FROM THE EDITOR

The Literature of a Profession

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In 1933, five years before the first issue of the *American Archivist*, Alexander Morris Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson offered a detailed account of the "profession" as a distinct way to define work.[1] Those who were part of a profession had to meet certain criteria, such as conforming to a code of ethics and acquiring formal, specialized education. In the decades that followed, other authors presented their own sets of conditions for an occupation to be worthy of professional status. In 1964, Harold Wilensky suggested that there was a common professionalization process, and relatively few occupations make it far enough through the process to "achieve the authority of the established professions."[2]

Thirty years ago, Andrew Abbott provided what has become an extremely influential perspective, in which the interesting questions are not about what should count as a profession, nor how an occupation can reach this status, but instead how occupational groups define and negotiate their respective boundaries.[3] According to Abbott, we live within an evolving system of professions, in which groups lay claim to certain "jurisdictions" of work. A jurisdiction is essentially a profession's scope of responsibility. Professional tasks rest on certain "objective foundations": technology, organizations, natural objects and facts, and cultural structures.[4] These characteristics of the environment are relatively stable at any given time, but they occasionally undergo dramatic transformations. In those cases, there is a "consequent jostling and readjustment within the system of professions."[5] Contenders for professional claims over the new vacancy attempt "to shape these problems into coherent jurisdictions by creating intellectual processes of diagnosis, inference and treatment."[6] For a given type of professional situation, diagnosis is the identification of what problem needs to be solved, inference is reasoning about potential responses to the problem, and treatment is taking action to address the situation.

In recent years, scholarship has tended to focus more on *professionalism* as a mode of being, rather than *professions* as clearly defined entities. Eliot Freidson, for example, describes professionalism as an "ideal type" to be distinguished from "the logic of competition in a free market" and "the managerial notion that efficiency is gained by minimizing discretion."[7] Valérie Fournier and Julia

Evetts have both argued that appeals to professionalism as a means to "discipline" work are common across many sectors of society, but these appeals can represent a wide diversity of power dynamics and claims of control.[8]

An underlying assumption in all of these discussions is that professions and professionalism could not exist without established bodies of knowledge. We expect a professional to understand certain concepts, to be conversant in certain specialized terminology, and to be aware of relevant advances in the field. Scholarly writing about professions discusses numerous ways to convey and perpetuate professional knowledge. These include, for example, formal associations, university degrees, and various other credentialing mechanisms. An archivist reading this literature may be disappointed to discover that only rarely do the authors mention the many types of documentary artifacts that make professions possible. To be a profession requires a professional literature, and professionalism involves drawing from (and ideally contributing to) a professional literature. This literature provides a vital component of a profession's "epistemic infrastructure."[9]

Since the 1930s when the American archival profession took major, visible steps to form its own identity—including establishment of the U.S. National Archives in 1934 and formation of the Society of American Archivists (SAA) in 1936—the profession's literature has grown dramatically. SAA published the first issue of its journal, the *American Archivist*, in 1938. It is my great honor to serve as the 22nd editor of the journal.

SAA has many other vectors of professional literature, including a strong book publishing program, a dedicated magazine called *Archival Outlook*, and newsletters of many component sections of the association. Within the United States, there are also many regional archival associations, as well as professional associations of allied professions, that publish valuable journals and newsletters. There are also numerous national and international publications coming from outside the United States that serve as rich professional resources. Finally, a vast array of online communication mechanisms convey information from, to, and between archival professionals, though which of these constitute "professional literature" is subject to debate.[10]

So what is the place of the *American Archivist* in this complex and dynamic landscape? One aspect of the journal's niche is simply length. Articles are generally a few thousand words, allowing the author to elaborate ideas more fully than one would typically find in a post to an online forum or newsletter item, but not as fully as one would typically find in a full monograph.

Another defining feature of the journal is that its contributions are subject to peer review. For each article found within its pages, members of the profession have volunteered their time and expertise to read, evaluate, and comment on the text. This process helps to ensure that published articles provide novel

contributions that are relevant to the archival profession. It also improves the content published in the journal when authors address concerns and suggestions raised by reviewers.

The *American Archivist* is also distinct in the time span of its content and reach of its audience. You are currently reading the 280th issue of the journal.[11] This represents a substantial body of literature, which has been available online since 2008.[12] As a previous editor of the journal, Phil Eppard, states, "Because it is the most widely circulated English-language archival journal, the *American Archivist* is uniquely positioned to influence archival theory and practice."[13]

As evidenced by the contents of this issue, contributions to the archival literature can take numerous forms. For example, authors can report on innovative professional practices within their institutions, challenge or extend existing theoretical concepts, investigate key moments or themes in the history of the profession based on analysis of primary sources, or report on the findings of empirical studies. In any case, articles should contribute something new and valuable. This is one reason why reading the existing archival literature is so important. Articles should convey to readers what the authors are building upon and then what they are adding to the discussion. A professional literature is for professionals, so it should help archivists to take action. It is worth remembering the discussion above about Abbott's three different professional "modes of action": diagnosis, inference, and treatment. The best *American Archivist* articles can inform and inspire archivists to act within one or more of these modes.

The first contribution in this issue is Nancy McGovern's presidential address. McGovern explores the place of "digital practice" in archives. She illustrates the many advances that archivists have made over the past several decades, places the profession's status within the stages of an organizational maturity model, and offers provocative questions about how to further advance both practice and core values of the profession, such as diversity and inclusion.

One of the core functions of archives is description, and two of this issue's articles report on empirical investigations of this function. Edward Benoit III conducted a mixed-methods study in which he asked participants to tag a sample collection with minimal metadata and then compared those tags to "real-world item-level metadata and query terms." Based on his findings, he concludes that social tags can provide useful supplemental access points to digital materials. Erin Baucom reports on a study in which she compared terms used by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) history project Web sites to describe gender and sexual identities to terms used in traditional archives to portray those same identities. She found that the terms in finding aids were often less precise or up-to-date than the terms used on the LGBTQ history project Web sites. She provides recommendations for engagement and descriptive practices to address these disparities. Both Benoit and Baucom

illustrate the importance of reaching outside the walls of the archives when generating descriptors and access points.

Archivists must often revisit and test their assumptions about how to meet user needs. Maurita Baldock and J. Wendel Cox discuss how two projects produced insights into congressional collections at an institution that was examining the importance of its political materials within its collection development policy. They recommend using both data analysis and an understanding of the American political scene to inform the development and promotion of congressional collections, in order to reach audiences that archivists might not have previously considered. Alexandra Chassanoff also explores the research potential of particular types of archival materials. She investigated the experiences of historians using digitized archival photographs as sources of evidence. Chassanoff discusses factors that make experiences meaningful and significant for historians who are engaged in this type of scholarship.

Users are not the only stakeholders for archivists to consider when making decisions about how to manage and provide access to archival materials; individuals who are represented in the materials can also have a major stake. Ashlyn Velte used a survey and set of interviews to ask archivists about ethical challenges related to acquisition of and access to social media collections. Participants in her study reported that when collecting social media as data, they intend to provide moderated access, and when collecting social media accounts, they intend to seek permission to collect and then provide access online. Such situations will become increasingly relevant to archives, especially those attempting to document dynamic, contemporary activities.

Two articles provide perspectives on pressing societal issues that intersect dramatically with the archival enterprise. Anna Robinson-Sweet argues, based on a review of related literature, that archivists should take on the role of reparations activists, particularly in the campaign for black reparations in the United States. She calls for American archivists to recognize the role that their intuitions may have played in advancing or perpetuating systemic racism. Ashley Nicole Vavra reviews the legal and historical background of the right to be forgotten (RTBF). She discusses how countries in Europe are applying the concept of RTBF, as well as discussing the new European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). She illustrates tensions between the RTBF and professional values of archivists, including accountability, preservation of the historical record, and equal access.

This issue includes a special section with three articles on the theme of archives and education. Leslie Waggener discusses the experience of developing and offering a first-year seminar (FYS) based on archival materials at the University of Wyoming (UW). She offers lessons and insights related to administering such educational offerings. In the second article, eight co-authors,

Lindsay Anderberg, Robin Katz, Shaun Hayes, Alison Stankrauff, Morgen MacIntosh-Hodgetts, Josue Hurtado, Abigail Nye, and Ashley Todd-Diaz, report on a survey-based study of whether archival graduate programs are preparing students to teach with primary sources. They found that pedagogical training in graduate archival education programs is relatively limited and inconsistent. They argue that these findings should be a concern in light of recent scholarship on teaching with primary sources, as well as archival job postings indicating a need to teach with primary sources. In the final article of the special section, Christopher Livingston reports on a collaboration between the Walter Stiern Library and History Department at California State University, Bakersfield, to integrate an archival service-learning program into the curriculum. Livingston describes the establishment of the program and provides initial findings about the benefits of service learning, as well as discussing the implications of service learning for archivists.

This issue concludes with eleven reviews of books that are relevant to readers of the journal. Bethany Anderson, reviews editor for the journal, provides a thoughtful and informative summary of the reviews in her introduction to that section.

I would like to conclude by thanking Greg Hunter, the previous *American Archivist* editor, who put substantial work into this issue of the journal; most of the articles had made it through the editorial process before I took over as editor. Greg also shared valuable advice on how to approach the editorial process. Finally, I am deeply thankful to Teresa Brinati and Abigail Christian at SAA for their amazing support and patience as I transition into this new role. I look forward to the adventure ahead, as we all collectively define and shape the literature of the archival profession.

Notes

1   Alexander Morris Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson, *The Professions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933).

2   Harold L. Wilensky, "The Professionalization of Everyone?," *American Journal of Sociology* 70, no. 2 (1964): 137.

3   Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

4   Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 39.

5   Abbott, *The System of Professions*, 33.

6   Andrew Abbott, "Boundaries of Social Work or Social Work of Boundaries?," *Social Service Review* 69, no. 4 (1995): 552.

7   Eliot Freidson, *Professionalism: The Third Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 3.

8   Valérie Fournier, "The Appeal to 'Professionalism' as a Disciplinary Mechanism," *Sociological Review* 47, no. 2 (1999): 280–307; Julia Evetts, "The Sociological Analysis of Professionalism: Occupational Change in the Modern World," *International Sociology* 18, no. 2 (2003): 395–415.

9 Margaret Hedstrom and John Leslie King, "Epistemic Infrastructure in the Rise of the Knowledge Economy," in *Advancing Knowledge and the Knowledge Economy*, ed. Brian Kahin and Dominique Foray (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 113–34.

10 While some could insist on certain types of formal vetting for a resource to count as professional literature, an even more fundamental issue (and one of great concern to archivists) is the persistence of sources. It is questionable whether information artifacts can serve as contributions to the professional literature if persistent citations to them are not possible, i.e., there is no guarantee that following a link to an item will allow the reader to access it.

11 Volume 81, number 1 is the 280th issue of *American Archivist* when counting volumes 1 and 2 of volume 51 (1988) as a single issue (bound and published together) and including the online supplement issue dedicated to the 75th anniversary of SAA in 2011. *American Archivist* was a quarterly publication (four issues per year) for the first sixty years of the journal, and it switched to a semi-annual publication (two issues per year) starting with volume 61 in 1998.

12 See http://americanarchivist.org/.

13 Philip B. Eppard, "Making an Impact on the Archival Profession," *American Archivist* 68, no. 2 (2005): 207.