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ARCHIVES IN THE SERVICE OF SCHOLARSHIP
RECENT PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES
OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Frank B. Evans*

Like other public service institutions, the National Archives and Records Service of the General Services Administration, "NARS," has necessarily modified, expanded, and redefined its mission over the years to implement the will of Congress. The National Archives was created by Congress in 1934 as an independent agency. Viewed in retrospect, the agency is today in the midst of a transition in its history as an institution. Its original mission, its original staff, and even its original building, have, in a very real sense, served their initial purposes. The centralization and preservation of the archives of the federal government has been assured, and the generation of men and women who devoted their professional careers to the accomplishment of these objectives have almost all passed from the active scene. Their achievements are truly remarkable. In less than four decades they created what has become, by general admission, the preeminent national archival institution in the world, in terms of the volume and variety of its holdings, the technology and professionalism involved in their preservation and administration, and the variety of programs intended to facilitate their use.

This central achievement is all the more remarkable since it was accompanied by the successful initiation of a range of related new programs as Congress expanded the basic mission of the National Archives. For example, the Office of the Federal Register, which Congress first

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authorized in 1935 to publish the laws, executive orders, and agency rules and regulations affecting business and individuals, today compiles, indexes, and publishes a wide variety of basic administrative and legal publications that range from the official Organization Manual to the daily Federal Register, the Code of Federal Regulations, the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, the Public Papers of the Presidents, and the U.S. Statutes at Large. The Office of Records Management, which formally dates from 1950 when the National Archives was terminated as an independent agency and a reconstituted National Archives and Records Service became one of the constituent services of the General Services Administration, provides a variety of program services to all federal agencies relating to the creation, maintenance and use, and disposition of their records. The closely related Office of Federal Records Centers, an outgrowth of World War II experience, today administers a nationwide network of 15 strategically located records centers that provide low cost storage and necessary services on more than 15 million cubic feet of semicurrent federal records, those no longer needed in offices for the conduct of current business, but that still possess administrative, legal, fiscal or other values for operational purposes.

Beginning with a unique institution, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library which was accepted by Congress in 1939 to be administered by the National Archives, a Presidential Library system has been developed under Congressional guidelines to preserve and make available to scholars the papers of every president since President Hoover; and in recent years, the National Historical Publications Commission, which is administered by NARS and of which the Archivist of the United States serves as chairman has developed a national program for the publication, through letterpress or on microfilm, of public and private records and personal papers basic to the study, teaching, and understanding of our national experience.

This, in very brief compass, is the heritage of NARS as an institution. It is one of which it can justly be proud. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the nature and extent of the research resources in the custody of NARS are still relatively little known to the great majority of scholars and other researchers.

These resources may be regarded as falling into five broad categories, each presenting its own particular problems of access and use, and each constituting its own challenge to the imaginative researcher. The least utilized, in terms of the traditional interests of most American historians, are the nondocumentary resources, the many thousands of museum objects in the presidential libraries as well as the artifacts, including court exhibits, that are part of the official records of the government. They range from the stamp collections of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, through the many valuable gifts given by foreign heads of state to recent presidents, to the weapons and other physical evidence involved in presidential assassinations. To date virtually all of this material has been used, if at all, almost exclusively for exhibit purposes. These nondocumentary resources deserve to be known more widely and to be used more extensively.

A second category of research resources consists of published material. Included are the specialized libraries in each of the presidential libraries; the extensive holdings on archives administration, past and present, of the National Archives Library; and a relatively recent and important addition to the printed documents collection of NARS. This acquisition constitutes the more than 2 million items published since 1861 by the Government Printing Office that comprised the former library of the Superintendent of Documents. These "printed archives" of the federal government now in the custody of NARS fill a major gap in its archival resources and finally place it in the same class as leading European national archival agencies.

In addition to nondocumentary and published resources, NARS has in its custody, as previously indicated, more than 15 million cubic feet of "federal record center records," to use their legal designation, including those located in the Washington National Records Center and the St. Louis National Personnel Records Center. While NARS has physical custody of this material, the transferring federal agencies retain legal title and thus control all access to and use of the records, most of which are ultimately intended for disposal. A fourth category of material consists of the personal papers of the various presidents, their associates in office, and their contemporaries, research resources which the law

designates as "donated historical materials." Access to and use of these papers and other gifts is controlled by their donors.

The final category, which actually constitutes the core of the research resources of NARS, comprises the 1.1 million cubic feet of generally unpublished textual and nontextual documentary material, almost all noncurrent government records, that has been accessioned and that comprises "The National Archives of the United States," as this body of material has been designed by law. A relatively small percentage of this material, very closely related to the White House years of the various presidents, is located in the presidential libraries. Included, for example, are the records of certain accessioned presidential boards, committees, and commissions, certain Secret Service protection files, and condolence letters and messages. The constantly increasing accessioned holdings of the regional Archives Branches also constitute part of the National Archives of the United States, but the great majority of this category of material is located in the National Archives Building in Washington and in the General Archives Division of the Washington National Records Center in Suitland, Maryland. The General Archives Division at Suitland is essentially an annex to the National Archives Building, administering archival holdings that had to be relocated because of lack of space in the original building.

Such, in summary fashion, is the nature and volume of the resources available to researchers in the nationwide network of NARS depositories. In this age, however, it is essential that we not only preserve what is of value and relevant from our inheritance, but that we attempt to make public programs and activities as responsive as possible to changing needs and aspirations. As a new generation of archivists takes up this challenge, and as NARS enters into a new period in its institutional history, it has already taken a series of initiatives to expand the variety and to improve the quality and the usefulness of its services, particularly to scholarly users.

To strengthen bonds with the professional and scholarly community, senior staff members have been assigned continuing responsibility for professional and

academic liaison. Through personal and continuing contacts with professional organizations, faculty, and graduate students, and particularly through professional meetings, they keep the archivists directly informed of interests, needs, and problems. They study special problems relating to NARS programs and services, such as those involved in training and professional development, and they recommend new arrangements to strengthen relations with the academic community. With the full support of its national advisory council, NARS has been studying the creation of fellowships for scholars and graduate students, who would join its staff for a predetermined period to do research in its records, prepare specialized finding aids, teach a seminar or two, plan and conduct a major conference, or otherwise to promote the more effective utilization of its research resources. One such position has already been created and Professor David Pletcher of Indiana University during the 1972 academic year served as the first NARS senior fellow. Professor Pletcher, a recipient of the American Historical Association's Albert J. Beveridge Award and a McKnight Foundation Award, surveyed NARS holdings dealing with economic relations between the United States and Latin America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

To add to the competence and improve the effectiveness of its own staff, NARS successfully applied to the Council on Library Resources for three fellowships for staff members. Under these fellowships Dr. Harold T. Pinkett, Chief of the Natural Resources Branch in the Civil Archives Division, studied appraisal, disposition, and accessioning activities in representative public archival agencies in the United States and abroad; Mr. Ralph E. Ehrenberg, Director of the Cartographic Archives Division, surveyed and analyzed archival cartographic depositories in the United States, Canada, and England; and Miss Patricia Andrews, the NARS Librarian, studied the control of U. S. Government publications by depository libraries. NARS plans to continue this incoming and outgoing flow of academic scholars and its own staff specialists.

Also, to maintain and improve the quality of its direct services to scholarly researchers, NARS for a number of years has recruited annually a select group of graduate history students, generally at the Master's level or beyond, as archivist trainees. These trainees

are required to undergo a comprehensive and intensive two-year training program, consisting of classroom instruction, rotational assignments, and on-the-job training, that is intended to enable them to perform as fully-trained professional archivists. Having been oriented to and experienced in original research before joining the federal service, trainees who have not done so are encouraged to complete their graduate studies, and, to the extent that workload permits, to devote a percentage of their official work time in independent study, research, and writing, along with the rest of the professional staff. This training program proved so successful that it was extended to the Office of Presidential Libraries. Basic to this program is the conviction that scholarly-oriented as well as thoroughly-trained archivists are necessary to meet scholarly needs.

To help bridge the geographical gap between its staff and the scholarly community, NARS initiated a series of conferences which have brought together in Washington noted scholars, scientists, graduate students, administrators, and other persons with a significant interest in or connection with a particular conference theme. Planned and directed by NARS specialists, these two-day conferences held semiannually, have featured scholarly papers and panel and floor discussions. They have provided for NARS a unique opportunity to gauge research interests, trends, and needs, and have enabled it, in turn, to directly inform scholars of the variety and richness of the research resources in its custody. All of the presentations and discussions have been recorded, and an edited version of the proceedings will be published.

To date, highly successful conferences have been held on polar exploration, in conjunction with the creation of our Center for Polar Archives; on Statistical Data in the records in NARS custody; on its Captured German and Related Records; on Foreign Relations Research; Territorial History; Urban Research; Research in the Administration of Public Policy; Research in World War II Records; Research in Historical Geography; and on Research in Federal Records Relating to American Indians. In November 1972, a conference on the use of Audiovisual Archives as Original Source Material was the first one to be held outside of Washington; it made use of the excellent audiovisual facilities provided by the new Conference Center at the University of Delaware in Newark, Delaware. The Archives Advisory Council has urged that NARS explore ways and means to

repeat this conference in various parts of the country. This past spring a conference was held on Federal Archives as Sources for Research in Black Studies, and in November was held the first of several conferences relating to the American Revolution and the period of the formation of the Union, this one on the Meaning of the American Revolution. Scheduled for this spring is a conference on research on naval history. The response by the scholarly community to the conference series has been most gratifying, and NARS intends to continue and to expand this program. The first three volumes of conference papers have been published, and the papers from the next six conferences are at various stages of the editorial and publication process.

In the spring of 1969 NARS published the first issue of Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives. An expanded and more scholarly successor to the earlier and irregularly published National Archives Accessions, this journal now has some 5,000 paid subscribers and is sent to more than 40 countries. Initially issued three times a year--it is now a full-fledged quarterly--Prologue carries to scholars and to the general public articles based wholly or in part on the research resources of NARS, descriptions of its more significant accessions, and information about its programs and activities. The journal has won awards for its design and content, and has been acclaimed as readable as well as scholarly.

Another new departure, this one directly related to the planning of the nation's bicentennial anniversary, was the establishment within the Office of the National Archives of a Center for the Documentary Study of the American Revolution. Building upon the original papers of the Continental Congresses, the records of the government under the Articles of Confederation, and the records of the Constitutional Convention, NARS brought together in the Center a number of specialists on its own staff. As resources permit it plans to seek qualified and interested scholars to serve as successive directors, probably on an advanced fellowship basis. The Center staff has begun the preparation of a guide to pre-Federal records in NARS custody, and has received a grant from the Ford Foundation to help support a project for computer-assisted in-depth indexing of the voluminous and very difficult to use records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses.

Like other institutions NARS has learned that the fruits of automation are, at the outset, relatively expensive and frequently slow to materialize. Several years ago it undertook a series of preliminary surveys and has now reached the stage of detailed feasibility and cost studies of several major projects, particularly one intended to achieve better administrative control of its holdings. At the same time it developed a program for the use of automated techniques in indexing both original records and published finding aids. This program has been used, in modified fashion, to help prepare the index to the Guide to Cartographic Records in the National Archives, and for the forthcoming catalog of microfilm publications. NARS intends to utilize the storage, update, and selective printing capabilities of the computer and other automated equipment in the publication of its revised general guide to the holdings that constitute the National Archives of the United States, as well as in the publication and updating of other finding aids, including subject guides, inventories, and special lists.

This summary of new programs and activities to improve services to scholarship also requires mention of establishment of the position of Black History Specialist. NARS recruited a qualified scholar in this area who is now compiling for publication a guide to records in the National Archives relating to Black History. Complimenting this project is one for compiling and publishing a guide to records in NARS custody relating to Africa, a project undertaken in cooperation with the International Council on Archives. NARS has added to its staff other specialists, in areas such as the history of science and technology, and is planning subject guides to records relating to a number of such specialized areas. A recently begun project involves compilation of a guide to holdings relating to Indians, while at the indexing stage is an expanded and revised guide to holdings relating to Latin America.

Some three years ago--and several months before the public controversy over disclosure of the Pentagon Papers--NARS undertook studies of the problems and costs involved in an extensive program of declassifying security-classified records dated through 1945. These studies provided part of the background for a request to Congress for a special appropriation to begin this important work. The appropriation was made, and NARS has been recruiting and training personnel for its newly-organized Records De-

classification Division. The immediate beneficiaries of this accelerated declassification program, which will systematically review all national-security classified records over thirty years old, will be research scholars, but the ultimate benefit will be to the American people in general.

This listing of new initiatives, programs, and activities could readily be extended. NARS inaugurated what has proved to be a highly popular series of film festivals to acquaint both scholars and the general public with its tremendous audiovisual resources. It created a National Audiovisual Center that will not only assist it in promoting more effective use of archival holdings, but that will provide service to civilian agencies and to the general public regarding storage, information, sales, and loan of current agency film productions. Despite budgetary restrictions, it was able to secure a special appropriation to undertake long deferred and increasingly critical measures for the restoration and preservation of many of its nontextual records--maps and charts, still and motion pictures, and sound recordings. Following a study of computer-produced and related records in federal agencies, it established a Machine-Readable Records Branch, assembled a staff of archivists trained in the new technology and computer specialists trained in archival principles and techniques, and began the difficult task of appraising, accessioning, preserving, arranging, describing, and providing reference service on machine-readable records and related software documentation that has archival value. Scholars and other researchers understandably do not see many of these activities, but they are essential to the basic mission of acquiring and preserving materials so that scholars may use them.

More recently, through the National Archives Trust Fund, NARS launched two new programs designed to extend services and gain additional support from the many publics it serves. The first one, the American Project, is aimed at attracting gifts of fine examples of furniture and the decorative arts from America's past, chiefly from the Federal period, for display in several public areas in the National Archives Building. Included in the displays are items on loan that are available for purchase and donation. This program to enhance the appearance of the National Archives Building as the repository of our national documentary treasures has been accompanied by a

general rehabilitation of both the exterior and the interior of the building, an extensive reconditioning and updating of its climate control systems, and, of particular importance, the installation of new security and fire prevention systems.

The second program is specifically intended to attract gifts and to gain the financial resources necessary to support special projects to improve services to scholarship, education, and the community at large. Called Associates of the National Archives, this program makes available annual memberships in a variety of categories, from students to founding members. Associates are entitled to guided special tours, invitations to exhibit openings and certain receptions, a limited participation in other invitational affairs including the conference series and special lectures, group instruction, copies of specified publications, and discounts on other publications. The former Educational Program Staff has also been reorganized, given responsibility for previously scattered editorial and publications activities, and redesignated as the Office of Educational Programs.

All of the recent programs and activities have not been essentially Washington-based, however, or even limited to the United States. In 1948 the then Archivist of the United States, Solon J. Buck, launched the movement that led to the creation two years later of the International Council on Archives (ICA), an affiliate of the UNESCO Department of Documentation, Libraries, and Archives. Buck's successors, Wayne C. Grover and Robert H. Bahmer, gave support to the ICA, and played important roles in its quadrennial congresses. In 1966 they organized in Washington a special, or Extraordinary Congress, as it was called, which had as its theme "Archives for Scholarship." The purpose of the Congress was to promote liberalization of access to and use of archives in all countries, and the so-called "Thirty-Year Rule" for access, and the rapid growth abroad in the use of microfilm as a publication medium for archives were a direct outgrowth of that Congress.

After becoming Archivist in 1968, Dr. James B. Rhoads both accelerated and expanded the international activities of NARS. To provide additional support in this area he appointed a senior staff member as his assistant for international affairs. As Vice President of ICA and a member of its governing body, Dr. Rhoads has participated personally in virtually all of its meetings and programs.

With his support members of the NARS staff serve as chairmen of such important international committees as those on microfilm and machine-readable records, and as consultants to several foreign governments in developing countries on archival and records management problems and programs.

In 1976 NARS will host the next quadrennial Congress of the ICA, and for more than a year now various committees appointed by the Archivist have been busy planning and preparing for this important event. This past summer UNESCO approved the Archivist's proposal for an International Seminar on Public Records Administration. A grant from UNESCO will help provide the necessary funds to enable some 20 English-speaking archivists and other officials from developing countries to attend a two-week seminar in Washington in March 1974, where they will be introduced to modern records management principles and techniques. The pay-off to scholarship of such a seminar is not immediate, but it is the same eventual pay-off of all effective records management programs--fewer records and better records at less cost, and more adequate documentation that is more readily accessible.

Underlying all of NARS activities in the international area is the Archivist's strong commitment to the concept of Archives for Scholarship. The NARS staff is expected to do everything possible to facilitate the use of archival holdings by foreign scholars, and to assist such scholars in locating and gaining access to relevant sources in other depositories. The Archivist has been especially active in assisting American scholars in gaining access to archives abroad, on an individual and personal basis; in pressing for further liberalization of restrictions on access, use, and photocopying in particular countries; and in supporting projects for the compilation and publication of international and regional guides to foreign archival and manuscript resources.

Reserved for the conclusion of this summary has been the program that perhaps provides the most visible evidence of what NARS conceives as the major thrust of the next chapter in its history. In its efforts to achieve expanded and improved services to all of its publics, particularly the scholarly community, the Regional Archives program occupies a unique position. In a sense, the first step toward literally making the research resources of NARS more readily accessible was taken more than two decades ago, when, breaking with traditional European proprietary attitudes toward archives, the National Archives

launched a microfilm publication program. Under this program it has made available, at reasonable cost to institutions and scholars in their own libraries and studies, the film equivalent of more than 150,000,000 pages of unpublished documentary material. This total, however, represents only about 6 or 7 percent of its total documentary holdings, and includes primarily material of the most widespread national interest, such as that relating to the Revolutionary War and the formation of the Union, the Civil War, foreign affairs, and the decennial census. Its holdings also include many records that are primarily of regional and local importance and interest. In 1968, therefore, NARS established in each of 11 regional Federal Records Centers a Regional Archives Branch.

To these branches were transferred from Washington already accessioned records, or were accessioned directly from federal field offices such records as those of the United States district and circuit courts, and field records of the Bureau of Customs, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Corps of Engineers. The holdings of these regional branches currently exceed 160,000 cubic feet. This is more than 10 percent of the entire archival holdings of the National Archives and Records Service, and the holdings of each regional branch exceed those of the great majority of state archives in the United States. NARS intends to augment these holdings through careful review and study of its remaining holdings in Washington, as well as from current and future record accumulations by the agencies involved.

To further enhance the research potential, and thus the value to the scholar, of the Regional Archives Branches, it was decided to deposit copies of NARS microfilm publications in each regional branch, and to make these copies available on interinstitutional loan, chiefly within the region. To date some 7,000 rolls of microfilm have been deposited, and current planning, based upon available resources, calls for depositing some 4,000 rolls each fiscal year. The loan policy is a new and experimental one, and NARS hopes it will be able to continue this expanded service. Each issue of Prologue carries a summary description of the original records accessioned during the previous quarter by the Regional Archival Branches, as well as announcements of newly-available microfilm publications.

For each of the regions an Archives Advisory

Council has been appointed by the Administrator of General Services to advise him, the Archivist of the United States, and the regional administrators and commissioners on ways and means to expand the regional archives program; on research interests, needs, and trends in regional, state and local history; on methods of coping with increasingly specialized and technical archival resources that assume a variety of physical forms and types; all in all, on how to plan and develop the best possible archival program for that region on necessarily limited financial resources.

Each of the Regional Archives Branches is headed by a trained and experienced archivist. These branches, like their counterparts in the National Archives Building, perform a variety of archival functions. They accession, arrange, and describe records in a variety of finding aids. They perform reference service in regional research rooms and in response to telephone and written requests. They provide photocopies and prepare records for microfilm publication. They plan, prepare, and install exhibits based upon their record holdings. And, going beyond what can be done systematically and effectively in Washington, they work directly with colleges and universities in developing programs whereby faculty and students can make more effective use of archival resources in research projects. NARS is particularly concerned that students be provided with opportunities to learn firsthand about primary sources and to develop skills in their use. These are some of the programs and activities in which NARS is currently engaged in its efforts to expand and improve its services. It welcomes your suggestions and comments on all of them; it solicits your support for all of them, and particularly for the regional archives program.