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Reviews, Critiques, and Annotations

Steven W. Engerrand

Georgia Department of Archives and History

Pat Brown

Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives

Michael E. Holland

Texas State Library

Julia Rather

Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives

Barbara Teague

Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives

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Reviews, Critiques, and Annotations

Information Resources for Archivists and Records Administrators: A Report and Recommendations. By Victoria Irons Walch. Albany, N.Y.: National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, 1987. Pp. v, 42. Bibliography.

Archivists have been seeking a means to encourage sharing of information about policies, methods, and publications in the fields of archives and records administration. When the National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators (NASARA) applied to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) for a grant to establish a clearinghouse for information about government records, the NHPRC suggested that instead of setting up another clearinghouse, NASARA should study the needs of archivists and records administrators in general. NASARA hired Victoria Irons Walch, an independent consulting archivist, to make recommendations and to produce a report. Shortly after the project began, NASARA became NAGARA (National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators). NAGARA sponsored two conferences in mid-1985 to determine the needs of those who would likely be the users of a clearinghouse. Conference participants did not precisely define the terms "clearinghouse" or "information resource center" (Walch uses the terms synonymously), but a consensus developed concerning the improvements which they

expected a clearinghouse to bring about. Walch evaluated other professions and information services, developed several options, and made recommendations. *Information Resources for Archivists and Records Administrators* is her final report on this project.

Walch begins with a profile of the user community, a survey of existing sources of information for archivists, and an analysis of information providers in allied fields. She notes that current resources were not meeting the needs of records professionals. The background section concludes with a "planning" chapter in which Walch deals with expected benefits, types of information to be documented, the target audience, and costs. In this section, she relies on the discussions which were held at the two preliminary conferences in 1985 and on her analysis of information centers in allied fields to shape her choices of options for the records community. Walch offers three "structural and service options" which range from enhancing existing resources to establishing a "full-service information collection and delivery operation." Based on the criteria which she develops in the background section, Walch chose the middle ground (her option B): setting up a new centralized, self-supporting information center. She modeled this option on the System and Procedures Exchange Center (SPEC) program of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL).

From several possible locations for this proposed information center, Walch determined that basing the center in the National Archives would be the most efficient use of resources, but also suggests investigating the possibility of allowing a private contractor to operate the center. In addition, she recommends that the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) library become the official depository library for material concerning archives and records. The NARA library includes a large collection of materials on archives and records administration, and NARA had expressed interest in acting as a clearinghouse. Of course, insufficient funding, limited space, and a shortage of staff presented major obstacles to NARA's adopting the clearinghouse.

Information Resources for Archivists and Records Administrators is thorough and sensibly organized. Walch has placed reasonable limits on her report. She defines the "records community" broadly

to include allied professionals and local government officials as well as archivists, manuscript curators, and records managers. The types of information products and services which she evaluates were suggested in the early planning meetings for this project. Her evaluation of clearinghouses which serve allied professions shows both strengths and shortcomings. In addition, Walch avoids extravagant claims for resource centers or clearinghouses. She explains that resource centers are not panaceas; availability of information does not guarantee use of that information.

Walch's report has been quite successful. It identifies the major issues for discussion, it has mobilized leaders in the archives and records profession, and it provides a basis for establishing an information center. NAGARA and NARA have already carried out several of Walch's recommendations concerning the establishment of a center. The NHPRC gave NAGARA a grant to hold an implementation conference in mid-1987. In response to the conference's recommendations, NARA agreed to have its library provide several clearinghouse services and develop a database of archival literature. The NARA library already had begun a broader acquisition policy. In addition, the implementation conference agreed to recommend to the major archives and records organizations that a coordinating body, the Archives and Records Information Coalition (ARIC), be created.

Steven W. Engerrand

Georgia Department of Archives and History

Directory of Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the United States. Second edition. National Historical Publications and Records Commission. Phoenix, Arizona: Oryx Press, 1988. Pp. xv, 853. Index. \$55.

For the past ten years archivists and reference librarians have consulted the *Directory of Archives and Manuscripts Repositories in the United States* in search of needed information about archival

institutions. In many cases the information listed was outdated or inadequate. The long awaited second edition of the directory is now available.

Because of some of the deficiencies in the 1978 edition of the directory, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) staff, in 1980, initiated plans to prepare a second edition. These plans were slowed by federal budget cuts which decimated the staff of the commission. The staff reduction compounded problems inherent in the SPINDEX computer program used for data processing, such as problems in correcting and updating files. Priorities were reordered and the ambitious plans for a new edition were simplified. The NHPRC staff recanvassed all responding institutions in 1983. The responses received before 1 September 1983 were incorporated into the second edition. In early 1986 telephone numbers were updated again.

The 1978 edition included approximately 3,250 entries, with about fifteen percent of those providing only minimum information. The second edition includes 4,760 listings with only 335 abbreviated entries. About 1,400 repositories are listed that were not included in the earlier edition.

The format for the entries is identical to the previous edition. The directory is arranged alphabetically by state and thereafter by city and institutional name within the city. For each institution information in the following categories may be included: name of institution; address and telephone number; hours of operation; user fees; general restrictions on access; availability of copying facilities for users; acquisition policy; volume of total holdings of historical materials; a brief description of holdings; and bibliographic references to selected guides and printed finding aids published since 1958 that cite the repository.

A repository index and subject index are included in this edition of the directory. A listing of repositories by type, which appeared in the first edition, was omitted in the second edition.

One of the problems that plagued the 1978 volume was inadequate or inaccurate information. After checking the listing for my institution, I was not greatly encouraged that significant

improvement in the 1988 directory was made. The telephone number of the archives which has not changed in almost four years was incorrect. The description of the holdings was confused with a sister institution. The address was the old address used four years ago. These problems are inherent in developing a directory of this magnitude with such a long lag time from compilation to publication. It is hoped this directory will have a longer, useful life span than the earlier edition.

The directory will be useful to archivists and reference librarians as they seek to provide information to researchers on archival repositories. It will be a pleasure to retire the old 1978 directory.

Pat Brown

Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives

Our Memory at Risk: Preserving New York's Unique Research Resources. By the New York Document Conservation Advisory Council. Albany, NY: New York State Education Department, 1988. Pp. vii, 56. Illustrations, appendices. Paper.

New York State consistently has been in the forefront of efforts to study, evaluate, and report on the accessibility and preservation needs of state and local government records. *Toward a Usable Past*, published in 1984 by the New York State Historical Records Advisory Board, identifies obstacles standing in the way of archivists and records custodians in providing access to historical documentation. The report identifies the physical preservation of historical materials as the single most important archival management issue in the state. This problem was estimated to be so severe and complex that if not addressed in an effective, systematic, and timely manner it might well strip the citizens of New York of large portions of their documentary heritage.

The identification of this single most critical issue prompted the New York State Library and the State Archives to initiate a detailed assessment of the preservation needs of historical records

in the Empire State and develop a systematic action plan for preserving the state's unique historical resources. The results of this study, partially funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), was published as *Our Memory at Risk: Preserving New York's Unique Research Resources*.

Our Memory at Risk is a strong and well-written report that offers to the general public compelling examples of the contributions made by historical records to the quality of life. Further, the report provides an intelligent and understandable explanation of the forces at work in removing these unique resources from our lives. This document is aimed at attracting the attention and support of private citizens, resource allocators, and elected officials. It emphasizes that enlisting the public and elected officials in the cause of historical resources preservation is necessary if unique historical records are to be identified and saved from the loss caused by neglect, internal degradation, and environmental factors.

The far more original and, from the perspective of the archivist, more useful contribution of this report lies in its thoughtful analysis and action plan for preserving the state's imperiled historical records. *Our Memory at Risk* identifies nine issues or strategic considerations which must be addressed in a comprehensive and coordinated statewide records preservation plan. These issues include identifying and selecting historical resources, training archival and preservation administrators, developing preservation standards and guidelines, coordinating disaster planning, and establishing mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and assessment. Among the most interesting and extensively treated issues are those related to creating public awareness of archival needs and, as a direct result, commanding adequate public funding; the failure to acquire public support has resulted in the perpetuation of the cycle of poverty in the archival enterprise. Each issue discussed in the report is accompanied by one or several recommendations for addressing the problem; each recommendation consists of a suggested action, an identification of the most likely initiator or coordinator of the action, and an evaluation of the resources that would be needed to accomplish the recommended action realistically.

Our Memory at Risk will serve as a useful model for preservation needs assessment and planning in other states facing the same problems. This report is a thoughtful and important contribution to archives and records literature that ranks in importance with *Documenting America* and Howard Lowell's *Preservation Needs in State Archives*.

Michael E. Holland
Texas State Library

Archival Informatics Technical Report: Archives and Authority Control. Edited by Avra Michelson. Pt. 2, no. 2 (Summer 1988). Pp. 62. \$45.

This *Archival Informatics Technical Report*, "Archives and Authority Control," is part two of the quarterly publication series, *Archival Informatics Newsletter and Technical Reports*. It is the proceedings of a seminar on authority control sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution held on 27 October 1987. The volume is comprised of six papers presented to the seminar, along with a discussion section after each paper and a general discussion at the end. The information offered here is a welcome addition to the all too sparse literature on authority control in the archival world.

The first of the six articles serves as an introduction to the reasons behind the seminar and to the thinking about authority control in general. In this article, "Descriptive Standards and the Archival Profession," Avra Michelson emphasizes that "although the primary reason to adopt authority control and descriptive standards is to maximize the ability of researchers to retrieve primary source materials . . . , the adoption of standards promises to benefit archivists" also. She discusses the progression of archival descriptive standards and outlines questions that archivists will have to face in using online catalog descriptions.

The next article, "An Introduction to Authority Control for Archivists" by Jackie M. Dooley, is a very useful piece for novices

and offers a refresher course for those who are familiar with the concepts and implementation of authority control. She provides a clear explanation of the types of authority records, as well as delineating how the archival community can build on standards already established by library professionals.

Lisa B. Weber's "Development of Authority Control Systems within the Archival Profession" discusses the short history of authority control in archives. She believes that a "purposeful statement of cataloging requirements and authority control relationships does not exist in the archival community" but that archivists are thinking more about this because of the requirements of standard cataloging encouraged by the MARC (Machine Readable Cataloging) AMC (Archives and Manuscript Control) format. Weber points out that bibliographic description in library catalogs is often limiting to archivists who want to provide the context and the content to the researcher. She discusses several ways in which to approach these problems, such as the provenance approach and access points for form of material and function. Echoing many of the other papers, she believes that more research on users is needed in the archival profession, so that archivists will know what kinds of authority files to construct and maintain.

Three other articles, two specific to the Smithsonian Institution and one to the Minnesota Historical Society, offer useful comments and perspectives. The general discussion that took place after the papers were presented provides broad commentary as well as answers to specific questions on authority control.

This report is a good beginning and can be thought of, almost as a call for action. Avra Michelson summed it up well by stating "that the development and use of descriptive standards, which include authority control, presents some of the most important work facing archivists as it directly challenges our professional commitment to provide access to materials and the extent to which we are willing to make primary source materials housed in our repositories available to a larger audience."

Julia Rather and Barbara Teague
Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives

The Man Behind the Quill. By Arthur Plotnik. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1987. Pp. xv, 110. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$14.50.

This small volume contains a biography of Jacob Shallus, calligrapher of the United States Constitution. It also traces the development of the Constitution itself and Shallus's role in its making. The author includes a history of the constitutional parchments. This odyssey eventually led to their placement in the National Archives in 1952. Photographs of the original Constitution and a brief sketch of the life of Francis Shallus, the son of the engrosser of the Constitution, add to this readable and attractive book about an individual who touched "greatness" but never achieved it himself.

A Guide to Cherokee Documents in the Northeastern United States. By Paul Kutsche. Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1986. Pp. vii, 531. Index. \$75.

This massive guide is similar to an earlier publication in this series, *A Guide to Cherokee Documents in Foreign Archives* by William Anderson and James A. Lewis. Kutsche essentially has created a calendar of manuscript collections pertaining to the Cherokee Indians in twenty public and private libraries in the northeast portion of the United States, plus one small collection in Colorado Springs. Most of these collections are already well known. The compiler has gathered these collections in one volume and provided valuable annotations and an index. The materials annotated are primarily documents related to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The majority of the material listed in the guide is located at the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

The index lists all of the personal names mentioned in each entry. Included in the index are names of places, tribes, and

institutions. A topical listing rather than a subject index is used for the guide.

This is a monumental project that will be a valuable reference tool for research on the Cherokees. The magnitude of the project limited the inclusion of additional collections in repositories in California and Oklahoma. This omission, though significant, does not diminish the value of this detailed guide.

Keeping the Past: A Basic Guide to the Care and Preservation of Personal Papers. By the Kansas City Area Archivists. Kansas City, Missouri: KCAA Publications Committee, 1987. Pp. 25. \$5.

This small volume adds to the growing archival literature aimed at the general public and the nonprofessional. The manual furnishes individuals and families with the basic "dos and don'ts" of archival preservation. The purpose of the publication is to provide basic preservation information, including advice to seek professional assistance whenever appropriate. This is a handy volume for archivists to recommend because of its readability and its coverage of the most common preservation issues and problems. It will save repeated explanations to answer the most frequently asked questions. Appendixes provide a brief bibliography and addresses of professional organizations and archival product supplies. The publication is available from KCAA, Western Historical Manuscripts Collections, University of Missouri, Newcomb Hall, Room 302, 5100 Rockhill Road, Kansas City, MO 64110-2499.