

January 2002

## Bringing Provenance to a Wider Audience

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### Recommended Citation

Matthews, Linda, "Bringing Provenance to a Wider Audience," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 20 no. 1 (2002) .  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol20/iss1/4>

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## **Bringing *Provenance* to a Wider Audience**

**Linda Matthews**

The journal of a professional association is an integral part of the public and educational mission of an organization. By its quality and relevance to current issues, a journal essentially confirms the group's professional stature and purpose. By publishing articles on new initiatives, noteworthy projects, legal and social issues, and emerging trends affecting archives, the journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists (SGA) contributes to the continuing education of its members, the development of new archivists, and the historical record of issues and research affecting the profession. *Provenance* is the major published record of the society and its service to the profession.

How can the Society of Georgia Archivists maintain the relevance of its journal, now thirty years in existence, as technology molds our working lives? When David B. Gracy II established the journal in 1972, archivists had little professional literature beyond the *American Archivist*. Professional literature is now much more readily available and more sophisticated. In looking toward the future, say the fiftieth anniversary of *Provenance*, should the journal continue in its present form? If not, how can we modify our journal to meet the needs of future pro-

professionals and to be part of the development and growth of the profession in the twenty-first century?

Looking at the need for ready access to information and the problem of obsolescence for an information publication that is too long in preparation and delivery, should we not be rethinking the method of delivering *Provenance*? Would the archives professional and others who need to know about archives be better served if *Provenance* were delivered as an electronic journal?

Just as technology has changed our daily working lives, so technology is changing the delivery of information sources in our field as in all others. While electronic books (e-books) have not caught on with the reading public or academic users, demand for electronic journals (e-journals) by scholars is increasing dramatically. E-journals give quick and easy access from remote locations to the latest journal articles. Students, faculty, and professionals receive more timely reading by this method than through the lengthy process of print publication. Many new journals are issued solely in electronic form, distributed by commercial vendors and organizations for a subscription fee or no fee, and cataloged and made available through library online catalogs.

Those archivists who work in libraries, either public or academic, are certainly aware of the trend toward e-journals. A recent study of academics in the sciences indicated that the popularity of e-journals for their professional literature, both for research and for keeping up with trends in the field, is growing steadily. While scientists may be at the head of the disciplines in adopting the new technology of electronic journals, the humanities and social sciences and the public at large are following along. A large study of "information-gathering habits of students and professors" conducted for the Digital Library Federation by Outsell, a research firm that analyzes trends in the information industry, reported that 75 percent of the respondents use e-journals. While most continued to have greater trust in print sources or go to print sources to confirm their findings, the majority of respondents went first to online sources in their studies and research.<sup>1</sup> Those who use the Internet know that online sources

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Carlson, "Students and Faculty Members Turn First to Online Materials, Study Finds," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 49, no. 8 (October 18, 2002): A37.

from reliable organizations, such as professional associations, libraries, and archives, are generally accepted as the most current and best available information. The Society of Georgia Archivists should examine these trends in thinking about the future of *Provenance* and whether the mission of the society and the journal could be well served through electronic publication.

I propose that the society consider making *Provenance* an electronic journal, issued only in electronic form. The journal could then publish case studies, reports on research in progress, and thought-provoking essays in a timely fashion to a much wider audience. Libraries are increasingly reluctant to subscribe to additional paper journals that take up valuable space on shelves and may have a limited audience. Individuals are equally loathe to house long journal runs, and quick access is more and more the major issue with researchers.

Obviously there are issues to be addressed in changing from print to electronic format. As with a print journal, there must be an editor and the production must have a base of operations, usually an institution. An editorial board would still need to establish policy, receive submissions, and make judgments on publication. The board and membership would need to decide how to distribute the journal—by subscription, available to members, or simply free from the SGA website? Who would set up the initial site for the journal? Programming, design, and setup would entail time and money. The journal would need to be housed on an institution's server. Ongoing maintenance, systems support, indexing, updating, and preservation of the electronic files would need to be addressed. Clearly these issues are not new. There are thousands of e-journals, some large and well known, others small association publications, that are being cataloged by libraries. The Research Libraries Group's electronic publication *DigiNews*, available through the group's website, gives current insights concerning preservation and other issues related to electronic publications.

The Society might wish to consider joining a consortial collection of e-journals, such as *Project Muse*. Begun at Johns Hopkins University as an electronic collection of publications from the Hopkins University Press and still based at Johns Hopkins, *Project Muse* now includes publications from more than sixty university presses and associations, most in the arts and sciences. The benefit of joining with *Project Muse* would be

that the time and cost of digitizing, indexing, developing a search engine, and maintenance are handled by that project. While one must subscribe to *Project Muse* for a fee to gain access to the journals in its collections, the society could still maintain the journal through its website and provide access to its own journal free of charge, if negotiated with *Project Muse*. The society would need to submit *Provenance* to the Johns Hopkins project for review and acceptance, but similar association journals are already included.

How would the electronic publication of *Provenance* benefit the society and the profession at large? There are the obvious benefits to the readers and those involved in the production of the journal:

- Electronic publication should be more timely. Although there is still a time requirement for soliciting, reading, accepting, and editing manuscripts, the time for mounting the journal electronically would be minimal, once the site is established, compared to the work of preparation and mailing of the print journal.
- Electronic publishing would enhance the recognition and readership of *Provenance* by making it more visible and useful to readers throughout the world, likely increasing the number of submissions for publication.
- The full text of the journal from its first to current issues could be made fully searchable online.
- The journal could be created online just as it would look in print (not merely typed text), making it easily recognizable and easier to read.
- Users would be able to print those articles of immediate use without having to give shelf space to the whole issue or many issues.
- The production costs should be lower once the design and initial programming are completed.
- The Society of Georgia Archivists could be in the forefront of the archives world in making its journal accessible to a worldwide audience and searchable through the Web.

This proposal makes an assumption that the mission of the society and its journal is to promote the understanding, preservation, and professional management of archives to as

broad an audience as possible. There may be other elements in the mission, such as providing a venue for publications by beginning professionals, which need to be considered. In examining the future of the journal on its thirtieth anniversary, a remarkable achievement and contribution to the profession, the society's executive board and the editorial board of *Provenance* should review and state a clear mission that is far-reaching. Does the current *Provenance* fit into that mission? Could *Provenance* as an electronic journal fulfill the society's mission for the future? Understanding our audience for the journal and the ways in which that audience will be accessing information is critical in planning the future of *Provenance*.

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