

INTRODUCTION TO PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Introduction to President Peter Gottlieb

Victoria Irons Walch

Listening to NPR this morning, I learned that today is the only Friday the thirteenth that will occur in all of 2010. For the superstitious, that might come as a great relief. But Friday the thirteenth has always been a lucky day for me, and I certainly consider myself lucky this afternoon to be introducing my colleague and friend, Peter Gottlieb, on the occasion of his address as president of the Society of American Archivists.

Peter received his bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1971 and then attended the University of Pittsburgh for his master's and doctoral degrees, completing his graduate work in 1977. His first archival position was in the West Virginia Collection at the West Virginia University Library where he served as assistant and then associate curator from 1977 to 1983. He went from there to head the Historical Collections and Labor Archives at Penn State University.

I started getting to know Peter when he was appointed as the state archivist of Wisconsin in 1991. In that role, he also leads the work of the State Historical Records Advisory Board, or SHRAB, which, under his leadership, has been one of the most active and productive of any in the United States. You may know that regulations of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) designate the state archivist in each state as the "state coordinator" for the NHPRC Records Program.

With NHPRC's encouragement, the state archivists began to meet regularly in the early 1990s at about the same time that Peter came to Wisconsin. NHPRC hoped that these meetings would strengthen what was envisioned as a national archival network through collaboration and sharing of best practices across state lines. The organization was then known as the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators, or COSHRC.

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Peter was elected chair of the COSHRC Steering Committee in the year 2000, a time that in retrospect was really a tipping point. As the state archivists came together each year, they found many areas of common interest and need beyond their roles in leading the SHRABs. During his year as chair, Peter encouraged discussions of COSHRC's future, including formalizing its structure and administration. Two years later, the council decided to incorporate as a 501c3 nonprofit, and, in 2005, changed its name to the Council of State Archivists. Peter's leadership during this critical time laid the groundwork for turning the council into the active and productive organization it is now.

Since then, the benefits of his professional engagement and leadership have extended to other organizations. He was elected to the Council of the Midwest Archives Conference, where he served from 2001 to 2004. Then to the Council of the Society of American Archivists, serving from 2004 to 2007.

I'm sure that others have found, as I have, that Peter does not take a commitment to serve lightly. For Peter, it's never been about power or glory, it's about his responsibility to a profession for which he cares so deeply. He's been asked many times to get involved in one worthy cause or another—I've asked him myself on a number of occasions with somewhat mixed success—but he chooses carefully. Once he makes a commitment, however, he gives it his all. You can trust him to do what he says he'll do.

I have always admired most in Peter his interest and skill in fostering collaboration. He has been responsible for getting diverse groups of people to work together toward a common goal in many different contexts. I've already noted his involvement at a pivotal time in the evolution of what is now the Council of State Archivists.

I've also seen his skills at work in the Wisconsin Historical Records Advisory Board. I attended several of their meetings in the mid-1990s when they were developing a strategic plan. One meeting that stands out in my mind included representatives from the state genealogical society and the state bar association. Before the end of the day, these two representatives of groups that had never talked before had discovered a deep common bond in their desire to preserve and have access to records in Wisconsin.

When Peter was asked to run for SAA vice president/president-elect, I know that he considered it very carefully. I was delighted when he decided to proceed because I knew that he would not just fulfill the responsibilities of the office, which are enormous in and of themselves, but would take seriously the opportunity to effect broader positive change.

One important effort that has drawn his attention has been advocacy for the Preserving the American Historical Record (PAHR) bill in Congress. With his encouragement, more SAA members than ever before are now actively

working toward passage of the bill. He also presented masterful testimony before a subcommittee on the Hill, which many of us watched via webcast.

One of Peter's other longstanding goals has been to strengthen ties among the three organizations represented at this annual meeting—the Society of American Archivists, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, and the Council of State Archivists. It is therefore especially appropriate that Peter's SAA presidential year coincides with this joint meeting. Peter is a member of all three organizations and I am too, making it a special pleasure to have the opportunity to introduce him today.

I can only hope that this turns out to be yet another tipping point year for all of us, so that when we look back we can see a year in which Peter's thoughtful, steady, and committed leadership was a significant force in bringing us both substantially more funding for the important work we do and closer alliances among our organizations to strengthen the archival profession throughout the United States.

I'm honored and proud to introduce this year's SAA president, Peter Gottlieb.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Unifying the Archival Profession: A Proposal

Peter Gottlieb

From time to time we hear within our archival associations calls for closer ties to allied professional groups such as ARMA International, the American Library Association, the Association of American Museums, or the historians' groups. These calls certainly make sense; we *should* have effective alliances with associations in several professions that share our concerns with records, cultural heritage, digital curation, teaching and writing history, and several others. But these calls to develop stronger working relationships with allied professions make me wonder why we generally hear fewer voices in favor of stronger connections among the members of our own family—the archival associations throughout the United States? Rarely since the late 1980s and early 1990s have archivists discussed this particular goal.¹

I think the time has come for all of us in the archival profession to actively explore the relationship among our associations, and in this paper I want to discuss some ideas about how we might do this and why it is important for us to try. This joint meeting of three of our associations in the nation's capital, with Archivist of the United States David Ferriero giving us his own plenary talk and the National Archives serving as one of our hosts, makes this an appropriate time and place to talk about unification. Here in Washington, where our organizations have been more active recently in the process of appointing a new Archivist of the United States, in trying to move the Preserve the American

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65th Presidential Address, Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, 13 August 2010, Washington, D.C.

¹ Richard Cox, "Professionalism and Archivists in the United States," *American Archivist* 49 (Summer 1986): 243–44; Kevin Proffitt, "The Archival Bridge," *Midwestern Archivist* 16 (1991): 118; Anne R. Kenney, "Shaping the Future: SAA Leadership in a Changing World," *American Archivist* 56 (Fall 1993): 579–81. An exception to the more recent lack of discussion about stronger relationships among archival associations is Elizabeth Adkins's column "Top 10 Reasons for SAA to Continue to Reach Out to Government Archivists," *Archival Outlook* (September/October 2006): 3.

Historical Record legislation through Congress, and in advocating for the reauthorization of the National Historic Preservation and Records Commission (NHPRC), we have the appropriate setting for considering why unification is important and what it could enable us to do.

For me, this idea also has a more personal side that I will explain in terms of my own archival career. With graduate degrees in American history, I got my first archival position in the West Virginia Collection at West Virginia University Library. A strong regional collection of both published and primary source materials, the archives includes manuscripts as well as court and local government records. My next position took me to Penn State University where I directed a manuscript repository of Pennsylvania industrial and labor history that primarily serves the campus community. A final move brought me to the Wisconsin Historical Society and the position of state archivist of Wisconsin. My varied roles at the historical society include administering a government records repository, chairing a state historical records advisory board, and managing a large research collection of personal, family, and organizational papers. In Madison, Wisconsin, a street runs from the University of Wisconsin campus where my repository's reading rooms and collections are located, to the state capitol building. To carry out my historical society roles, I have walked the length of that street back and forth so many times that I finally realized it represents the spectrum of my career, with traditional research interests on one end and government records and information management on the other.

The archival associations I have joined and worked with parallel my career path. Enrolling initially in SAA and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Association, I later transferred to the Midwest Archives Conference when I moved to Wisconsin. As soon as I got to Wisconsin, I started participating in the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) through the historical society's institutional membership and almost simultaneously joined the state archivists' organization, then called the Council of State Historic Records Coordinators. In 2004, SAA members gave me an opportunity to serve on the SAA Council, and I have been privileged to continue as a member of that leadership group with one short break until today.

Perhaps my moving from one kind of job to another and working in several associations sounds downright promiscuous to you, but I describe my professional journey only to point out that the notion of unifying our archival associations reflects my professional experience and has an almost intuitive appeal for me. My career may not be typical, but, on the other hand, I do not think it is unique. I am by no means the only archivist whose responsibilities have bridged government archives or organizational records as well as manuscripts. As the A*Census enumeration of archivists has shown, a large proportion of us belong

to more than one association.² Clearly, I have good company in maintaining activity in several archival organizations, and this is partly because of the way the landscape of archival associations has evolved.

In the United States, we have an amazing jigsaw puzzle of separate and independent archival associations at the national, regional, state, and local levels. Figuring out how these pieces fit together (or whether, in fact, they fit together) would be challenging enough if their numbers were stable. But there seem to be more and more every year. Around 2000, the National Forum on Archival Continuing Education counted a total of sixty-one. The SAA website currently lists sixty-four. The 2004 national census of archivists says that we have at least twenty more associations than SAA counts.³ We cannot be sure that all of the archival associations found by the census project still exist, but realizing that this number does not account for other programs like the archival institutes and the archives student chapters, we can still surely say that our organizational cup overfloweth.

Let me make two points about this associational landscape. First, multiple archival organizations bring benefits and represent potential. Archivists clearly gain when there are associations for various branches of the profession. Today's varied national archival associations offer fellowship and services to film archivists, government archivists, religious archivists, and certified archivists. The regional, state, and local archival organizations bring the benefits of association services and networking closer to archivists' homes and places of work, and though the student chapters are parts of SAA rather than separate entities, they make an important contribution by fostering a professional identity among archivists from the time they start taking their first course in a graduate archival education program. The second and fairly obvious point is that there are historical reasons why we have sprouted all our organizations. Since the 1960s, no national archival association has been capable of encompassing all the various interests and needs of an increasingly differentiated and numerous profession. It's not the broadening and specialization of our profession that differs from many other professions, it's the fact that these trends have gone on outside the framework of a single national archival association.

The fragmented character of organized archival professionals became noticeable in the 1970s, when the government archivists created their own national organization and the earliest regional associations emerged. The trend began at the state level even earlier, when first archivists in Michigan organized their own association in 1958, followed in the next decade by their counterparts

² Victoria I. Walch, ed., "A*Census," *American Archivist* 69 (Fall/Winter 2006), Appendix H, 506–9.

³ National Forum on Archival Continuing Education, *Final Report* (July 2002), 6; Society of American Archivists, *Directory of Archival Organizations in the United States and Canada*, <http://www.archivists.org/assoc-orgs/directory/index.asp>, accessed 15 July 2010; Victoria I. Walch, "A*Census: A Closer Look," <http://www.archivists.org/a-census/ACensus-Part3-Expanded.pdf>, 101, accessed 15 July 2010.

in Georgia and then Ohio. The Midwest Archives Conference held its founding meeting in 1972, as did the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference. Seeking fellowship and professional services closer to home, some of the geographical groups consciously opposed what they felt was the formality and remoteness of the Society of American Archivists.⁴

The extension of archival organizations beyond the bounds of a unifying framework continued in the 1980s and 1990s. Additional state and regional associations joined the pioneers, while both the Academy of Certified Archivists (ACA) and the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC) were organized in 1989. The Association of Moving Image Archivists followed soon after in 1991 by formalizing an earlier advisory committee on film and television archives that already had international membership.⁵ This was not a simple process of new groups appearing completely unrelated and independent from existing ones. Before the ACA achieved its own organization, it had developed within SAA. COSHRC began with the sponsorship of NHPRC, but decided in 2001 to stand on its own as a fully independent organization—the Council of State Archivists (CoSA)—meeting in conjunction with NAGARA. By the turn of the century, the continuing processes of differentiation and proliferation had produced about eighty-five archival associations with no overarching structure to connect them.

The lack of a single, unifying national organization for archivists can be deceiving, in two ways. First, regardless how many associations we form for all the different kinds of repositories and archival specializations we work in, there is just one archival profession. At the core of this profession we have a body of knowledge and practice that underlies all the various applications we employ them for. We also share professional values and ethics that identify us as archivists and distinguish us from other professions. These fundamentals, of course, do not make all archivists look, talk, and act the same—as a group we are much more varied and interesting than that! But there is much more in our professional roles, daily problems, and aspirations that unite us than our many separate associations would suggest.

Second, while our organizational map seems fractured, the memberships of our associations actually overlap to a considerable extent. The A*Census

⁴ David B. Gracy, "History Making History," *Provenance* 27 (2009): 4; Patrick M. Quinn, "The Midwest Archives Conference: A Rich History Revisited," *Midwest Archivist* 18 (1993): 5; a short history of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference can be found at <http://www.marac.info/mc/page.do?sitePageId=93940&orgId=marac#history>, accessed 7 July 2010; a humorous example of the suspicious attitudes toward the Society of American Archivists among newly organized local and regional associations is Bob Knecht's brief and lighthearted history of the Kansas City Area Archivists, "The Dustiest Shelf," *Dusty Shelf* 8, no. 1 (June 1988), <http://www.umkc.edu/KCAA/History/KCAA%20at%2010.htm>, accessed 7 July 2010.

⁵ AMIA History, <http://www.amianet.org/about/history.php>, accessed 15 July 2010; Jim Byers, "Certification in America: The ACA Example," <http://www.certifiedarchivists.org/about-us/history.html#history>, accessed 15 July 2010.

study found a widespread pattern of respondents belonging to more than one organization. Not surprisingly, nearly 80 percent of CoSA members are enrolled in NAGARA; roughly 10 percent of many regional associations' members belong to the American Library Association's Rare Books and Manuscripts section; and between three-fifths and two-thirds of CoSA, NAGARA, and many regional associations' members are also SAA members.⁶ What this suggests is that though our organizations have split and multiplied, they share many of the same members.

Does it make sense today to try serving a core membership with more than seven dozen independent archival associations? In the bounding economy before 2008 it may have seemed defensible. Employment of archivists grew, new repositories were founded and existing ones expanded, graduate archival education programs spread, and the process of professional specialization appeared to require more and more separate organizations. The sharply changed economic realities since 2008 call this into question.

Simply put, the crowded field of separate archival associations stretches the resources for widely shared goals too thin. Though we collaborate on some important work, we still duplicate our efforts in other ways. SAA, CoSA, and NAGARA all have ambitions to provide clearinghouses of information for archivists, and we all offer continuing education to professionals, as do many state, local, and regional associations, without a national framework to define and rationalize our respective roles. As a result of these overlapping programs and because of inadequate budgets even when the economy is expanding rapidly, the increasing number of archival organizations means that we are not making the best possible use of our resources. CoSA's and NAGARA's strategic plans include goals to address sustainable finances. While SAA seeks the right balance between earned income and other revenue for its budget, its current resources constrain its ambitions and its progress on its own strategic priorities.⁷

We take pride in the economies we gain by occasionally bringing three of our national associations together in a joint annual meeting like this one, and we should. Over the past twelve months, I have observed, from a front row seat, the effort that volunteers and paid staff in our national organizations devoted to putting together a meeting for the whole archival profession, and I can tell you that it took an entire year of sustained work. But we also have to realize that building one broad stage on which all archivists can come together once a year is logical and important and something we should try to do every year, *just like many other professions do*. Cultivating our shared interests and concerns through

⁶ Walch, ed., "A*Census," Appendix H, Tables 3.9.13a–d, 506–9.

⁷ NAGARA's draft 2010 strategic plan is on a members-only page at its website, <http://www.nagara.org>, accessed 17 November 2010; "CoSA Mission and Goals (March 2010, second draft)," mss in author's possession; SAA adopted its current strategic plan on 26 May 2010, see <http://www2.archivists.org/governance/strategic-priorities>, accessed 17 November 2010.

a single annual meeting that allows time for each of our associations to hold its own programs and governance sessions can also join us behind an effort to solve the compelling but tricky task of using information technology to bring the annual meeting to more archivists, without undercutting the meeting's financial contributions to annual budgets.

The challenge we face today is not that we have many organizations, it's that we have little or no connections among them and no framework to bring them together and to focus our resources and our efforts on our highest priorities. We might imagine several ways to respond to this challenge. One *conceivable* approach that I do not advocate would be a grand merger of our associations into a single larger organization with a consolidated membership. Dissolving our associations and trying to regroup on a new basis would be a complete non-starter. In fact, it would uproot deep organizational loyalties that long-term members have formed over decades and that sustain a great deal of productive work for archivists and for our profession. It would fully merit the ridicule and resistance it would receive from all of us who value the organizations where we have our primary connections.

A second approach to forging connections would be keeping all our associations separate and independent but strengthening our collaboration on key issues. Collaboration works well in the right circumstances and for relatively short and tightly focused efforts. As experienced archivists and other experts have pointed out, however, collaborative work requires extensive preparation by participants and thorough understanding of organizational aims and project goals.⁸ To unify our profession through repeated collaborations seems cumbersome, time consuming, and costly.

I want to propose another way: a federation of archival organizations. When I say "federation," I simply mean a new national organization that our existing associations could voluntarily join, with which those associations would align in terms of basic policies, and to which they would commit support in the interests of serving all members—their own as well as the federation's—and pursue agreed-on goals.

If we decide to adopt this solution, it would not be simple. It would require big changes for all the archival organizations that would participate, but it offers two enormous advantages. First, a federated structure provides a way to unify the archival profession in pursuit of widely shared and long-held goals. Second, it depends for success on our current associations continuing their roles and services in the archival field. A federation could be a natural way to build on the

⁸ Tim Ericson, "...Developing and Delivering Continuing Education to Archivists," comments at National Forum on Archival Continuing Education, 28 April 2000, <http://www.statearchivists.org/reports/index.htm>, 3–6, accessed 22 July 2010; Joan K. Lippincott, "...Providing Adult Education and Building Collaborative Efforts," comments at National Forum on Archival Continuing Education, 28 April 2000, <http://www.statearchivists.org/reports/index.htm>, 2–3, accessed 22 July 2010.

growth of our associations and to gain strength for our profession from the last forty years of organization building. We have various organizational models in allied professions that suggest what our associations could try through federation.

The American Library Association (ALA) offers one example. Let's keep in mind that ALA is not a federation, so it is not a model that we can simply copy to connect our many separate associations. ALA is also much larger than all archival organizations combined. On the one hand, it is an organization that spans the wide variety of professional library specializations, subspecializations, and state and regional chapters, supporting the work of these units, and on the other hand, uniting them in one national organization.

The American Library Association itself resembles an umbrella under which a complex network of component groups operate.⁹ Members pursue their specializations through major divisions like the American Association of School Librarians, Library Leadership and Management Association, and the Public Library Association. Though these are all units of ALA, they in fact function fairly autonomously beneath the national umbrella, supported by dues of their members. They hold their own meetings, conduct their own business, and, in some cases, publish their own journals. The larger ones also spawn sections, interest groups, or forums that offer a focus for still greater specialization among their members.¹⁰

Of equal interest here are the ALA chapters, which are independent state, regional, and territorial library associations affiliated with ALA but conducting their own business in their respective jurisdictions. They gain the status of a component group when ALA's governing body approves their voluntary request to affiliate. They cooperate with the national organization to promote library service and librarianship in their geographic areas, add a level of geographic representation within ALA's governance structure, and coordinate advocacy on key issues with other chapters and with ALA itself. ALA provides staffing to support and strengthen chapters. While the chapters themselves pay annual dues to ALA, their members do not have to become individual ALA members.¹¹

Divisions and chapters constitute only part of ALA's elaborate organization. Committees, affiliates, and roundtables also represent other library interests

⁹ Dennis Thomison, *A History of the American Library Association, 1876–1972* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1978) is an authoritative source on ALA's early history and organizational development; American Library Association, "Organizational Overview," <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/governance/handbook/Organizational%20overview/orgoverview.cfm>, accessed 5 June 2010.

¹⁰ American Library Association, "Member Groups and Communities—Divisions," <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/index.cfm>, accessed 5 June 2010.

¹¹ American Library Association, "ALA Chapters," <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/affiliates/chapters/index.cfm>, accessed 5 June 2010.

and levels of participation.¹² Keeping such a diversified organization intact and on track no doubt requires constant effort and unending adjustments. What we should note, though, is that within one broad organization, ALA has found a way, perhaps tenuous and certainly prone to continual stresses, to combine a variety of professional library specializations, interests, and geographic groups in a single structure. Though acting with considerable freedom, these groups both support the national organization (financially and otherwise) and adhere to the policies set by the organization's governing body.¹³ When ALA needs to make its views heard in national debates and when it wants to coordinate national public relations campaigns or develop standards for library work, it can draw on all parts of its expansive structure. This is one example our archival organizations could examine for ways to unite on shared interests without surrendering our separate activities and identities.

There are other models. Many cultural resources and information professions follow the librarians' example of inclusive national organizations with significant numbers of affiliated groups. The American Association of Museums (AAM) incorporates independently chartered regional museum associations and has affiliations with several dozen organizations representing all kinds of museums. The AAM offers its new members a range of interest groups, most of which require additional dues to join.¹⁴ The Society for American Archaeology similarly has a broad international organization that invites affiliation from state, local, and special-interest archaeological groups and provides representation for these affiliates in its structure.¹⁵ ARMA also features regions within which are chapters of the parent organization.¹⁶

The point of these examples is not that our sister professions are unusually adept in their organization building. On the contrary, it *suggests* that we archivists with our plethora of separate, disconnected organizations are exceptionally fragmented. Examples from other professions give us concrete models of tiered organizations, policies, and governance practices that enable them to combine independent action by the limbs and branches with a strong central supporting

¹² American Library Association, "Organizational Overview"; "Round Tables," http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/rts/round_tables.cfm; "Committees," <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/committees/index.cfm>; "American Library Association Affiliates," <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/affiliates/affiliates/index.cfm>, all accessed 21 November 2010.

¹³ Thomison describes ALA organizational studies and debates in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s in *A History of the American Library Association*, 177–178, 197–203, 224–31.

¹⁴ American Association of Museums, "AAM Committees and Councils," <http://www.aam-us.org/aboutaam/councils/index.cfm#cra>, accessed 23 November 2010.

¹⁵ Society for American Archaeology, "About the Society," <http://www.saa.org/AbouttheSociety/tabid/54/Default.aspx>; "Council of Affiliated Societies," <https://ecommerce.saa.org/saa/staticcontent/staticpages/adminDir/affiliates.cfm>; "Interest Groups," <http://www.saa.org/ForMembers/InterestGroups/tabid/129/Default.aspx>, all accessed 23 November 2010.

¹⁶ ARMA International, "ARMA's Chapters and Regions," <http://www.arma.org/about/chapters/chapters.aspx>, accessed 23 November 2010.

trunk. We cannot, of course, adopt one of these alternate structures wholesale for our own profession, as though we were putting on a change of clothing. But we can draw on elements that would work for our circumstances and for our values, and we can follow certain principles of organization that have allowed other professions to unify.

What would a unified archival profession look like, how would it get work done, and what difference would it make to archivists and archives? Let's think about a national archival federation, because unlike the professional organizations I have been describing, whose component groups developed *within* or in close connection to a single association, we start with our disassembled jigsaw puzzle of about eighty-five pieces. Our goal should be to build the right kinds of connections and relationships among our associations so that we gain a single national organization with the strength to pursue a national agenda that also allows its constituent groups to continue serving members in ways they are best equipped to do.

An American archival federation could resemble other professions' associations in having both geographically based chapters, units based on archival functions and repository types, and affiliated organizations. All of these would have their own individual and institutional members who in most cases would also belong to the federation and receive benefits as federation members. No existing archival organization would need to change its current mission or functions to join the federation, unless it chose to do so. Although its policies and positions on key archival issues would need to be consistent with those of the federation itself, it could otherwise continue to operate much as it does today, within the framework of a national body. NAGARA could continue as NAGARA; in fact, an American archival federation without a government archivists and records administrators group would be quite an odd thing indeed. CoSA could continue as CoSA; a federation would be much stronger and more effective with the state archivists working in it as a component group. Regional, state, and local archival associations could likewise continue as they currently do, and they in particular would give the federation broad-based participation and balance.

While the devil always lurks in the many details of such a proposal, a plenary talk is not a good vehicle for addressing practical details. To avoid sounding superficial and blithe, however, let me very briefly touch on the weighty matter of governance. All of our archival associations have small governing bodies. We probably do not need larger ones, but it is striking that they are all fairly similar in size when the memberships they represent range in number from a few dozen to several thousand. To steer a larger and more complex national federation, we would need to investigate a tiered governance arrangement in which policy and other major decisions rest with a representative council or assembly much larger than any of our current governing bodies. We would also need a much smaller

executive group to make operating decisions between council sessions. We could ensure representation from the various components of our federation through formulas that assign one or more council seats to chapters, interest units, and affiliated organizations. Decisions on dues and changes to the constitution or bylaws could be made by the entire membership. Members would also cast votes for the federation's national officers.

Again, let's recognize that working out the final blueprint, to say nothing of putting it into practice and making it function, would be challenging. The point we need to remember is that larger and more complex professions have evolved similar structures. We need to make the effort, and we could start by forming a joint commission on federation to which our associations would send representatives to adopt organizational principles, governance structures, membership categories, and financial plans. While the commission members would shoulder the responsibility to produce a proposal covering all these things, the commission itself needs a clear and definite charge, a timeline to complete its work, and resources to support its meetings and deliberations. Even more, it needs participation from both our national organizations and from enough regional, state, and local associations to forge an agreement that represents a critical mass in the profession and that has momentum. I see no reason, however, why all the archival organizations that might ever join a federation need to participate in its initial formation. As we know from the rapid technological developments taking place all around us, early adopters gain some advantages, but not exclusive ones.

To set out on this road is to face a new set of challenges in place of those we face as a host of separate associations. Among others, a major challenge is balancing the needs and interests of component groups with the imperative to strengthen the profession overall and to achieve a level of national influence without which we cannot reach long-cherished goals. Because these challenges will be daunting, our organizations that enlist in the unification effort must bring an earnest commitment to the work. We cannot expect to succeed in this endeavor if we are weighed down with too many conditions, qualifications, reservations, and overly protective instincts. But since the delegates to a commission on federation must be accountable to their own associations, the associations themselves must instruct their delegates to produce results, and the associations must have both the will and the patience to pursue the discussions to a successful conclusion.

So let me return to the fundamental question: Why we would do this in the first place? What could we gain by the work it would require to bring our associations together and the inevitable compromises we would need to adopt to keep a new structure as inclusive as possible? I think we stand to gain in at least three areas: advocating for archives; defending archives; and enhancing our members' professional resources.

First, I believe that a unified archival profession gives all members a stronger and more persuasive voice on the issues that matter a great deal to us: state and national policies that affect archives and archivists, particularly access to records, state and federal funding for archives, professional standards, and the role and status of the National Archives and Records Administration. Our advocacy work is improving, but more often than not our agendas are still more expressions of hope than plans we can implement. We must progress much further, and one united organization speaking for our highest priorities stands a better chance of getting attention from Congress, federal agencies, state and local governments, academic institutions, standards organizations, and other sites of influence on archival work.

Second, we need a unified profession and a single national organization to defend archives and archivists. We united in the 1980s to restore the independence of the National Archives, but now and in the future we need a single, powerful protective arm. Our repositories face political pressures and even frontal attacks more often than we like to think, and our many associations' dispersed leaderships and memberships often cannot respond quickly enough. Slumping budgets in states and localities are exposing many archives to consolidation and reorganization schemes that jeopardize their programmatic integrity. Financial hardships can threaten privately funded archives too. Political and even personal biases can also at times imperil archives and the public trust roles that many archivists must play.

We must also defend our own status as professionals and advance the educational and training requirements and other standards that we have worked so long and hard to develop. I believe we are seriously mistaken if we think we have finished the work of developing standards for entry to the profession. Professional qualifications, values, and standards go to the heart of what it means to be an archivist, and all of our organizations must come together to ensure that we can improve these standards and that we can increase our control over their development.

Third, a federation that unifies all archivists in one national organization can do more to accomplish the fundamental purpose of any professional association, and that is to serve its members. One need all our members clearly have is continuing professional education. From the late 1980s through the early years of the past decade, several of our national organizations devoted enormous efforts to improving continuing education for archivists. These important initiatives were separate and uncoordinated. We can better enrich our members' professional futures by developing a national continuing education program for professional archivists, in which we use our resources rationally to teach the varied postappointment knowledge and skills needed in our careers. A single national organization can effectively deliver this program through its

chapters and component groups, and a national advisory committee with representation from all branches of the association can evaluate, assess, and provide feedback to continually improve that program.

We also need much better Internet resources for professional archivists, aspiring archivists, and everyone who needs information about our profession, and a unified federation could better pursue this goal than can a range of separate organizations. Although many of our groups today maintain wonderful websites that could continue after unification, it makes little sense to expect archivists and members of the public to discern the most current and authoritative information from the welter of existing archival association websites that show up on results pages when we search on any number of topics, whether graduate-level or continuing education programs, conferences, archival standards, repository directories, job announcements, or general information about what we archivists do and where to learn more about us. The way a united archival profession virtually presents itself can mirror our federated organization, with the identities, missions, and services of constituent groups easily discovered through links embedded throughout the website and in organizational lists on the primary navigation bars. With all groups' resources accessible through the site search function, we would harness the power of current communications and information technology that already blurs the boundaries among our separate associations. Truly outstanding websites serve many purposes, but for professional associations they offer a powerful tool for enhancing members' professional lives. Focusing our resources on the effort to develop such a tool is another way that a united profession can serve its members.

Our associations all do good work; individually they accomplish significant things from time to time. But we dream of doing more; indeed, we have committed to doing more. My recent predecessors as SAA president have talked about archival power at their plenary addresses.¹⁷ In a sense, I am also talking about power, because I think that without greater power through unification we cannot achieve the larger goals to which we aspire. We believe that archives are not just good things; we believe that they are essential. We believe that a vibrant civic life in this country can no more exist without active and accessible archives than it could without engaged citizens. We know that archives protect Americans' democratic rights and entitlements, enrich their cultural lives, and keep their organizations accountable. It is time for us to come together to support these beliefs, these professional principles, and with the power of unity and common purpose build a future where we turn our aspirations into accomplishments.

¹⁷ Randall C. Jimerson, "Embracing the Power of Archives," *American Archivist* 69 (Spring/Summer 2006): 19–32; Mark A. Greene, "The Power of Archives: Archivists' Values and Value in the Postmodern Age," *American Archivist* 72 (Spring/Summer 2009): 17–41; Frank Boles's inaugural remarks at SAA's 2008 Annual Meeting are summarized in "Colleagues Connect at West Coast Conference; Archives 2008 Speakers Call On Members to Claim their Power," *Archival Outlook* (September/October 2008): 10.