhibitions. With the transformation of the *American Archivist* into an electronic publication, it is time to re-envision the focus and function of the journal. The journal is a principal benefit of membership and must therefore be relevant, meaningful, stimulating, and provocative.

The *American Archivist* Editorial Board has no mechanism for readers to evaluate the journal, as SAA does routinely for its educational programs and the annual meeting. The Editorial Board now seeks feedback from both SAA members and nonmember readers to ascertain what they think about the journal and its future. We are fortunate that Cory Nimer begins this discussion in this issue with his paper "Reading and Publishing within the Archives Community: A Survey." We also have some baseline demographic data from the A*CENSUS and surveys conducted by the National Forum on Archival Continuing Education (NFACE).[1]

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[1] "Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States," *American Archivist* 69 (Fall/Winter 2006) and see survey data at http://www.archivists.org/a-census/. For NFACE, see http://www.statearchivists.org/reports/NFACE/IndivEducSurvey/indivsurvsumm.htm. Both accessed 11 July 2009.

As we re-envision the *American Archivist* we want your input on how we are doing and where we should be going. In January 2009, I completed my first three years as your editor. SAA renewed its contract with me for another two years with an option for a third. It is time to assess what has been done.

## The Journal Moves Online

SAA Council charged the American Archivist Editorial Board to develop and implement a plan to transition the *American Archivist* from a print-only publication to a print-plus-electronic publication that encompasses future volumes of the journal and the complete digital conversion of the back files of the journal from its first issue in 1938. In August 2007, SAA released eight volumes online—volume 63.2 (Fall/Winter 2000) through volume 70.1 (Spring/Summer 2007). All issues since that time have been published by SAA in dual electronic and print formats.

This year Council approved and funded the digital conversion of the first sixty-two volumes of the journal (1938 through Spring/Summer 2000) and their full integration with those already available online. The Editorial Board and Director of Publishing Teresa Brinati assembled a full run of the journal, developed a request for proposals, reviewed the bids, and awarded the bid for digitization to OCLC. As I write, OCLC is digitizing the back run and the digital files will be posted to our online hosting service, MetaPress, this fall. By the time this issue is in print, the entire run of *American Archivist* will be online at http://www.archivists.org/.

Beginning with this issue of the *American Archivist*, SAA student members will have access to only the electronic edition and will no longer receive a print copy. This change in distribution is necessary to allocate much-needed resources to content development and providing electronic access. This fall SAA will provide members/subscribers the option to "opt out" of receiving the print edition of the journal by checking a box on their renewal form. All full members will continue to receive the print edition if they want it.

We want a robust evaluation of the online journal before renewing the hosting contract in September 2010. According to statistics provided by MetaPress, users accessed the journal more 45,000 times between January 2008 and July 2009. Articles from the journal were downloaded 20,544 times in the past twelve months. To make such statistics meaningful, the Editorial Board wants to understand how readers access and engage with the journal, both online and in paper, and to learn more about the relationship between paper and online reading.

The time has come to explore new tools for facilitating conversations among authors and readers around *American Archivist* content. The Editorial Board is excited about the prospects for new venues for such communication in

the online journal, such as those envisioned by Scott Anderson and Robert Allen in this issue. We hope such tools will allow the *American Archivist* to function as an archival commons supporting robust and timely discussions of archival theory and practice.

Anderson and Allen note that the online networked environment also allows for layering content, supplying more detail for those wanting it, while providing context and conclusions for the wider audience. Links within formal *American Archivist* articles could lead readers to supporting documents, photographs, raw data, and other unfolding layers below the publication itself. Just as footnotes refer readers to a broader network of contextual information from a wide range of communities that bear on interdisciplinary archival topics, so, we hope, an *American Archivist* online article might serve as a portal to further information in context for readers who want to follow those links. The survey will probe for your thoughts about structuring such discourse and providing access to it.

### *American Archivist* To Be Added to JSTOR

Last April, SAA signed an agreement with JSTOR to add the *American Archivist* to its newly developing Arts and Sciences VI collection, "Library and Information Sciences." JSTOR approached SAA to add the *American Archivist* to its digital collections of more than a thousand journals across the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. JSTOR (short for *Journal Storage*) was established in 1995 to build a trusted digital archive of scholarly output. The organization will digitize the backrun to its specifications in 2010 and will add the *American Archivist* to its research platform, promoting enhanced discovery and use of the entire journal corpus. JSTOR's commitment to the *American Archivist* is a recognition of the long-standing importance of archival thought to a wide range of disciplines. Our license with JSTOR will make the *American Archivist* visible to many academic researchers who might not otherwise find it.

During its first decades, SAA members worked through the association to define a sense of the archival profession as a distinct one. Now, with a clear sense of its own identify, the *American Archivist* can reach across archivists' professional perimeters to embrace the interdisciplinary nature of our profession and the common interests we share with museum curators, librarians, records managers, conservators, and information and systems managers, to name a few fellow travelers. We also share interests with many academic disciplines, such as anthropology, literature, history, psychology, management, conservation, information theory, and human information processing, all of which are well represented in the JSTOR collections.

### Authors Now Retain Copyright

With the able assistance of the Intellectual Property Working Group, the Editorial Board changed its agreement with authors. Journal authors now retain copyright of their works and license SAA to publish, nonexclusively, in the *American Archivist.* We instituted this change in 2008, and in 2009 the SAA Council adopted this policy for materials produced by component groups within the association (this excludes books). Here is the new policy:

1. The author retains copyright in any submissions to SAA.
2. For any content submitted, the author grants to SAA a nonexclusive, royalty-free, irrevocable, perpetual, worldwide, and fully sub-licensable license to use, reproduce, modify, adapt, publish, translate, create derivative works from, incorporate into other works, distribute, publicly perform, publicly display, and otherwise exploit such content, in whole or in part, in any form, media, or technology now known or later developed.
3. Any subsequent use of the authorized article must include a citation to the version as published by SAA.

### Submissions and Pages Published Increase

The Editorial Board seeks to foster a culture of publishing in the profession. We are pleased to note that both the number of manuscripts submitted and the number of pages published have increased. I need to know from you, the readers, whether this increase in the number of pages published and the stronger competition for publication reflects an increase in the relevance and quality of the journal. I also need to know how authors regard the editorial procedures that the Board follows to review, edit, and produce the journal's contents.

### Does Anyone Read the Professional Literature?

Cory Nimer of Brigham Young University shared the results of his survey of the professional reading habits of archivists with the Board at its meeting in San Francisco. Following his presentation, the Board encouraged him to prepare an article for the *American Archivist.* As you will see, some of his findings are disturbing. For example, 25% of the respondents indicate that they do not read any archives journals. Is the issue that archivists choose not to make the time and effort to read the professional literature? Research shows that people use information that is readily available, even if they know it is of lesser quality, rather than seek other information that is not at hand. Or are the archival

journals not publishing articles relevant to the current needs of professional archivists?

We want to probe what journal "use" and journal "reading" actually mean today. I think the relationship between reading professional literature and meeting daily demands at work is complex. Do you read the *American Archivist* or other archival journals? How? Do you scan, browse, read selectively? Do you refer to back issues? Do you use indexing tools to find relevant information on archival theory and practice? Is the *American Archivist* a bridge between practitioners and theorists? Should it be? Do you read professional literature from other fields such as history, library and information science, or literature related to the subject focus of your repository?

We need to understand patterns of learning by archivists. Where and how do you seek professional development in the face of increasing competition for attention and new personal information management challenges? What is the role of *American Archivist* in professional development?. I think that the relationship between reading professional literature and meeting work demands is a complex equation. We need to probe the extent to which you distinguish reading journals and finding information to do your job. When I was a practicing archivist rather than an editor, I scanned incoming issues, read perhaps one or two articles relevant to my work at that time, and looked at the book reviews to see if I wanted to add another book to the "pile of good intentions." From time to time, an issue or question would arise and I would remember an article in the *American Archivist* and go looking for it. When I found the article I laboriously tracked the footnotes for more information. Today, as we know, full-text access, comprehensive abstracting and indexing services, citation databases, and a rich array of third-party search and retrieval services allow for quick retrieval of relevant information and new and interesting ways of parsing, assembling, and evaluating that information. With the *American Archivist* now online, we are likely to marvel at new discoveries about our own history as a profession as we are able to mine the past seventy-one years of archival thought.

The Editorial Board will follow Cory Nimer's admonition that "archival organizations and institutions should begin to explore ways to improve engagement with professional reading. . . . Journal editorial boards should also be sure to consider the needs and interests of their readers, refocusing content to address a wide variety of topics while focusing on practical application." And we will seek to reach archivists who do not read the *American Archivist* to find out why. In this issue of the *American Archivist,* Scott Cline revisits Richard Cox's insight that "Archivists and records managers often portray themselves (not necessarily on purpose) as too busy to read, to think, or to stay current with their field."[2] Cline,

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[2] Richard J. Cox, *Archives and Archivists in the Information Age* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc., 2004), 121.

however, concludes that "the archival analog is to recognize the implication of each thing we do, no matter how insignificant or mundane or how crucial or essential it may seem, and to engage our work with purposeful intention."

We hope, when you receive your survey in early 2010 from the *American Archivist* Editorial Board, that you will take the time to begin a conversation with us about how you currently use the *American Archivist*, what kinds of content in it are most useful to you, and how we can work to increase its applicability to your professional practice and professional development as an archivist.