

January 2002

Satisfaction and Skills We Gain as Archivists are Not Ours to Keep

Susan G. Broome
Mercer University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance>



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Broome, Susan G., "Satisfaction and Skills We Gain as Archivists are Not Ours to Keep," *Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 20 no. 1 (2002) .

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol20/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Provenance, Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

Satisfaction and Skills We Gain as Archivists Are Not Ours to Keep

Susan G. Broome

A year ago *Provenance* was in triage, and the executive board of the Society of Georgia Archivists (SGA) had health care power of attorney. A robust journal, fed by the careful attention of outgoing editor Sheryl Vogt, her staff, and the editorial board, was floundering. Transfusions from other leaders were in order, but an extended search for a new attending physician had not been successful. A sense of despair and resignation was felt by many who had invested their lifeblood in the publication. There was talk of letting it die with dignity, but there was a critical need to evaluate its viability before making such a final decision. The absence of an attending physician hardly seemed reason enough to come to a hasty conclusion that might later seem ill-advised. A frank discussion among the family members was called for, something no one relished.

The current *Provenance* was birthed as *Georgia Archive* in 1972, destined to serve as a regional publication where no others existed at the time. Early leaders had a vision that looked beyond state borders. The Society of Georgia Archivists was committed to providing professional literature to students and archivists, as well as publishing opportunities to first-time and

seasoned authors. It also developed archival education programs and concerned itself with mentoring archivists. The cost of providing these resources was seen as reasonable, and there was a strong commitment to the underlying ideals.

Over the years, the journal evolved into quite a professional enterprise, but it also hit some rough spots. Publication was dropped from twice yearly to once, and even that was difficult to maintain on a regular basis. SGA considered linking the journal with those in other archival organizations, but concluded that there were adequate resources to maintain it in its present form. The organization excelled in offering training opportunities to archivists with varying levels of experience, and it received grants to work on collaborative projects that would benefit archives statewide.

Still, mentoring writers and editorial board staff and members declined under the heavy load of production. Institutional support for professional activities did not always match the needs for leadership. Demands on archivists' time increased, making major commitments to offices in SGA (and the work of the nominating committee) more difficult. The need for competent professional literature never faltered, but a difference of opinion grew between those who valued the printed word and those who valued workshops and annual meetings.

The family meeting was sobering. The conversation allowed open debate over several issues and recognized the consensus that the earlier ideals of SGA had not been forgotten or turned aside. The family members came to the discussion from a position of strength. Membership, basic leadership, and funding were stable. It was agreed that the cost of producing the journal was a minor issue. The journal's purpose was service, not making a profit.

Though the first priority of SGA is to work for the benefit of its dues-paying members, there was agreement that contributing to the larger archival community was a noble and worthwhile goal. Meeting more than the immediate needs of its membership was viewed as important.

There was also agreement that support of the publishing commitments and training opportunities of SGA should not be mutually exclusive. There is room for both to exist and to complement one another.

Although an attending physician was nowhere in sight, there was acknowledgment that interns and residents had much to contribute toward the health of the patient. Mentoring of writers had always been integral to the success of *Provenance*, yet there was also room for mentoring editorial board members, readers, and copy editors. Publication workshops could encourage a broader range of authors. Students in the fields of archives, history, and preservation could be accessed through the chairs of their degree programs. Board members with varying levels of expertise would teach one another about the process of producing professional literature. Not everyone in leadership needs to be an expert.

Make no mistake about this. The outcome of this family meeting was *not* determined before it began. Members did some genuine soul-searching. Communication was not always easy. Dying with dignity is still death, and in the final analysis the group was not willing to let the journal go that easily. Make no mistake about that either. Death would have been the easier choice.

An attending physician appeared down a very long hall. She had a quiet assurance that there was life left in *Provenance* and that there remained a purpose for its existence. She was equally certain that transfusions from a myriad of others would be necessary to ensure the successful recovery of the patient. A new editorial board is being formed from archivists old and new. They are being called on to monitor activities and research coming from surrounding states and archival education programs, searching for publishable materials. Efforts are being made to maintain close relationships with both inquirers and writers, as they wind their way through the maze of the publishing process. New readers are being invited to evaluate manuscripts. Editorial liaisons are being recruited from varying backgrounds. Publishing workshops will be offered.

In many ways, life is back to normal. And yet, there was that near-death experience. Life takes on new meaning in such circumstances. Those who aided in reviving the patient did not suffer from difficult conversations or hide from the commitments now required. We must look past the *process* of publishing and focus on the *people* involved. The satisfaction and skills we gain from our work as archivists are not ours to keep. They are for sharing and adding value to others' lives. *Provenance*

enance is not in triage anymore, nor in intensive care. You will find it on the blood donor list.

Susan G. Broome is head of special collections (Baptist and University archives) at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. She served as president of the Society of Georgia Archivists prior to becoming the editor of *Provenance*.