

# Not Waiting for Godot: The History of the Academy of Certified Archivists and the Professionalization of the Archival Field

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## ABSTRACT

2014 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the Academy of Certified Archivists (ACA) by the Society of American Archivists (SAA). This was a crucial part of SAA's effort to advance the archival field. To fulfill its responsibility, the academy established a postemployment standard for professional archivists. As this history of the organization shows, ACA uses best practices for testing to determine in a valid, reliable, and objective way whether or not somebody has a working mastery of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that archivists need. In so doing, ACA assists employers to find competent archivists who are capable of both properly assisting researchers and ably caring for materials. By conducting historical research and comparing multiple surveys, this study traces the academy's journey from a vision to a successful institution. As ACA continues to grow, it gets ever closer to fulfilling the vision of advancing the archival profession.

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## KEY WORDS

Archival History, Academy of Certified Archivists, Society of American Archivists, Certification, Professionalization, Standards

We must disabuse ourselves that anyone can be an archivist.<sup>1</sup>

—Waldo Gifford Leland

Over a century ago, Waldo Gifford Leland and other archivists were already worried about unqualified people entering the archival field. That concern is still with us. Archivists cringe when library directors say that anybody with an MLS is “good enough” to be an archivist. Archivists know of others who, although once well trained, do not keep up with advances in the field. Archivists grumble at professional meetings about how many graduates there are from questionable archival programs. Some seem content to just complain about the situation and wait for a solution to suddenly occur on its own, but that does nothing to maintain or improve professional standards. Fortunately, twenty-five years ago, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) created the Academy of Certified Archivists (ACA), which has been led by those who not only had a vision of advancing our profession, but also worked tirelessly to accomplish the task. Unlike other archivists, they were not waiting for Godot.

## Professions

The clergy were the first occupation referred to as a “profession” because their job included professing their faith. By 1675, use of the word *profession* had changed enough that people commonly used it about any occupation that restricted practitioners to those “having claim to due qualifications.”<sup>2</sup> Because of this origin, lists of attributes that define the word *profession* continue to commonly include that an occupation needs a way of regulating who works in the field by determining who is duly qualified to do so. One example of such a list is “a high degree of systematic knowledge; strong community orientation and loyalty; self-regulation; and a system of rewards defined and administered by the community of workers.”<sup>3</sup> As a result, for an occupation to be considered a profession, by definition it must have standards for what practitioners should know and do and have a method of regulation to exclude the unqualified, which is often referred to as “self-policing.” If a profession fails to self-police, somebody else might do it for them, like the library director who decides to hire people without archival training for archivist positions because he or she believes that an MLS is all that is needed. When this occurs, that occupation is not a profession in any meaningful way, neither by definition nor in fact.

Professions almost universally self-police through a licensing or certification process that recognizes those who have met the predetermined qualifications for that profession. In most professions, certification is a well-established practice that raises the quality of that profession’s service and maintains that

level through a recertification process even as the profession's practices evolve. Because certification has such an extensive history in the United States, the way to properly conduct the examination process is well developed and has withstood court challenges. The list of professions that test prospective practitioners is lengthy and includes doctors, lawyers, accountants, appraisers, and records managers. Those who are not licensed or certified often either cannot be in the profession or are legally limited in what they can do. For example, many people are accountants, but only certified public accountants (CPAs) can perform certain duties. To be a CPA, one does not have to graduate from a certain kind of educational program, but instead must demonstrate knowledge of the field by passing exams and then keeping up with advances in the profession by taking continuing education classes.

Like most professions today, medical doctors may take an examination to become board certified. Two hundred years ago, however, anybody could call themselves a doctor, even without formal training. The resulting poor quality of medical care should come as no surprise. In 1870, Harvard University president Charles Eliot wrote that the "ignorance and general incompetency of the average graduate of American Medical Schools, at the time when he receives the degree which turns him loose upon the community, is something horrible to contemplate."<sup>4</sup> Through the nineteenth century, the U.S. medical community tried rectifying the poor overall quality of doctors by requiring them to have a degree from an accredited medical school. This failed to keep incompetents out of the profession, however. Medical diploma mills opened, received their accreditation, and churned out minimally educated doctors.

The turning point for the self-policing of the medical community came in the early twentieth century when doctors started taking board certification exams and the American Medical Association began grading medical schools on the success rates of their graduates on the exams. Few students from poor quality schools passed the exams. Once prospective applicants learned this, poor quality schools could no longer attract enough students to remain open. From 1906 to 1922, the numbers of both medical schools and graduates were cut by more than half. Because the profession rallied behind certification and the publication of the results of how every medical school's graduates performed on certification exams, the medical community was able to transition quickly from a body of practitioners with questionable credentials to an exemplar of a profession.<sup>5</sup>

The histories of numerous other professions have followed a similar path, but often without the accrediting of their educational programs. As noted above, this is how accounting's CPA program operates.<sup>6</sup> Of course, records management, the occupation most similar to archival management and whose responsibilities (and even materials) overlap the most, also certifies practitioners

without accrediting their alma maters. As one can see from other occupations, certification programs typically begin when a profession's leadership wants to set standards of practice and to assure conformity to them, to aid employers in hiring qualified practitioners, to protect their patrons, and to raise the credibility of the profession.

## The Archival Field's Advancement toward Professionalization

Archivists have long been interested in establishing standards for the profession. It was even one of the Society of American Archivists' three founding objectives as Albert Newsome stated in his presidential address at SAA's first annual meeting in 1936.<sup>7</sup> To this day, SAA's constitution promotes the use of "sound principles and standards" and "professional standards" for those who wish to be practitioners.

The first significant campaign to set standards for qualifications to be an archivist came in the early 1950s. During President Eisenhower's administration, SAA and the American Historical Association united to dissuade him from replacing the archivist of the United States with a political appointee with no archival background. To help reduce this problem in the future, Dolores Renze, Colorado's state archivist, proposed the certifying of archivists as part of a way to create standards to make archivists more "professional" and to give them more credibility.<sup>8</sup> As Renze stated, "We must sooner or later establish for ourselves certain and proper standards against which we can measure the work of the individuals who engage in archival practice in the broad sense of a profession."<sup>9</sup> Many archivists supported Renze's stance. Margaret Cross Norton, who was Illinois's state archivist, agreed, writing that "one of the purposes of the Society is to exercise certain controls over the profession . . . usually one of the main purposes of all professional associations . . . [is] to establish standards in the field and to exercise some surveillance over those qualified to pass as members of a profession."<sup>10</sup>

In the years that followed, prominent archivists periodically voiced concerns about the need to create archival standards, including those for qualifying professional archivists. For example, Herman Kahn stated in his 1970 presidential address that many prospective employers came up to SAA officers "rather plaintively asking: 'How do I go about finding a qualified archivist?' 'How do I recognize an archivist when I see one?' 'When a person applies for this job, how do I know whether he is a qualified archivist?' These are perfectly reasonable questions, because at present there is no valid method of proving that one is an archivist unless one is already in a job that requires him to do archival work."<sup>11</sup>

A survey of SAA members in the early 1970s found that 8.5% had not earned a bachelor's degree and 21.9% had attained no more than that. More important,

only 49% had received *any* formal training in archives administration *or* records management in *any* setting. Moreover, the authors of the study thought that this *overestimated* the amount of training within the archival field because those who responded to the survey were better trained than the typical archivist. Consequently, it is no surprise that these findings inspired SAA to improve the training of its members and has made great strides in doing so since then.<sup>12</sup>

In 1971, Kahn was one of seven members of the Committee for the 1970s, which was SAA's first significant attempt at systematic planning. It issued its report in 1972, which recommended many ways to improve the profession. In response to its finding that SAA's work to improve the occupational knowledge of archivists "has not been impressive," in 1973 SAA's Committee on Education and Training started constructing guidelines for archival training. One topic of discussion concerned the observation that graduating from an accredited program does not mean that one learned or retained what was taught. This led to the committee to consider certification, just as this point has convinced many other professions to certify their practitioners. The committee concluded that it was imperative for SAA to establish standards for archivists. An example of what could be done was close at hand. In 1976, SAA became a founding sponsor of the Institute of Certified Records Managers.<sup>13</sup>

A panel of Trudy Peterson, Patrick Quinn, and Hugh Taylor discussed certification publicly at a conference called "Setting Priorities for Historical Records." They noted that since the most important function of a profession is to police itself to ensure that all practitioners are qualified, archivists should find a way to make sure that practitioners are up to the necessary standards. Just as important would be determining a method of recertifying practitioners to make sure that they remain current with the occupation's knowledge, skills, and abilities.<sup>14</sup>

In March 1977, SAA's recently renamed Committee on Education and Professional Development (CEPD) sent to SAA Council a proposed "Program for Archival Certification," which was based largely on what Trudy Peterson had outlined. It would have allowed individuals to be certified in one of three ways: by completing an approved archival training program, by passing an SAA-administered archival certification examination, or by experience. The committee also recommended a periodic recertification requirement, but did not explain how this would work. The *SAA Newsletter* published this proposal in its July 1977 issue. In addition, archivists discussed the program at SAA's 1977 Annual Meeting. In 1978, CEPD also presented "Evaluation Procedures for Archival Education Programs." These two proposals led to a vigorous debate throughout the profession.<sup>15</sup>

In 1979, SAA president Hugh Taylor wrote about how SAA could address the important task of self-policing the profession: "It is my own personal view that if the approval of educational programs is not found to be viable (at this

stage we simply do not know), then individual certification would probably be brought forward again as the only other alternative. Even if program approval was found to be practical, certification by examination might still be introduced for those for whom approved programs were out of reach both geographically and financially.”<sup>16</sup>

In October 1978, SAA’s Council decided to make educational accreditation a priority. As has occurred each of the many times accreditation of archival education programs has been proposed, however, archivists could not agree about how it should work. In 1980, CEPD completed a self-study instrument for gathering information about graduate archival education programs and for use during site visits to educational institutions. By the next year, however, it was apparent that this would be an expensive undertaking and that many of the colleges and universities with existing archival management programs were not interested in participating in an accreditation program. Of the forty-two programs to which CEPD sent the questionnaire, only twenty-four responded and only half of those provided sufficient information for the committee’s work. With so few educational programs willing to provide even this minimal amount of support for the creation of an accreditation process, CEPD recognized that the initiative was futile.<sup>17</sup> The CEPD summary report, however, did point out that “the reality of the marketplace, we believe, ensured that archivists will eventually find it necessary to establish a mechanism for self-policing.”<sup>18</sup> Although SAA’s effort failed, many understood the need to create common standards, including those for certifying archivists, so that the archival occupation would continue to professionalize.<sup>19</sup>

By 1984, certification was a concept whose time had arrived. After discussing accreditation of individual archives, certification of archivists, and accreditation of archival educational programs, SAA Council voted at its May 1984 meeting to have CEPD report the next spring on creating a method for certifying individual archivists. This put the onus not on institutions, but on individual archivists to be responsible for obtaining the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed and to maintain professional standards. Council set a few parameters: the program would be financially self-sustaining; certain qualifications would allow one to be “grandfathered” in; members would be required to recertify periodically; the program would be seen as postemployment; and its purpose would be to create a standard for being an archivist and to provide incentive for archivists to maintain and improve their professional competency.<sup>20</sup>

CEPD appointed Susan Grigg to head the committee’s working group charged with gathering information about other occupations’ certification programs, and then it drafted an initial plan for SAA. This report created many of the basic characteristics of the Academy of Certified Archivists, including its name. The committee presented a draft to Council, which printed it in the

*SAA Newsletter* and scheduled a considerable amount of time for archivists to discuss the plan. Archivists debated the proposal extensively, including an open discussion at SAA's 1985 Annual Meeting and discussions at numerous regional archival association meetings.<sup>21</sup>

A poll revealed broad interest in certification finding 70.1% in favor of creating ACA in the manner proposed, and only 27.2% opposed. The poll also found at least 60% support in each institutional setting: business, government, academia, museum, and religious. When the study arranged the results by years of the respondents' archival experience, however, an interesting outcome surfaced. The most and least experienced archivists were in strong support, but those with eleven to fifteen years of experience were evenly split on certification. The lead researcher suggested that older archivists strongly backed certification because they were firmly set in their careers and could see the need for it; the newest archivists supported certification because they were well trained by the recently improved archival education programs. Those in between, however, felt "less secure" because they benefited from neither of these advantages.<sup>22</sup>

"Those most strongly against certification," the study concluded, "were often vehement in questioning the need for such a venture."<sup>23</sup> For example, one archivist stated that the certification proposal made him "confused, chagrined, and insecure."<sup>24</sup> Another archivist even went so far as to say that "I would rather tolerate a certain amount of ineptitude and even charlatanism" than to have a program that would judge the qualifications of archivists.<sup>25</sup> One regional poll found that 12% of its members doubted their ability to become certified, which, if true across the country, would explain some of the opposition to certification.<sup>26</sup>

Some people opposed certification because they feared its success would end consideration of the other methods of professional self-policing: accreditation of archival repositories and accreditation of archival educational programs. This was despite SAA's repeated assurances that it would continue to consider the other options and that these initiatives would succeed or fail on their own merits.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to general negative comments, specific concerns about the proposed plan surfaced. Some questioned the expenses that SAA would incur. Others felt that the plan lacked important details, such as how the recertification process would work. There also was a very reasonable concern that the exam should be well designed and conform to generally accepted testing standards. Another point was that some archivists might not be able to afford the cost of taking the exam or of recertifying. Some opponents pointed out that the benefits of certification were speculative. However, that would be true of any proposal that did not already exist, including the accreditation of archival repositories or of archival educational programs.<sup>28</sup> Some worried that, as one archivist wrote, "No two archival milieux are alike; hardly two archivists perform



similar work. . . . There are no educational standards for training archivists; there can be none. No one has ever established with any clarity what an archivist does.”<sup>29</sup> This view was much more widespread just twenty-five years ago than many current archivists might imagine. Another opponent wrote that certification “appears to be a case of placing the cart before the horse by focusing on the enforcement mechanism rather than on the goal of developing standards and statements of competencies from which certification and other tools might flow.”<sup>30</sup> Some opponents supported their case by bringing up the decades-old controversy about whether the optimal archival education came from studying history or library science. As one archivist wrote, “certification brings with it an unfortunate tendency to substitute vocational education for liberal education as the foundation of the profession.”<sup>31</sup> The same archivist wrote that “a code of conduct would be a travesty. . . . Setting minimum standards may seem attractive as a means to improve the worst in us. Unfortunately, it accepts a minimum level of accomplishment as sufficient.”<sup>32</sup> Finally, another archivist advanced a conspiracy theory that a cabal was creating certification so that it could control the profession.<sup>33</sup>

We have already read some of the reasons why proponents supported certification: it would be SAA’s most important standard for the field; it would finally allow employers to have an objective standard for judging the qualifications of prospective archivists; and its wide acceptance would keep unqualified people out of the field. Proponents also pointed out that since it did not matter where or how one learned to be an archivist, this was a more democratic approach to the occupation’s self-policing than the accreditation of educational programs would be. Others emphasized that certification is far less expensive than the accreditation of either educational programs or archival repositories. Moreover, unlike the accrediting of educational programs, certification would provide a way to make archivists keep up with changes in the field by means of the recertification requirements. Some argued that certification could become an alternative credential to the MLS degree, thus creating more employment possibilities for those who lacked that degree. Proponents predicted that certification would bring increased esteem from one’s peers and superiors for both individual archivists and the profession, which could lead to improved pay.<sup>34</sup> As one archivist wrote, “the certification program is the one most important thing that the SAA can do to insure fair compensation for a high level of professionalism.”<sup>35</sup> In a summary of the case for certification, one archivist wrote that

Some opponents argue we need to do something else first—surely an argument that delays doing anything. Or they argue that certification isn’t the way to measure the basic competence of individual archivists, but they fail to produce an alternative plan. I suspect opponents do not want to set standards. After all, the lack of standards means any archival practices, or practicing



archivists, can be acceptable because there is no yardstick. Some archivists look at certification and see how they don't measure up. Proponents see a tool they can use [to improve the profession]. The difference is one of confidence in one's professional competence.<sup>36</sup>

As the survey results in the next section of this article show, some of the predicted benefits from certification have been achieved, more have been partially attained, and some areas have yet to show noticeable improvement.

In early 1986, SAA Council revised the plan to add detail and to incorporate suggestions that members had made. Council then published this draft in the *SAA Newsletter* and scheduled an open forum to discuss it at the 1986 Annual Meeting. SAA conducted a subsequent poll that found that the concept of certification still had broad support (51.8% vs. 37.3%), but that the members were only slightly in favor of the current version of it (43.9% vs. 42.1%). Council took the constructive criticism into account and again revised the proposal.<sup>37</sup>

In preparation for Council's final vote on certification, SAA president William Joyce appointed a subcommittee of Francis Blouin, Trudy Peterson, Anne Diffendal (SAA's treasurer), and Donn Neal (SAA's executive director) to create a plan for implementing certification in case Council approved it. The plan called for the creation of the Interim Board for Certification (IBC), which would be composed of a chair, four members, and SAA's executive director *ex officio*. One of these members was to be a "consumer" of archivists' work, there to broaden the perspective of the IBC. The other three members would chair subcommittees, each including two additional SAA members. Finally, the plan had the IBC filling in the details of what they would do over the next eighteen months.<sup>38</sup>

The report estimated that it would cost \$48,360 over the IBC's eighteen-month existence to implement the program, including creating the exam. SAA would pay these start-up costs and then ACA would refund them. In addition to these costs, the report estimated that the various expenses of maintaining the certification program for a five-year period would require \$12,000 per year as well as copious amounts of volunteer time.<sup>39</sup>

SAA Council reviewed the subcommittee's implementation report at its meeting on February 1, 1987, and amended the plan in a few ways, including that the exam would be multiple choice. In making this change, Council followed the generally accepted practice in the United States for certifying and licensing exams. Because of its widespread use, ample research exists into how to write and score this type of test so that it will assess an examinee's level of achievement in a valid and reliable way.<sup>40</sup>

In the discussion before the vote on certification, Council members stressed that they supported certification as one of SAA's ongoing initiatives to strengthen the profession, which included the development of standards, the improvement of the continuing education and publications programs, and

the creation of guidelines for graduate education and institutional evaluation. Certification would further this goal by better defining what an archivist is and does and by measuring archival knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Council members also mentioned that recertification was a critical part of the plan since it would be the only mechanism to ensure the advancement of the profession by compelling professionals to keep their KSAs up-to-date. Council members also noted that recertification and the Society's continuing education programs would reinforce each other. By a vote of 8-2, Council approved the appointment of the IBC to establish a program for the certification of archivists. Council then required the IBC to submit a detailed plan and budget by December 1987 for Council's approval.<sup>41</sup>

"Council Gives Nod on Certification" was the headline on the cover of the March 1987 *SAA Newsletter*. It is important to note that this accomplishment was the culmination of Council approvals over time. In 1984, Council initiated the process, other Council members approved the creation of ACA in 1987, and a new Council reaffirmed the decision in 1988.<sup>42</sup> As a result, after a decade of discussions, three full years of debate, and considerable planning and revisions to the plan, SAA committed to taking the next step in professionalizing the archival field.

For the membership of the IBC, SAA president Joyce appointed Edie Hedlin, who served as chair; J. Frank Cook, who took charge of the administrative practices and appeals procedures; Edmund Berkeley, who ran certification by petition and recertification; and James Bert Rhoads, who oversaw certification by examination. In addition, Carole Huxley, the deputy commissioner for cultural education for New York state, agreed to serve as the public member. Clearly, they had much to do. Some turnover in their membership, however, soon disturbed their work. Berkeley left the IBC, and his duties were taken over by Cook, whose responsibilities Roy Tryon took over. In short order, Tryon, too, would leave and Paul Chestnut would replace him.<sup>43</sup>

While SAA's vision of making certification a standard for all professional archivists was taking shape, the Society was moving ahead in other ways to professionalize the field. As SAA's Working Group on Standards for Archival Description stated, "The rapidly broadening interest in the development and adoption of standards is a strong and healthy sign that the archival profession has reached a point of maturity. . . . Standards-related activities are in progress or planned in virtually every phase of professional archival work. Among the major recent initiatives are the establishment of the Academy of Certified Archivists, the adoption of formal guidelines for graduate archival education programs, and the strong efforts toward developing effective and meaningful institutional evaluation criteria."<sup>44</sup> Other projects on which SAA was working around this time included establishing a board for approving archival standards,

interacting with other groups that set archival-related standards, creating the *Archival Fundamentals* manual series, and improving SAA's continuing education program to include workshops at the intermediate and advanced levels and on specialized topics.<sup>45</sup>

Once appointed, IBC members quickly realized just how much they had to accomplish in less than two years. When they prioritized all they needed to do, they decided that some tasks, such as the creation of the recertification program, would be left to the Academy of Certified Archivists.<sup>46</sup>

The IBC soon came up with a fiscal plan, which included a very quick repayment to SAA for ACA's start-up costs. The plan assumed that at least 260 archivists would certify by petition, that 50 per year would seek certification by examination, and that half of all certified archivists (CAs) would recertify. Given these assumptions, IBC projected a balanced budget for certification through the year 2000. Although this projection wildly underestimated how many archivists would petition, other miscalculations in this plan came to have negative consequences.<sup>47</sup>

Obviously, the creation of a valid exam was of paramount importance. To help with this, SAA Council and the IBC engaged the services of Betsy Ranslow, a credentialing consultant. She assisted in creating a request for proposals that was sent to four nationally recognized professional testing companies and in developing a contract with the selected company. SAA Council and the IBC decided that the Professional Examination Service (PES) offered the best balance between cost and service quality. PES provided guidance and technical assistance to ensure that the certification examination would be reliable, valid, objective, and conform to generally accepted standards.<sup>48</sup>

PES advised that the nationally accepted method for developing a certification exam was for the IBC to begin with, in essence, overseeing the defining of what a professional archivist does by constructing the Role Delineation Statement (RDS). James Rhoads, who was the former archivist of the United States, led this work. The RDS was created by groups of experienced archivists and archival educators who collectively represented a broad cross-section of archives in the United States. This was the case with all the groups used throughout the process. These groups identified seven basic "domains," or areas of archival practice: selection, appraisal, and acquisition; arrangement and description; reference services and access; preservation and protection; outreach, advocacy, and promotion; managing archival programs; and professional, ethical, and legal responsibilities. Then, they determined that there were twenty-four common, major archival tasks, each of which they then matched with one of these domains. Next, they identified more than fifty KSAs that are required to successfully accomplish these tasks, created descriptive statements about these, and matched each with its appropriate domain. They then judged

each domain as to its relative importance, which they also did with each of the tasks. Still more archivists then validated these weights, which PES then used to decide how many questions each task would have on the exam.<sup>49</sup>

Although the RDS was developed to create a legally defensible exam, it is also one of most valuable benefits that ACA has bestowed upon the profession because archival experts developed it according to rigorous standards. The archival community came to agree that the RDS was a thorough description of what an archivist is and does. Previously, no one agreed on this basic point because archivists could be educated in history, library science, or other programs; could oversee institutional records or individuals' papers; could be employed by a government, for-profit, or nonprofit; and could work with a very wide variety of formats. As a result, many at the time believed that there was no feasible way to develop standards for an archivist's KSAs. The RDS overcame all that. Every few years, ACA re-examines and updates the RDS to ensure that it remains up-to-date with the ever-advancing archival field. Because it is a benchmark for what archivists should currently know and be able to do, not only does ACA use the RDS to guide the creation of the exam, but employers also use it in making job descriptions for archivists, and educators use it to assist in creating curricula for archival education programs.<sup>50</sup>

In early 1989, four other groups of archivists used the RDS to guide them in creating a pool of a couple of hundred multiple-choice questions. PES ensured that these would adhere to psychometric testing standards for reliability and validity. In June, another group selected which of these questions would become the initial certification exam. Once the exam was finished, PES used the Angoff Method to set the passing score in a way that met the *Standards for Education and Psychological Testing*. As a result of the rigor in the exam's construction, it tests in a reliable and valid way for a professional-level mastery of an archivist's needed knowledge, skills, and abilities.<sup>51</sup>

To help candidates prepare for the exam, the IBC created a candidate handbook that provided information about the examination process as well as some sample test questions. To become a candidate, an archivist had to meet one of three qualifications: a master's degree with a minimum of nine semester hours in archives administration and one year of qualifying experience in archives; a master's degree and two years of qualifying experience; or a bachelor's degree and three years of qualifying experience.<sup>52</sup>

SAA Council directed CEPD, in consultation with the IBC, to develop a proposal that graduates of certain qualified archival education programs be allowed to sit for examination immediately upon graduation. This never happened, seemingly because every attempt at accrediting archival education programs has failed: no agreement could be reached on what qualifies or disqualifies a program.<sup>53</sup>

At a meeting of SAA Council, its members and Edie Hedlin agreed that marketing and public relations were important, not only to get more archivists to become certified, but also because some opponents of certification did not realize that Council still wanted to investigate both the accreditation of individual archives and the accreditation of archival educational programs as additional ways of standardizing the profession. Council suggested sending a letter to the membership from the officers and Council as well as presenting regular updates about certification in the *SAA Newsletter*. Karen Benedict volunteered to assist in this educational and promotional campaign.<sup>54</sup>

This promotional effort began at the 1988 Annual Meeting where the IBC participated in both a plenary session about certification and staffed a booth where they answered questions about the process. During the next months, IBC representatives spoke at more than a dozen regional archival associations. The 1989 SAA Annual Meeting included the session "The Archivist's Role: The Impact and Implications of the Certification Examination." During this session, the panel explained how PES and the IBC developed and validated the exam. In another promotional effort, IBC sent information packets that included articles about the development of SAA's certification program and other relevant materials to all presidents and newsletter editors of regional archival associations.<sup>55</sup>

Early in its existence, the IBC had to decide on the criteria for certification by petition. They decided that applicants had to meet one of three combinations of education and experience: a master's degree including at least nine semester hours of graduate study in archives administration and a minimum of five years qualifying archival experience; a master's degree and six years qualifying experience; or a bachelor's degree and seven years qualifying experience. In addition, the qualifying experience had to be at the professional level, not in a nonprofessional or paraprofessional job. Candidates paid a nonrefundable application fee of \$25. Then, if accepted, they paid a certification fee of \$250, for a total fee of \$275. Applicants had to send in their petitions by September 30, 1989.<sup>56</sup>

The IBC met in January 1989 to refine the procedures for evaluating petitions, which SAA Council then approved in February. These included that the reviewers would remain anonymous and that there would also be an appeal process for those whose petitions the reviewers rejected. In addition, SAA Council's executive committee reviewed the petitions of the members of the IBC and its Petition Subcommittee, which Frank Cook headed. The IBC's consultant and legal counsel indicated that these procedures would assure that the reviews would be fair and objective.<sup>57</sup>

The subcommittee created a draft petition and asked over a hundred archivists for feedback before the IBC finalized it. The IBC then made the certification petitions available in the July 1989 *SAA Newsletter*, at many archives meetings, and by mail to those who requested them.<sup>58</sup>

Early in the summer of 1989, the Petition Subcommittee approved the hundredth certification petition, the predetermined threshold that triggered the creation of the Academy of Certified Archivists. The vision and commitment shown by SAA Council, the CEPD, and the IBC as well as countless other archivists were about to pay off for the profession. This was such a momentous juncture for the profession that both the incoming and outgoing SAA presidents commented on it during their official remarks at the 1989 Annual Meeting. John Fleckner noted that the “headline story in the archival profession for 1988 is, of course, the overwhelming response to SAA’s new certification program. . . . The Academy of Certified Archivists begins life with substantial financial as well as human resources as it faces the challenges of institutionalizing certification.”<sup>59</sup> For his part, Frank Evans stated that “Of primary significance in implementing [SAA’s] long-term agenda is the society’s certification program. The success of the petition phase has exceeded our most optimistic predictions.”<sup>60</sup>

October 26, 1989, was to be a most important date for the professionalization of the archival field and particularly for ACA. In conjunction with the SAA Annual Meeting in St. Louis, that morning twenty archivists would pass the first certification examination. In addition, that evening ACA held its organizing meeting. At that time, the gathered members determined many details of the academy’s operation, including the election of its first officers. After the election, the IBC handed over its responsibilities and ceased to exist.<sup>61</sup>

One unfortunate result of this scheduling was that the newly elected leaders had no time to plan before taking office. Having some time to prepare would have been helpful because despite how much the IBC accomplished, so much more needed to be done to make ACA a fully functioning organization. To help guide the new ACA officers, the IBC wrote a report that explained what they thought were the most pressing issues. Unfortunately, it stated that ACA had numerous items that it needed to do “immediately” or “as soon as possible.”<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the new officers needed to do a great deal and do it very quickly to create a credible, fully functioning organization.

Elected that first night were Gregory S. Hunter, president; David Olson, vice president; Karen Benedict, treasurer; and Karen Paul, secretary. The next morning, they met for breakfast to decide on priorities for the next year and the division of responsibilities. The original ACA bylaws provided for only four officers; the regents were added the next year after the members approved new bylaws. As a result, these four had much to do. In addition to typical presidential duties, such as liaison with other organizations, Hunter, with the assistance of the Organization and Structure Committee, focused on the creation of a constitution and bylaws. He also worked on incorporating ACA, which the officers saw as critical because until this was done they could be held personally liable for anything related to ACA. Olson worked with the Examination Committee



on finalizing the appeals from the certification-by-petition process and preparing for the next examination, which included holding more item-writing and exam development workshops. Benedict not only oversaw everything to do with finances, but also created a control system with the assistance of the Finance Committee. Finally, in addition to the secretary's regular duties and preparing for the next elections, Paul worked with the Membership and Outreach Committee on all aspects of promoting ACA and the value of certification. Just one day after this informal meeting, Hunter and Benedict met with SAA Council to go over the draft of a compact, which, once agreed to, had ACA repay the money SAA invested to create ACA and set the fees for the office services, including membership list management, that SAA would provide in the future.<sup>63</sup>

ACA accomplished an impressive amount during its first year. This included incorporating and filing for 501(c)(3) status, creating the original bylaws, publishing an outreach brochure and multiple newsletters, creating a member database, tweaking the examination before it was offered a second time, undertaking financial planning, auditing ACA's finances, and discussing the future of the academy. Furthermore, because of the number of petitions that came in just before the deadline and how many appeals were made, it took almost a year to wind down this process, which Frank Cook continued to oversee. Ultimately, of 756 archivists who petitioned to become certified, 689 succeeded using this method.<sup>64</sup>

During ACA's second year, when Maygene Daniels was president, the officers still had some basic organizational tasks to accomplish in addition to ongoing activities, such as revising the exam and conducting outreach. For example, they needed to develop a strategic plan and write a governance handbook. In addition, Vice President Deborah Skaggs created systems for reviewing exam applications, selecting test sites, and developing the exam. Furthermore, this was the final year of the contract with Professional Examination Service. PES had done an admirable job of guiding ACA through the extensive process of creating a reliable, valid examination that met best practices for certification exams, but now the most rigorous part of the process was past. As a result, PES's contract was renewed for another three years, but provided for fewer services.<sup>65</sup>

By the third year, the Examination Committee (now the Examination Development Committee) was not just creating new questions with the help of PES, but also reviewing existing questions both on the exam and in the item bank to make sure that they were still relevant. For a profession that is constantly advancing, this is critical.<sup>66</sup>

ACA had not yet addressed another area critical for an evolving profession: certification maintenance. Recertification via continuing education is very common among the professions. Recertification is based on the fact that professionals, including archivists, must continue to expand their knowledge, skills,



and abilities to keep up with the changes in the field or they will inevitably become less effective. It helps ensure that certified archivists remain competent regardless of how long ago they became certified. Thus, recertification is needed not only to make sure that an archivist's certification remains valid and meaningful for employers and society, but also to offer certified archivists benchmarks for measuring their own growth.

ACA had not yet created the recertification process because its founders had been busy with other priorities and had determined that creating this system could be done in a more informed way after a few years of giving the exam. ACA, however, could no longer put off this task.

The first decision the ACA's Board of Regents made about recertification was to shorten the term of certification from eight to five years. The board did this because they believed the rapid changes to the profession necessitated more frequent recertification. This change would take effect as each current CA recertified and immediately for all those passing the exam after 1991. The board also decided to allow recertification by either retaking the exam or by providing confirmation of continued professional development since the archivist's last certification or recertification. Professional development is demonstrated by accumulating points in five defined areas: employment; education; professional participation; professional service; and writing, publishing, and editing.<sup>67</sup>

Starting in 1991, two successive task forces worked on recertification. They started by investigating how other professions, such as records management, law, and nursing, handle their recertification processes. The task force then considered members' opinions on various possibilities and created a proposal. After an extended period of amending, the Board of Regents approved the recertification program in 1995.<sup>68</sup> Next, Willow Powers, who was the first regent for recertification (now certification maintenance), had to take the recertification plan and turn it into a system that functioned consistently and fairly. A large part of turning theory into practice was the creation and training of petition review teams, which exist to this day.<sup>69</sup>

James Rhoads became ACA's third president in 1992. During his term, the board appointed the immediate past president, Maygene Daniels, to chair a task force on bylaws and organizational structure. Up until then the president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer each served two-year terms and had many specific duties, while the regents each served three-year terms, but did not have any particular assignments. Among the task force's recommendations was to give each of the regents designated responsibilities. This meant that many of the vice president's tasks went to either the newly created regent for examination development or the regent for examination administration. ACA also created the regent for outreach and the regent for certification maintenance positions so that these two important functions would have leaders who could

concentrate on them. Furthermore, future chief executives would serve one year as vice president, then one year as president, and finally one year as regent for nominations. Moreover, three standing committees were created: nominating, examination, and finance.<sup>70</sup>

In 1993, the Board of Regents voted to no longer allow those with only bachelor's degrees to take the exam after 1998; the board later backtracked and allowed them to "petition for exception" to take the exam. The board ended even this option after the 2005 exam because they believed it was important to base certification on three factors: completion of a graduate degree, fundamental knowledge of the profession as demonstrated by passing the ACA exam, and professional archival experience.<sup>71</sup>

In 1993, ACA created an option for taking the exam provisionally. To do this, the exam candidate needed a master's degree with at least nine semester (or twelve quarter) hours of graduate archival classes. Those who passed the exam would become provisional members of ACA, which would allow them to tell prospective employers that they had passed the exam and would be full CAs once they had one year of professional experience.<sup>72</sup>

Although these advances were taking place and the membership was growing steadily, behind the scenes all was not well. In fact, ACA was in a financial fight for its young life. Although it had started with what many considered to be a huge amount of money from fees for certification because far more archivists petitioned to be members than those who created ACA had budgeted, the expenses of maintaining a rigorous exam and providing basic membership services was much, much more than estimated. Although the IBC thought that they were handing over "a comfortable reserve," within five months of ACA's creation, Karen Benedict warned that it could run out of money in less than four years and might need to institute dues. For example, during the 1990–1991 fiscal year, ACA took in almost \$15,400, while its expenses were just over \$32,700. Just the administrative fees paid to SAA were almost \$15,000, and the exam expenses exceeded \$9,300. Remember, in 1987 the estimate was that the total annual costs of operating ACA would be about \$12,000. Furthermore, the original income estimate assumed that fifty people per year would take the test, but three of the first five years had totals well below that.<sup>73</sup>

At the time, ACA's only significant revenues came from exam application fees and certification fees from those who passed the exam. Consequently, money came in when archivists became members, but after 1989 that was a relatively small and variable amount. As it was, the next new revenue stream would not be created until 1997 when the \$250 recertification fees would begin.<sup>74</sup>

These fiscal problems greatly restrained ACA's ability to take advantage of its early momentum and do a considerable amount of outreach to employers and prospective members. For example, during this period when the ACA

*Newsletter* was being sent to all SAA members as a part of its newsletter, ACA cut its publication to only three issues per year. Although this lowered the cost by half, it also reduced this method of publicity for ACA by 50%. Certainly, many members volunteered to do outreach, but ACA was able to give precious little financial support to these efforts. In 1995, ACA further reduced its expenses by contracting with Capitol Hill Management Services to handle both ACA's administrative services (formerly with SAA) and exam development assistance (formerly PES's responsibility). Despite its bare-bones budget, ACA was still projecting that it would run out of money in just a few years.<sup>75</sup>

At this juncture, ACA's future hung in the balance. Treasurer Carla Summers, Vice President Elizabeth Adkins, and Regent for Exam Administration Claudette John sought a way to make ACA fiscally stable. Because ACA had already minimized expenses, the only remaining possibility was to increase revenues. However, since ACA did not have publications or annual meetings that could help the association raise money, its only viable option was to implement dues. Although the Board of Regents deliberated intensely and modified the plan, they voted to institute annual dues of \$50, reduce the certification fees to \$150, and eliminate the recertification fee. The members at ACA's 1994 annual business meeting debated extensively, but most understood the situation and approved the change. Unfortunately, this resulted in the departure of many of those who had objected to dues. In 1999–2000, by which time all members were paying dues, there were only 665 members, while in 1994–1995 there had been 934 members, a level that took a dozen years to re-attain. Consequently, ACA's reserves hit their nadir of just over \$20,000 in the late 1990s. The installation of dues, however, did have the intended results. Although the next treasurer, Jim Byers, had to institute additional cost cutting, the added revenue from dues slowly made ACA financially sound and allowed it to begin some long-term financial planning, instead of always obsessing about reducing costs.<sup>76</sup>

The financial crisis was ACA's most pivotal event after its founding. Before it, it was possible that ACA's important mission and all of the hard work that went into it could be lost. After it, ACA has slowly, but steadily ascended. In fact, much of what ACA has accomplished recently has involved enhancing its existing framework. Recent years have seen improvements to existing processes, each of which has strengthened ACA.

Arguably, the most important enhancement involved exam locations. After the first year, the exam always took place at five predetermined sites. Because so many archivists had very limited travel budgets, Leon Miller, who was regent for outreach, suggested creating a "pick your site" program. This allows archivists to ask to have an exam site located anywhere as long as a certain number of candidates (currently five) are willing to take the test there. The board approved the idea, and the regent for exam administration, Becky Tousey, instituted it

in 1998. It was an immediate success, more than doubling the previous year's number of candidates (77 vs. 37). The test has been given in as many as seventeen sites at one time and even once in Hong Kong.<sup>77</sup>

Over the years, technological advances have enabled ACA to serve its members better. For example, in 1996, ACA created a website. Within a year, the website allowed archivists easy access to a newly updated exam study guide, which had a suggested reading list and sample questions. Later, archivists could use the Internet to read the *ACA Newsletter* (instituted by Joe Ciccone in 2006), vote (instituted by Richard Shrake in 2010), submit their recertification forms (instituted by Kristy Sorensen in 2011), apply to take the exam (instituted by Daphne DeLeon in 2012), and pay their dues (instituted by Mott Linn in 2012). These improvements reduced costs and made the processes easier for both ACA and its members.<sup>78</sup>

Although SAA created ACA to advance professional standards in the United States, it also does so internationally. In 2003, ACA joined the International Council of Archives. This not only gave it greater international visibility, but also made it easier for ACA to respond to archivists in other countries who wanted to establish their own method of certification. For example, in 2006, ACA was asked to send a speaker to the VII European Conference on Archives to explain how ACA was created so that they could emulate it. This was of great interest to the European Union because of its need for archivists qualified to work anywhere in the union no matter where they were trained.<sup>79</sup>

A critical part of ACA's success is its consistent and strong support by a very large number of its members. They understand that the more widely accepted ACA is, the stronger the profession will be. To honor those who have made outstanding individual contributions to ACA, in 2001, the Board of Regents created the Distinguished Service Award, which Martin Levitt suggested and for which he donated the initial funding.<sup>80</sup>

In 2009, ACA reached two milestones: its twentieth anniversary and its thousandth member. To honor this anniversary, SAA Council passed a resolution stating that "ACA exists to ensure that standards of expertise in the practice of archival science are maintained and promoted by demonstrating a mastery of a defined body of knowledge and skills, compiled and regularly revised through the organization's Role Delineation Statement."<sup>81</sup>

Today, ACA has not only grown, but also seems prepared for continued growth. In 1990, after the petitioning process and the first year's exam results, ACA had 716 members. In the wake of the budget crisis, membership slumped to its nadir at 665 in 2000. As of July 1, 2014, that number had grown to 1,201. The number taking the exam has also risen. In 1989, 21 took the exam at the SAA conference site; in 2013, a record 192 candidates took it at one of a record 17 locations.<sup>82</sup>

Meanwhile, neither the accreditation of individual archives nor the accreditation of educational programs has been implemented, though progress has been made in both areas. SAA published "Evaluation of Archival Institutions" in 1982, "Archives Assessment and Planning Workbook" in 1989, and the current "Guidelines for Evaluation of Archival Institutions" in 1994.<sup>83</sup> Likewise, SAA issued guidelines on archival education in 1988 and 1994 that have been superseded by the 2011 "Guidelines for a Graduate Program in Archival Studies."<sup>84</sup> Despite the progress, the larger accreditation initiatives have gone nowhere.<sup>85</sup> Consequently, archivists of today are fortunate that their predecessors decided not to wait to establish certification of individual archivists. With the proven viability of certification and the fact that many professions use only certification to self-regulate, these other accreditation options seem less and less necessary.

### Comparing Certified Archivists of Yesterday and Today

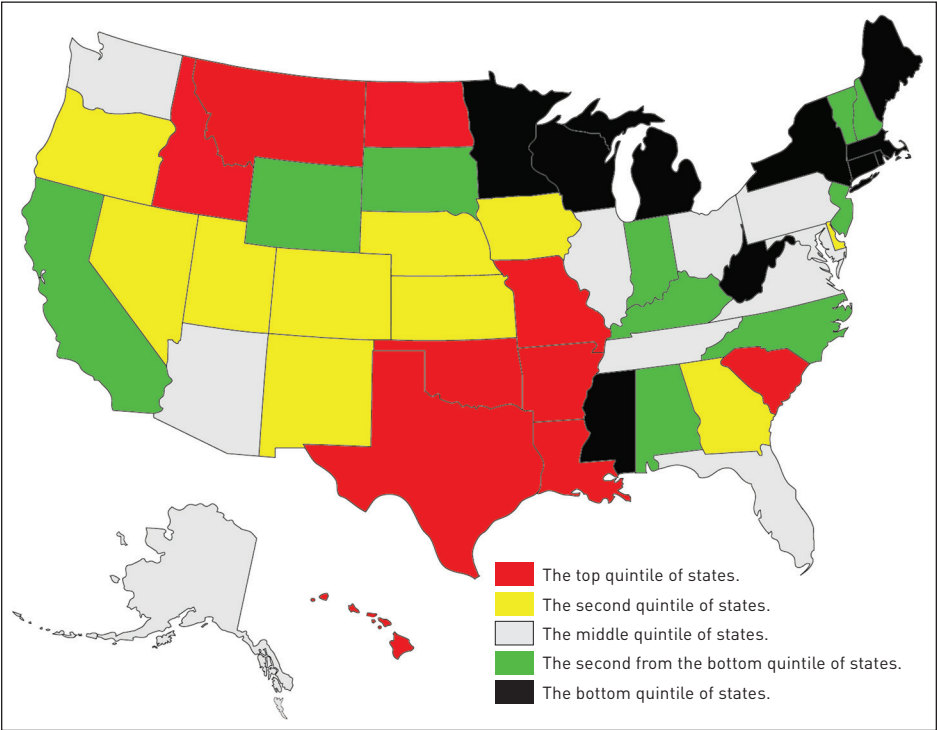
In 1990, 1999, and 2013, the academy conducted surveys of its membership (see Appendix A). The ways in which ACA's membership has changed over its history are interesting. In some ways, certified archivists have mirrored the changes occurring throughout the archival field, and in other ways they have not.<sup>86</sup>

Although SAA conducted A\*CENSUS over ten years ago, it remains the most recent look at the entire archival field in the United States. It demonstrated that average certified archivists differ from average archivists in a number of ways. First of all, they were much more likely to respond to the A\*CENSUS survey: 77.5% versus 47.2% for all archivists. This willingness to respond might have been influenced by another finding: 43 % of certified archivists felt very strongly about their connection to the profession, but only 29% of SAA members and 22% of the profession as a whole felt this way. Remember that one item on the list of attributes that define a profession is a "strong community orientation and loyalty." The survey findings suggest that certified archivists are much more likely than most archivists to subscribe to this critical aspect of making ours a profession. A\*CENSUS also found that CAs are more likely than the typical archivist or SAA member to participate in a wide array of activities, measured by the number of archival conferences attended, archives-related presentations given, archival workshops taught, and leadership positions held. For example, 71% of CAs had held a leadership position in a professional organization during their careers, while only 51.5% of SAA members and 43.3% of archivists in general had done the same. Certified archivists are also much more likely to take part in continuing education programs than their peers. Furthermore, this difference not only held true overall, but was also the case no matter how many years of experience the archivists had. This fulfilled one of SAA's objectives in creating

ACA, which was to improve the quality of the field’s practitioners through continuing education.<sup>87</sup>

As of July 1, 2014, ACA had 1,178 members in the United States compared to SAA’s 6,008 individual members, which means that ACA is just under 20% of the size of SAA. This ratio, however, varies greatly from region to region. Certified archivists are over 40% of the size of SAA’s membership in the states that make up the Society of Southwest Archivists and more than 30% of SAA’s for the whole area west of the Mississippi River. Conversely, ACA’s membership is only about 8% of SAA’s in the New England Archivists’ region. Of course, not all CAs are SAA members; A\*CENSUS found that 79% were in 2005. As the map shows (see Figure 1), ACA is very strong in the south central United States and a bit less so in the other regions west of the Mississippi River, while being under-represented in New England and to a lesser extent in the Great Lakes states.

As one would expect, these comparisons vary even more widely on a state-by-state basis. ACA has the same number of members in Idaho as SAA has, while Arkansas’s and Missouri’s ACA memberships are over 66% the size of SAA’s. On the other hand, the corresponding rates are 3% for Mississippi and 0% for West Virginia. In addition, Hawaii went from having no ACA members in 1990 to 13



**FIGURE 1.** The fifty states fall into five equally numbered groups. The top quintile has the most certified archivists when compared to the number of Society of American Archivists members. Washington, D.C., would fall into the middle quartile.

in 2014, while Oregon grew from 3 to 18, Maryland from 9 to 51, and Missouri from 14 to 47. In 1990, the jurisdictions that had the largest numbers of CAs were Washington, D.C. (72), New York (60), and Texas (46), while SAA's leaders were New York (328), California (210), and Pennsylvania (165). In 2014, ACA's most populous states were Texas (147), California (83), and Illinois (58), while for SAA they were New York (664), California (597), and Massachusetts (395).

On July 16, 2013, ACA sent out a survey to its 1,136 members. With 764 replying, the response rate was 67.3%. In 1999, CAs returned 71% of the questionnaires, and the 1990 survey had a remarkable 97% response rate.

In 2013, 66.0% of the respondents were female and 34.0% were male (see Table 1). Studies in 2004 (A\*CENSUS) and 1990 (SAA) found that those populations had a higher proportion of females than ACA had. Both ACA and SAA have had a reduction in the proportion of males over time.

**Table 1. What Is Your Gender?**

	2013	1999	1990	A*Census- CAs	A*Census- All	A*Census- SAA	SAA in 1990
Female	66.0%	52.0%	50.0%	58.3%	65.5%	67.8%	54%
Male	34.0%	48.0%	49.9%	41.7%	34.5%	32.2%	46%

Response Rate for 2013 Survey: 98.4%

The ethnic makeup of ACA members is also very similar to what A\*CENSUS found for the whole archival field (see Table 2). In 2013, ACA was 89.6% Caucasian versus the 87.7% that A\*CENSUS found, 1.7% to 2.1% for Hispanic Americans, 1.7% to 2.8% for African Americans, 2.4% to 1.0% for Asian Americans, 0.5% to 2.0% for Native Americans, 0.5% to 0.4% for Pacific Islanders, and 2.6% to 2.9% for "other." ACA's ethnic makeup has become a little more diverse over time.

**Table 2. What Ethnic Identification Best Describes You?**

	2013	1999	1990	A*Census
Hispanic American	1.7%	0%		2.1%
African American	1.7%	2%		2.8%
Asian American	2.4%	1%		1.0%
Native American	0.5%	1%		2.0%
Caucasian/White	89.6%	94%	93.0%	87.7%
Pacific Islander	0.5%			0.4%
Other (specify)	2.6%	2%		2.9%

Response Rate for 2013 Survey: 97.7%



The youngest CA to reply to the survey in 2013 was 26 and the oldest was 91. The mean age of those who replied was 49.3, while the mean age of those who were not retired was 47.4. A\*CENSUS found that the mean age for all archivists was 48.7 years, while that for CAs was 49.8. Instead of requesting the respondents' specific ages, the 1999 and 1990 surveys asked what ten-year range their ages fell within. When comparing the ages of the members in 1999 and 2013, 5% were 70 or older in 1999 versus 5.8% in 2013; 9% were 60–69 in 1999 versus 19.1% in 2013; 32% versus 25.3% for 50–59, 37% versus 20% for 40–49, 16% versus 28.6% for 30–39, and 1% versus 3.8% for 29 and younger. The information about ages that exists from the 1990 survey is that 76% were between 30 and 50; 17% were 51–60, and 7% were over 60. Consequently, it seems that the first CAs belonged to a fairly condensed and relatively young age range that over time has spread out more evenly.

The original CAs had a great deal of professional experience because at least 5 years was required for an applicant to petition to become certified. Again, the 1999 and 1990 surveys asked for what range of years the respondent's professional experience fell within. In 1990, 89% had at least 8 years of professional experience, while the remaining 11% had between 2 and 8 years. In 1999, 39% of the CAs who responded had 20 or more years of archival experience, while 21% had 16–20 years, 12% had 13–15 years, 18% had 8–12, 8% had 4–7, and 2% had 3 or fewer years. A\*CENSUS found that the average archivist and average SAA member had 14 years of archival experience, while the average certified archivist had 20 years. In 2013, the mean number of years that a certified archivist had worked in professional archival jobs was 18.9 years. To group them, 2.9% had worked 40 or more years; 12.5% had worked 30–39 years, 17.1% had worked 20–29, 8.6% had worked 16–19, 14.3% had worked 13–15, 19.5% had worked 8–12, 19.2% had worked 4–7, and 5.0% had 3 or fewer years of work. Although the proportion of certified archivists grew in some experience groupings and shrank in others, the absolute number since the 1999 survey grew in every range of experience.

For ACA's first eleven years, it was possible for an archivist to become certified with only a bachelor's degree. From 2000 to 2005, an applicant needed special approval to sit for the exam without a graduate degree. A graduate degree has been required to become a certified archivist since 2005.<sup>88</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising that certified archivists are very well educated and that the percentage of CAs with a graduate degree has gone up over time (see Table 3). In 2013, a bachelor's degree was the highest degree held by only 1.9% (over 20% of whom were retired), a master's by 88.4%, and a doctorate by 9.7%. By comparison, a bachelor's degree was the highest degree for 8.3% in 1999 and 10% in 1990. To go into more detail, 60.4% of CAs had a master's in library science and 37.8% had one in history. In addition, 31.7% had at least two master's degrees,

while 14.4% had both a master's in history and one in library science. A\*CENSUS demonstrated how much more education the typical CA had than the average archivist. It showed that 8.4% of all archivists had a doctorate, 70.7% held at least one master's degree, and 15.4% had two. It also found that 39.4% had an MLS or MLIS.

**Table 3. Please Indicate ALL of the Degrees You Hold**

	2013	1999	1990	A*Census
Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS)	100.00%	100%	100%	76.3%
Master's in history	37.83%			
Master's in library or information science (e.g., MLS, MSIS)	60.34%			39.4%
MBA/MPA	2.62%			
A master's not listed above (Please specify)	24.21%			
Any master's degree as the highest degree	88.40%	74%	70%	70.7%
Professional doctorate (e.g., JD, MD)	1.31%			
Academic doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD)	8.51%			
Any doctorate	9.70%	17%	18%	8.4%

Response Rate for 2013 Survey: 99.7%

Over the years, the original 716 members have become an ever smaller percentage of ACA's membership as additional archivists became certified. Currently, the "class of 1989" is 18.0% of ACA's membership, while they made up 15.8% of the respondents to the 2013 survey (see Table 4). This question is one way of comparing how representative the respondents were of the ACA membership as a whole since ACA knows the percentage of original members. Consequently, the class of 1989 was just slightly underrepresented in the survey results. Although most of the reduction in the class of 1989's proportion of the membership is due to the addition of new members, some is due to CAs retiring. Although some of the retirees have dropped out of ACA, others have stayed on

**Table 4. How Did You Originally Become a Certified Archivist?**

	Current	2013	1999	1989
By exam	82.0%	84.2%	42.0%	0.0%
By petition in 1989	18.0%	15.8%	58.0%	100.0%

Response Rate for 2013 Survey: 97.7%

through ACA’s emeritus status, which is for those who have left the profession, but want to remain members to continue their commitment to ACA. In 2013, emeritus members made up 12.2% of ACA’s membership.

In 2013, 62.5% were working at full-time/permanent archives jobs; 13.7% had full-time jobs that only partially included archives responsibilities; 9.6% were retired; 9.9% were working either part-time or temporary archival jobs; 1.8% were seeking archives jobs; and 2.5% were not employed in archival work and were not seeking archives-related employment (see Table 5). As a result, given the poor economic conditions of the last six years and how many people are seeking jobs as archivists, CAs are successful at being employed in their profession.

**Table 5. Which of These Best Describes Your Archival Employment Status on July 1, 2013?**

	2013	1999	1990	A*Census
Full time/permanent working on archives-related matters	62.5%	79.3%	89.0%	78.3%
Full time/permanent, but only part time on archival-related matters	13.7%			
Working a temporary/contract/project job on archives-related matters	9.9%	10.0%		10.2%
Working part time on archives-related matters				
Retired	9.6%	7.9%	1.0%	3.0%
Not employed in archives work, but seeking archives employment	1.8%		0.7%	1.1%
Not employed in archives work and not seeking archives-related employment	2.5%			
Other				7.5%

Response Rate for 2013 Survey: 99.5%

In 2013, 85.2% of CAs were employed, 8.2% were not employed, and 4.9% were consultants. Of those who were working for an organization, higher education employed 37.4%, the federal government employed 10.0%, state government 9.7%, religious institutions 7.5%, museums 7.2%, and for-profit organizations 6.2% (see Table 6). The rest were employed by local governments (4.9%), public libraries (4.0%), historical societies (3.7%), private repositories (1.3%), and other nonprofits (5.8%). As the table shows, the types of organizations that employ CAs have varied little over time and are fairly similar to the occupation as a whole.

**Table 6. If You Answered Yes, Which ONE of These Best Describes the Type of Organization of which Your Unit Is a Part?**

	2013	1999	1990	A*Census	SAA 1990
College or university	37.4%	38.0%	39.0%	36.0%	25.2%
Historical society	3.7%	4.5%			
Local government agency	4.9%				
State government agency	9.7%				
Federal government agency	10.0%				
TOTAL: government agency	24.6%	24.4%	27.2%	31.6%	19.9%
Private manuscript or archival repository	1.3%	2.5%			
Religious institution	7.5%	10.0%			14.1%
Public library	4.0%	4.0%			
Museum	7.2%	5.5%			5.1%
Other nonprofit organization	5.8%			23.1%	
Corporate organization (for profit)	6.2%	7.5%		5.4%	12.1%
Other (specify) _____				2.7%	
Self-employed				1.3%	
Manuscript repository					23.60%

Response Rate for 2013 Survey: 96.4%

A\*CENSUS found that 23.1% of its respondents supervised others. Of those managers, the mean number of paid staff (not just archivists) supervised was 14.2. In 2013, 51.0% of CAs had supervisory duties overseeing a mean number of 5.9 other archivists, which does not include paraprofessionals or people in other occupations. In 1990, approximately 60% had supervisory responsibilities.

Comparing salaries in a meaningful way is very complicated. Not only must inflation over time be taken into account, but also how the comparison groups differ on factors that have a significant positive correlation with salaries. Optimally, differences in each sample's averages of factors such as years of professional experience, how many people the respondents supervise, and the economic sector that employs them (e.g., government, corporate, etc.) should be accounted for. With that being said, in 1990, the mean salary was \$34,000 and the median was in the \$30,000-to-\$35,000 range with 38% of CAs earning from

\$25,000 to \$35,000, and with 37% earning over \$35,000. In 1999, 56% of CAs earned more than \$41,000 and 25% earned \$31,000 to \$40,999. In addition, the median was \$55,000 and the mean was \$44,725. A\*CENSUS found that on average, CAs earned \$55,218, SAA members earned \$51,279, and archivists in general earned \$49,329. These differences were at least in part due to the greater experience that CAs had. In 2013, the mean pay of CAs was \$57,006, and both the median and mode was in the \$50,001 to \$60,000 range with 19.6% of respondents. After removing the retirees from the calculations, the median and mode remained in the same range and the mean pay rose to \$58,405.<sup>89</sup>

In 1995, ACA instituted its first annual dues, which it set at \$50. It has never changed this price despite the fact that inflation has increased 58.25% since then. Consequently, in 1995 dollars, today's dues only cost \$21.13. By comparison, in 1995, SAA raised its range for individual dues to \$55 to \$155. Today it is \$80 to \$250.<sup>90</sup>

Of course, when SAA created ACA, no benefits were to be derived from certification. As a result, the 1990 survey asked what benefits "have you already received or anticipate receiving" from certification. The overwhelming choice was "knowledge of having contributed to the development of the profession." This is a further demonstration of the selfless vision for improving the profession that many of the original members had: although many of their careers were assured, they supported ACA, not to help their careers, but because they understood that a successful ACA would benefit those archivists who would come after them. The next most popular answers in 1990 were receiving increased respect from supervisors and getting better pay. One-quarter, however, believed that they would get no benefit from certification.

Having seen ACA's success, the responses from the 2013 survey were much more upbeat. In 2013, the question was changed to what "benefit(s) have you received from being certified." Only 11.7% said that they had not received any benefit from certification. The most frequently noted benefit stated by 53.8% was that their superiors gave them enhanced respect. Multiple CAs made statements in the 2013 survey that supported this finding (the survey included space for the respondents to give their thoughts about ACA, which was a way of collecting valuable qualitative information about the motivations of CAs). For example, one of the respondents stated, "For too many years before ACA I was considered a 'library assistant' working under librarians who did not understand our work. Having my certification was very helpful in gaining the title and salary I deserved." The next most-cited benefit was the knowledge of having contributed to the profession (45.1%). One respondent agreed with this, stating, "I am glad that as a Certified Archivist I have contributed to my profession by being a part of improving its standing and raising the quality of archivists. Unfortunately, there are some outside of ACA who do not seem to care if their occupation is

seen as nothing more than glorified file clerks.” Many noted enhanced respect from their peers (38.9%) and from the public (26.6%) because they were certified. As one respondent volunteered, “I am very pleased that ACA exists to improve the profession. Certification guarantees the competence of professional archivists and enhances the respect of archivists from prospective employers, colleagues, researchers, and the general public.” Of the respondents, 18.8% benefited from the CA being an alternative credential to the MLS degree, with one certified archivist stating: “I am glad ACA exists because for someone like me, who didn’t get an MLS degree, it provides formal recognition of my expertise.” Though it was not a choice on the survey, 2.8% wrote into the comments area for this question that they felt personal satisfaction or greater confidence due to certification. Many other remarks were also left in this comments field. For example, “The Human Resources office at work has stated that any full-time archivist hired in the future will need a CA because of what I have done.” Finally, many derived better career opportunities because they were certified (34.7%). As one respondent pointed out, “For many years, I directed a graduate-level archival training program. Many of my students’ careers benefited because they became Certified Archivists.”

This last perception is supported by the findings of a 2010 survey of supervisors of archivists in local and state governments. All of the respondents had a positive (59%) or neutral (41%) view of certified archivists, and 73% stated that they would hire a certified archivist over an otherwise equally qualified applicant.<sup>91</sup> As a result of positive opinions about certified archivists, many employers now seek CAs. For example, the Missouri State Archives includes in all position announcements that it prefers CAs and that if somebody noncertified is hired, that archivist must take the exam at the earliest opportunity.<sup>92</sup> The Nevada State Library and Archives validates the CA in two ways: by codifying it in law (NRS 3789.020) as the professional qualification for the division administrator and by including the CA in all archival job announcements.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, some employers, such as the University of Georgia, use certification as a requirement for promotion.<sup>94</sup>

In conclusion, one certified archivist stated, “I love that the Academy exists. ACA is an incredibly important part of the archives profession. Since there isn’t a degree in the U.S. specific to archival knowledge, job announcements should require the CA designation. I have an MLS and am a Certified Archivist. I am much more passionate about my certification than my MLS.”

## Conclusion

The archival field has steadily been professionalizing, particularly since the Committee for the 1970s presented its findings. In large part due to SAA

initiatives, both the quality of American archival literature and the quantity of archival training have improved greatly since then. Furthermore, a few decades ago, SAA had no way to approve standards, but now it has the Standards Committee as well as a collection of guidelines and standards that it has approved. Moreover, since the essential aspect of every profession is the quality of its practitioners, arguably the most important advancement is the standard for determining who is qualified to call themselves a certified archivist. The more widely accepted this standard is, the better off our profession, our employers, our researchers, and our materials will be.

The Academy of Certified Archivists was created by SAA to cooperate with both it and regional archival organizations to improve the competence of archivists. ACA fulfills its mission in two ways. First, it administers a valid and reliable exam that adheres to psychometric standards and tests for a working mastery of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that archivists need. Second, ACA determines who can remain certified through its certification maintenance program, which requires career-long continuing education. Unless a discipline has a way to ensure that its members keep up with the occupation's advances, its "professionals" can become marginalized as the field passes them by.

In many ways ACA has shown progress toward fulfilling SAA's desire to improve the quality of archivists. Although the makeup of ACA's membership vis-à-vis gender and ethnicity is similar to SAA's, certified archivists are more strongly connected to the field and are more likely to take part in many archives-related activities, such as attending conferences, holding leadership positions, presenting papers, and taking part in continuing education. Given this, it is no wonder that a majority of certified archivists have reported benefiting from enhanced respect from their supervisors and that many have reported enhanced respect from their peers and the public, as well as improved career opportunities. The latter observation is supported by a survey of local and state governments that found that the vast majority of those employers would prefer to hire a certified archivist over an otherwise equally qualified applicant. Consequently, numerous employers seek CAs to fill their positions and require certification of their archivists. For example, as one archivist who hires others responded to ACA's recent survey, "When I see the CA designation I know that there is at least a baseline level of competence that I can take for granted. Nowadays, when you get 100+ applicants for every single archives opening, the CA is extremely helpful in narrowing down to those who are qualified."

ACA overcame initial doubts and disputes about the necessity of certification to become a well-established, growing organization. It survived a budgetary near-death experience to become financially strong. The numbers of both its members and of applications to take the examination have been steadily growing and are at record levels.



There still are some people who are waiting for Godot to come and professionalize the archival field. Over time, however, many others have come to understand that ACA is an effective method of defining who is qualified to be a professional archivist, or have resigned themselves to ACA's existence as more employers seek CAs and growing numbers of archivists earn their professional certification. Just as with the certification of both medical doctors and accountants, archivists can look forward to certification continuing to be more widely adopted over time.

Because America's population is increasingly mobile and because of ever-improving methods of archival practice, demands for a nationally recognized method of identifying who is qualified to be an archivist will certainly continue to intensify, just as they have in other occupations. Certification will have additional benefits as more employers come to understand that it provides the only objective standard that exists to judge the qualifications of prospective archivists. Wide acceptance of certification in the future could also lead to enhanced public appreciation of archives, better institutional support, increased prestige for both individual archivists and the profession, and improved pay, thereby making the profession more attractive to join. Consequently, the Academy of Certified Archivists is a relatively new organization whose positive impacts on the field are only starting to be felt.

The academy's growing success and its twenty-fifth anniversary are testaments to the wisdom and dedication to the archival community of its members and especially its founders. Archivists are fortunate that SAA and some of our predecessors had the foresight and fortitude to create a certification program for individuals, thus bringing us ever closer to a true profession. Because of them, the Academy of Certified Archivists and the whole archival field are looking forward to a much brighter future.

\* \* \*

"When a person applies for this job, how do I know whether he is a qualified archivist?" In 1970, SAA president Herman Kahn said there was "no valid method" he could suggest to perplexed employers who asked this question. Fortunately, now there is one: hire a certified archivist.

## Appendix A

From mid-July through mid-September of 2013, ACA conducted a survey of its membership. Its questions are mostly the same as ACA's surveys of 1990 and 1999 with most of the changes being reworkings, not of the questions, but of the possible answers. In addition, the 2013 survey dropped some of the less pertinent questions from the earlier surveys in an effort to improve the response rate. The survey was sent online to all those members as of July 1, 2013, for whom ACA had email addresses. The rest were mailed a paper survey. The survey had a 67.3% response rate. Those who sent back answers responded to the individual questions at a rate from 99.7% (for the college degrees question) to 93.9% (for the salary question). A copy of the 2013 survey instrument follows.

1. How did you originally become a Certified Archivist?
  - ☐ By exam
  - ☐ By petition in 1989
2. Please indicate ALL of the degrees you hold. If you hold a second BA/BS, MA/MS, etc., please enter it in the box under "Other." (Select all that apply)
  - ☐ Bachelor's degree (e.g., BA, BS)
  - ☐ MA in history
  - ☐ a masters in library or information science (e.g., MLS, MSIS)
  - ☐ MBA/MPA
  - ☐ A masters not listed above (Please specify)
  - ☐ Professional doctorate (e.g., JD, MD)
  - ☐ Academic doctorate (e.g., PhD, EdD)
  - ☐ Other (please specify)
3. Excluding yourself, what is the total full time equivalent for the number of paid employees you supervise, directly or indirectly?  
Please enter a number \_\_\_\_\_
4. Including yourself, how many professional archivists are employed in your parent organization?  
Please enter a number \_\_\_\_\_
5. Which of these best describes your archival employment status on July 1, 2013:
  - ☐ Full-time/permanent working on archives-related matters
  - ☐ Full-time/permanent, but only part-time on archival-related matters
  - ☐ Working a temporary/contract/project job on archives-related matters
  - ☐ Working part-time on archives-related matters
  - ☐ Retired
  - ☐ Not employed in archives work, but seeking archives employment
  - ☐ Not employed in archives work and not seeking archives-related employment

6. Are you directly affiliated with an institution?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Consultant
  - ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
7. If you answered yes, which ONE of these best describes the type of organization of which your unit is a part.
- ☐ College or university
  - ☐ Historical society
  - ☐ Local government agency
  - ☐ State government agency
  - ☐ Federal government agency
  - ☐ Private manuscript or archival repository
  - ☐ Religious institution
  - ☐ Public library
  - ☐ Museum
  - ☐ Other not-for-profit organization
  - ☐ Corporate organization (for profit)
  - ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
8. What benefit(s) have you received from being certified? (Check all that apply)
- ☐ Better pay
  - ☐ Better career advancement or opportunities
  - ☐ Enhanced respect from the public
  - ☐ Enhanced respect from your superiors for you as an individual and/or for your profession
  - ☐ Enhanced respect from your peers
  - ☐ Knowledge of having contributed to the development of the profession
  - ☐ As an alternative credential to the MLS degree
  - ☐ None
  - ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
9. Enter the state, province, or country that is your place of employment (or residence if retired, self-employed, or unemployed)
- \_\_\_\_\_
10. What are the number of years you have worked in the archival profession (do not list extended time between jobs or time in para-professional positions):
- Please enter a number \_\_\_\_\_
11. What is your age?
- Please enter a number \_\_\_\_\_

12. What ethnic identification best describes you?
- ☐ Hispanic-American
  - ☐ African-American
  - ☐ Asian-American
  - ☐ Native American
  - ☐ Caucasian/White
  - ☐ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
13. What is your gender?
- ☐ Female
  - ☐ Male
14. What was your total compensation (excluding benefits) paid to you in calendar year 2012:
- ☐ Below \$10,000
  - ☐ \$10,001–\$20,000
  - ☐ \$20,001–\$30,000
  - ☐ \$30,001–\$40,000
  - ☐ \$40,001–\$50,000
  - ☐ \$50,001–\$60,000
  - ☐ \$60,001–\$70,000
  - ☐ \$70,001–\$80,000
  - ☐ \$80,001–\$90,000
  - ☐ \$90,001–\$100,000
  - ☐ \$100,001–\$110,000
  - ☐ \$110,001–\$120,000
  - ☐ \$120,001–\$130,000
  - ☐ \$130,001–\$140,000
  - ☐ \$140,001–\$150,000
  - ☐ \$150,001 or more
15. We are very interested in your thoughts about the Academy of Certified Archivists. Please use the space below for any questions, comments, or suggestions that you have about the Academy, Capital Hill Management Services (the company that manages ACA's business), and/or the certification or recertification processes.
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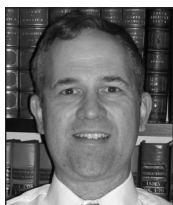
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- <sup>81</sup> "Society of American Archivists," *ACA News* 67, Fall 2009, 3.
- <sup>82</sup> ACA's Membership Database.
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- <sup>85</sup> Patrick Quinn, "Message from the President," *ACA News* 41, July 2001, 1; Diffendal, "Certified Archivists in A\*Census," 422; Shelly Kelly, "Report of the Secretary," *ACA News* 67, Fall 2009, 8.
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- <sup>88</sup> "Elimination of Bachelor's Degree Revisited," 3; and "ACA Announces 'Petition for Exception' to Be Phased Out," 3.
- <sup>89</sup> The mean for 2013 was calculated in the same way that A\*Census did, by using the center of each salary range. For example, this study used \$55,000 for all those who answered \$50,001–\$60,000; \$5,000 for those below \$10,000; and \$160,000 for those with \$150,001 or more.
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