

## *E Pluribus Unum?* SAA and the Regionals

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### **Abstract**

Panelists explore the past, present, and future relationships between the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the regional archival organizations in the United States, including the vision for cooperation held out in Peter Gottlieb's 2010 SAA Presidential Address. Is a proliferation of archival organizations a sign of health or is it problematic? How has technology affected our organizations and their ability to meet archivists' needs?

### **Introduction**

*Dennis E. Meissner*

It was just a year ago that Peter Gottlieb dropped something of a bombshell on all of us in his SAA Presidential Address.<sup>1</sup> I expected something thoughtful and reasonable and practicable from Peter, but had no idea what direction he would take with his remarks. I was surprised that his vision resolved on the panoply of U.S. archival associations and that he would make a serious call to unify their efforts. His address hectored us to move our thinking beyond simple cooperation on a project level and rudimentary coordination of some of our programs. Instead, he made an out-and-out pitch for federating our autonomous

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Gottlieb, "Unifying the Archival Profession: A Proposal," *American Archivist* 74 (Spring/Summer 2011): 23–37.

efforts into something that unifies our efforts aimed at public advocacy, solidifies our professional strength, and enlarges professional resources like continuing education. Peter urged us to imagine and to get comfortable with the notion of a new super-association that would realign existing archival associations—their programs, their resources, their agendas—into an entity with a tiered governance structure that would reinforce common goals and objectives.

I have to say that I was intrigued by the possibilities of such a realignment and the opportunities it might afford to enhance our collective professional power and leverage our resources to do important work that we are all generally agreed upon. On the other hand, I cut my professional teeth in the Midwest Archives Conference (MAC),<sup>2</sup> and would no doubt have made a very different, and poorer, professional journey if I had to take it without the important mentors and service opportunities that it afforded me. What is it that we value so much about our regional associations, all founded almost simultaneously? Is it their autonomy, their affordability, their locality, their informality? Is it their very idiosyncrasies? Would some of that perhaps be lost in federation, even though Peter does argue pointedly for their long-term value as distinct entities? Do we love them out of loyalty, or because we really need them? Why do we need them? Does SAA need them?

Our commentators consider the *value proposition* that regional archival associations<sup>3</sup> can make for today and the future. Four of our panelists have been and remain active leaders in regional associations, as well as active leaders within SAA, while the fifth provides a perspective on the issues from within SAA. The remarks by each speaker are divided into two portions: first providing an overview of the regional association that the speaker represents, and second presenting the speaker's reflections on a particular question posed by the session moderator. A summary of the significant elements of the audience discussion that came on the heels of the prepared remarks follows at the end of the article.

<sup>2</sup> Midwest Archives Conference, "Welcome to the Midwest Archives Conference," <http://www.midwestarchives.org/>, accessed 3 December 2011.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to highlight that the SAA session captured here was clearly and intentionally focused on *regional* associations, rather than on associations at any other level. While many significant membership organizations exist at national, state, metropolitan, and other geographical levels, their perspectives were not addressed in the session, although they did enter prominently into the subsequent discussion.

## A MARAC<sup>4</sup> Leader's Perspective

*Danna C. Bell-Russel*

On 23 June 1972, Mary Boccaccio, Frank Evans, and Elsie Freivogel hosted a meeting of thirty-three archivists at the University of Maryland campus in College Park. The primary agenda was to discuss the formation of a group to support archivists in the Mid-Atlantic region, comprising New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. The resulting organization focused on less experienced professionals, the staff members of small repositories, and archival issues at the regional, state and local levels. Coincidentally, the New England Archivists (NEA), Midwest Archives Conference (MAC), Northwest Archivists (NWA), and the Society of Southwest Archivists (SSA) were also formed that year.<sup>5</sup> That fall, this organization that is now known as the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC) held its first semi-annual meeting in Wilmington, Delaware, which drew 150 archivists and manuscript curators.

Why was MARAC created? Many original members were motivated by the perception that the Society of American Archivists was not adequately addressing the needs of less experienced professionals, staff from small repositories, and archival issues below the national level. In addition, members wanted the opportunity to discuss regional archival developments and to network with local colleagues who could share information and collaborate on projects. MARAC demonstrated its desire to develop programs and services on its own, rejecting any official affiliation with SAA and returning a \$100 "seed money" stipend that had been contributed by SAA to MARAC.

The initial purposes of the group were to plan practical, action-oriented conferences and workshops; seek additional means to help increase professional competence; preserve local historical resources; and promote cooperation with colleagues in related fields. Semi-annual meetings with programming that appealed to beginning archivists and seasoned professionals from either small or large repositories continues to be a major focus of MARAC's activities. In addition, MARAC recently began to offer professional development workshops within the region to meet the needs of those who are unable to attend the bi-annual meetings. For those who think that MARAC is full of stuffy archivists who spend their lives waxing philosophical about archival theory, the organization

<sup>4</sup> Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, "Welcome to Marac," <http://www.marac.info/>. Information in this historical overview of the development of MARAC is drawn in part from the history section of the organization's website at <http://www.marac.info/mc/page.do?sitePageId=92114&orgId=marac#history>, both accessed 3 December 2011.

<sup>5</sup> New England Archivists, "Home," <http://www.newenglandarchivists.org/>; Northwest Archivists, "Welcome to the Northwest Archivists Website," <http://northwestarchivistsinc.wildapricot.org/>; and Society of Southwest Archivists, "Welcome to the SSA's Home on the Web," <http://southwestarchivists.org/>; all accessed 3 December 2011.

hosts a hospitality suite at SAA where networking, adult beverages, conversation, and M&Ms reign supreme.

MARAC also developed an active publications program to complement the organization's programming. The *Mid-Atlantic Archivist*, MARAC's newsletter, is published quarterly, and a collection of technical leaflets provides archivists with information on subjects from processing congressional collections to working with architectural collections. In addition, MARAC has published several occasional papers such as "Guidelines for Archives and Manuscript Repositories," "Constitutional Issues and Archives," and "Paper and Leather Conservation" by Paul Mucci.<sup>6</sup>

To encourage additional scholarship and to honor outstanding publications and service, MARAC offers several awards including the Arline Custer Memorial Award to honor publishing achievements by individuals and organizations within the region; the C. Herbert Finch Award for outstanding online publications devoted to the promotion and use of archival materials within the MARAC region; and the Finding Aid Award, which recognizes outstanding achievement in the preparation of finding aids by institutions within the MARAC region, with the top award designated as the Fredric M. Miller Finding Aid Award. Most recently, MARAC created the Distinguished Service Award to recognize members who have made significant contributions to the organization as well as to the greater archival profession.

MARAC offers scholarships to support the needs of new professionals. The Marsha Trimble Scholarship and other non-named travel awards provide funds to help new professionals attend conferences. We also provide smaller grants to allow interested professionals to attend workshops offered during the conference. The Leonard Rapport Scholarship provides funds to support attendance at the Modern Archives Institute and pays the tuition for the institute.

To supplement its activities on the regional level, each state and the District of Columbia have a "state" caucus to provide additional opportunities to discuss archival issues that relate to that particular area, promote the exchange of information, and socialize with others from the profession.

***"Is Peter Gottlieb's notion of one integrated U.S. professional association useful or possible?"***

The way the question is asked, my answer is no. I think the various archival associations—be they local, state, or regional—would be unwilling and unable to band as one group. We may all work with collections that contain primary sources, but I think that one integrated archival professional association couldn't

<sup>6</sup> See MARAC, "MARAC Publications," <http://www.marac.info/mc/page.do?sitePageId=92117&orgId=marac>, accessed 3 December 2011.

or wouldn't support the needs of local historical society curators, city records clerks, and archivists from one-person repositories who lack professional credentials. In addition, most of our colleagues would find it difficult if not impossible to pay for professional development programming offered by this organization and to pay to attend the annual conferences. Plus, if competing conferences were held at the same time each year, those who have the same schedules or conflicts would be unable to attend. That means that a large number of the professionals within our organizations would miss out on training, networking, and other support opportunities, and the profession would miss out on the experiences of these people. Most likely this integrated association would need members in the individual states and regions to provide support and training locally. Then we're back where we are currently, with archival regional associations providing programming and support for those unable to attend conferences.

Gottlieb notes, "Since the 1960s, no national archival association has been capable of encompassing all the various interests and needs of an increasingly differentiated and numerous profession." He also observes,

The fragmented character of organized archival professionals became noticeable in the 1970s, when the government archivists created their own national organization and the earliest regional associations emerged. The trend began at the state level even earlier, when first archivists in Michigan organized their own association in 1958, followed in the next decade by their counterparts in Georgia and then Ohio. . . . Seeking fellowship and professional services closer to home, some of the geographical groups consciously opposed what they felt was the formality and remoteness of the Society of American Archivists.<sup>7</sup>

Gottlieb also argues,

The challenge we face today is not that we have many organizations, it's that we have little or no connections among them and no framework to bring them together and to focus our resources and our efforts on our highest priorities. We might imagine several ways to respond to this challenge. One conceivable approach that I do not advocate would be a grand merger of our associations into a single larger organization with a consolidated membership. Dissolving our associations and trying to regroup on a new basis would be a complete non-starter. In fact, it would uproot deep organizational loyalties that long-term members have formed over decades and that sustain a great deal of productive work for archivists and for our profession. It would fully merit the ridicule and resistance it would receive from all of us who value the organizations where we have our primary connections.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Gottlieb, "Unifying the Archival Profession," 28–29.

<sup>8</sup> Gottlieb, "Unifying the Archival Profession," 31.

Dr. Gottlieb and I totally agree that we should consider creating a federation of archival associations within which the organizations could work together. He states that a federated structure, similar to what ALA does, provides a way to unify the archives profession in pursuit of widely shared and long-held goals. He also notes that a federation's success depends on our current associations continuing their roles and services in the archives field. A federation could be a natural way to build on the growth of our associations and to gain strength for our profession from the last forty years of organization building. We have organizational blueprints in allied professions that suggest what our associations could try through federation. To quote from an editorial I wrote in the *Mid-Atlantic Archivist*:

A federation of archivists could band together to coordinate educational programming and ensure that training is provided for all archivists at fair price. A federation could collaborate on sharing administrative functions or band together to work with hotels and other vendors to arrange for lower rates for members. A federation of archivists could band together to hire a lobbyist to ensure that archival issues are heard by our policy makers and can also make sure that our political leaders know that there is a large and forceful group looking to ensure that the preservation of our historic record is of importance to lawmakers at all levels of government.<sup>9</sup>

This is not to say that creating a federation of archivists would be easy or quick, or that all local, state, or regional organizations would go for it. It would, however, provide a single entity that speaks with one voice for the needs of archivists. This organization could share some resources and perhaps seek other resources specifically to support the federation. It could create power: power for archivists individually, for our organizations, and for the profession as a whole.

### **An SSA Leader's Perspective: Firepower for a Common Agenda**

*Brenda S. Gunn*

On 5 May 1972, thirty-three archivists, librarians, and historians met at the University of Texas at Arlington to form the Society of Southwest Archivists (SSA). The states represented at that organizational meeting included Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Arizona joined a few years later, bringing the roster of states to six, which is where it remains today.

The board minutes from that founding meeting describe how a consensus of the attendees felt "for various reasons it is almost impossible for those engaged

<sup>9</sup> Danna Bell-Russel, "From the Chair: A Confederacy of Archivists," *Mid-Atlantic Archivist* 40 (Winter 2011): 1.

in archival work below supervisory levels to attend a meeting of the Society of American Archivists.” Consequently, these founders felt that the major role of SSA was to provide programs that would help improve the skills of people working in nonsupervisory roles. The group committed itself to one workshop per year, at least. The board minutes indicate, in addition, an intention to offer education opportunities to users of archives and a dedication to sound principles and standards of practice. The final stated object was to foster and promote cooperation within the archival profession as well as among allied professions. That object certainly bears relevance to our discussions today.<sup>10</sup>

SSA organizes an annual meeting, and, from its early days, the Society of American Archivists has had an occasional presence at those meetings. A history of SSA’s first two decades notes that the SAA executive director, Ann Morgan Campbell, wowed the SSA membership at the 1976 meeting. Other presentations by SAA representatives during that well-attended meeting provided status reports on the new code of ethics under development at that time and on the development of certification for the profession.<sup>11</sup>

SSA, from its earliest years, worked closely with SAA. In 1974, SSA established the Sister M. Claude Lane Award for outstanding religious archivists, to be presented by SAA at its award ceremony during the annual meeting.<sup>12</sup> SSA was the first regional to fund a national award with SAA.<sup>13</sup> In 2005, the SSA/SAA Emergency Disaster Assistance Grant Fund was established in response to the devastation along the Gulf Coast during hurricanes Katrina and Rita. That award is now a national disaster recovery fund fully managed by the SAA Foundation.<sup>14</sup>

Today, SSA’s membership is just under five hundred. SSA holds an annual meeting and occasionally shares this event with other regionals, such as the upcoming 2012 meeting with the Council of Intermountain Archivists in Phoenix, Arizona, where SSA will celebrate its fortieth anniversary.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes from the Society of Southwest Archivists organizational meeting, 5 May 1972, Society of Southwest Archivists Records, Baylor University Library.

<sup>11</sup> Charles R. Schultz, *Society of Southwest Archivists: The First Two Decades* (Lubbock, Tex.: Society of Southwest Archivists, 1992), 6.

<sup>12</sup> For more information about this award, see Society of American Archivists, “Sister M. Claude Lane, O.P., Memorial Award,” <http://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section12-lane>, accessed 3 December 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Patrick M. Quinn, “Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists,” *American Archivist* 46 (Fall 1983): 435, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015072452975>, accessed 3 December 2011.

<sup>14</sup> For more information on the foundation and the National Disaster Recovery Fund for Archives, see Society of American Archivists, “Foundation,” <http://www2.archivists.org/foundation>, accessed 3 December 2011.

**“How can regionals and SAA combine their efforts to serve a common professional agenda?”**

In his article on the historical context of the regional archival associations published in 1983, Patrick Quinn observes that the regionals are perhaps more adept than SAA at addressing “common problems in concert” due to their smaller sizes.<sup>15</sup> At the time of the article’s appearance in *American Archivist*—it was a decade after that fertile year, 1972, when six new regional organizations joined the five already in existence—Quinn recognized the importance of the regionals’ independence and stopped short of recommending a more formal arrangement between them and SAA.

Yet Quinn’s comment about common issues addressed in tandem begs two important questions. First, do members of the profession have a common agenda? I believe that we do. In 2005, SAA Council adopted three strategic priorities: technology, diversity, and advocacy/public awareness. In 2010, Council adopted a revised strategic planning document with the same priorities, but with additional goals and actions.<sup>16</sup> These three issues, which span all organizational, repository, and associational boundaries, represent our profession’s common agenda. Second, how can SAA and the regionals work together to serve this larger professional agenda? The following is an attempt to explore this question and suggest some potential answers. We all can work together to engage, encourage, exchange, energize, examine, and establish.

Since SAA is our national professional organization, it bears the greater responsibility for initiating change to the existing status quo. To begin, SAA can *engage* the regionals in conversations and discussions with regard to the common agenda. SAA can *encourage* the regionals to adopt technology, diversity, and advocacy as part of their own strategic priorities so that nationally, as a group of likeminded associations, the profession can promote and work on the same issues. It is important to realize and accept that adoption of this common agenda would not require any regional to abandon important regional or local priorities. Through communication outlets like annual meetings, newsletters, or websites, our common agenda should be a pervasive and persistent presence and a reminder of what is needed to improve the archival profession for all.

Though not regional associations, and with a relatively small number of members compared to the membership of regionals, the SAA Student Chapters can also contribute to the common agenda and can become outreach partners for SAA or the regional where each program exists. Students need to be aware of and conversant in the issues of technology, diversity, and advocacy, and these issues are undoubtedly part of each program’s curriculum. Exporting these

<sup>15</sup> Quinn, “Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists,” 437.

<sup>16</sup> Society of American Archivists, “Strategic Priority Outcomes and Activities, FY2010–FY2014,” <http://www2.archivists.org/governance/strategic-priorities>, accessed 3 December 2011.



issues from the classroom to the campus is a worthy goal and, by doing so, students raise awareness of archives. Planning events during Archives Month that focus on the common agenda is just one example of how this might play out on the campuses (physical and virtual).

Part of this engagement would be to *ensure* that opportunities for *exchange* exist between SAA and the regionals. To highlight work that explores any aspect of the common agenda, SAA can develop an annual meeting track featuring sessions proposed by a regional, or first presented at a regional meeting. In this way, SAA integrates the regionals more closely into the national meeting and provides opportunities to extend important discussions on these pressing topics across regional boundaries. Conversely, the regionals can bring SAA educational opportunities to their members, particularly offerings related to technology, diversity, and advocacy/public awareness.

SAA can utilize its popular Student Poster Session at the annual meeting to encourage individual students and student chapters to submit proposals that address aspects of the profession's common agenda. Students are already presenting posters that feature these topics, especially technology. Here are a few of the poster subjects by common agenda item presented at the most recent meeting: technology—born-digital collections, digital preservation planning, metadata, digital forensics, and Web archiving; diversity—under-documented populations; advocacy/public awareness—student chapter activities. By requiring an element of the common agenda to be included in all posters, SAA can encourage students to think more critically about where their activities and research fit more broadly into the profession.

The archival community needs to be *energized* and ready to take action on and for the common agenda. All archival organizations, nationally and at the regional level, have great energy and ideas concerning our areas of common interest. We risk less productive, duplicative work when our efforts remain focused solely on association-based islands. If the archival profession remains segregated in this regard, we are less powerful than we could be. If we fail to harness some of the existing and potential energy out there in the profession to create real firepower around a common agenda, we have missed an important opportunity.

SAA can take the lead in *examining* relationships between it and the regionals. We are not currently collaborating in substantive and significant ways to move the common agenda forward efficiently and effectively. An examination of SAA's Strategic Priority Outcomes and Activities document can illustrate why this may be so. If the language in the document is any indication, then SAA's organizational vision does not consider the regionals as partners in achieving the outcomes, even though the activities defined in the document are undertaken on behalf of the profession as well as SAA's own members. Specific mention of

the regionals is absent in all sections of the document. This says to me that SAA as an organization is overlooking how the regionals may help SAA in efforts to carry out this common agenda.

For example, under Strategic Priority #2, diversity, SAA establishes its plan for the Mosaic Scholarship. The measurable activities call for consulting with allied organizations for program models, identifying target audiences and expanding publicity to stimulate applications, establishing networking and internship opportunities, and establishing a mentoring program, among others. This wonderful SAA initiative in particular presents an ideal opportunity for SAA and the regionals to work together to increase diversity within the profession and to make a significant difference in the lives of archival students. Yet, nowhere in this section are the regionals listed as potential sources to which SAA can go for information or through which SAA can disseminate information about the scholarship. The oversight continues throughout all components of the document.

Of course, we expect to have multiple parties in any relationship and, in this regard, the regionals bear some responsibility for speaking up for what they see as an issue or agenda item. Each regional can take a broader view in regard to a common agenda and accept that it is appropriate for SAA to prescribe what a national common agenda might be.

How do we create a situation that perpetuates and supports ongoing fire-power where a common agenda is concerned? What could the profession establish that would be sustainable over the long term and would last through yearly leadership changes? Perhaps SAA can *establish* a new model. It is clear that better communication and cooperation are needed to bring the entire archival community together on issues of importance to everyone. SAA can work directly with regional, state, and local organizations to help implement the common agenda in those areas. I suspect, though, that SAA's current infrastructure cannot absorb that influx of work. Moreover, by forcing this particular change, any potential progress on the common agenda would be modest, if it could be made at all. Perhaps the current representative governance of SAA could be altered to include representative members elected from districts comprised of regional and state associations. The nine existing Council members would continue to serve as the elected governing body and as liaisons for SAA units and entities, while the new representatives would work with Council and their own districts' officers and boards (leaders of regional and local organizations) to implement a common professional agenda throughout their representative districts. These district representatives would in turn bring back to the national level any local or regional issues of concern, as well as the results of concerted efforts in that area.

Of course, a change of this size would require additional funding and other considerable adjustments. It would ensure, nonetheless, that communication

would flow up and down within the profession. In the spirit of poetry that infused the seventy-fifth anniversary meeting in Chicago, I offer a haiku in closing:

*For the common good  
Archival community  
Bring it together*

## **An NWA Leader's Perspective**

*Michael J. Paulus, Jr.*

The organization that I represent is in the *new* Northwest, in the Far West, which many think of as a wild frontier. This perception might be reinforced by the notice about the organization of our regional archival association that appeared in the *American Archivist* in 1974:

Northwest Archivists Group (Washington, British Columbia, Oregon, Montana, Idaho). Founded March 15, 1972; no constitution; no dues; meets twice yearly in conjunction with the annual Pacific Northwest History Conference (spring) and the regional SAA-NARS symposium (fall); occasional newsletter; governed by three-person steering committee, elected annually at the spring meeting . . .<sup>17</sup>

Somewhat belying that image of the unruly western frontier is the historical reality of patterns in the East being replicated in the West. Thus this statement, from the first issue of the *regular* newsletter of Northwest Archivists (NWA), which also appeared in 1974:

The change of name from Northwest Archivists Group (NWAG) to Northwest Archivists (NA) is but one of the many changes proposed at the NA meeting . . . Steering Committee member Terry Abraham introduced a proposed plan of organization, whose general purpose is to formalize the group into a regional body which can offer its members much more than an occasional program and meal. Northwest Archivists can provide, through cooperative efforts, a means of continued education, training, mutual assistance and idea-sharing among archivists, curators, librarians, and historians in the Northwest.<sup>18</sup>

NWA was part of the “founding wave” of regional archival organizations in 1972, as were MAC, MARAC, and SSA. Before that year, there were five regional

<sup>17</sup> “Archival Organizations,” *American Archivist* 37, no. 3 (1974): 508.

<sup>18</sup> “Northwest Archivists Meeting in Pullman, April 25, 1974,” *Northwest Archivists Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1974): 1.

organizations; by 1974 there were twelve.<sup>19</sup> Throughout its history, NWA has had a small but stable group of members committed to its founding ideals: regional collaboration around professional development, support, and advancement of archivists and archives. Today, NWA has a membership of about 200, representing Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. It holds an annual conference, often in conjunction with other archival or allied associations (last year we met with the Society of California Archivists, the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists, and the Conference of Inter-Mountain Archivists; and next year we will meet with the Oregon Heritage Commission). NWA funds scholarships and outreach programs; publishes a newsletter and helps subsidize the *Journal of Western Archives*; has an active mentorship program; and offers occasional professional development activities outside of annual meetings. About two-thirds of NWA's members are also members of SAA.<sup>20</sup>

As with other regional archival organizations, one can identify four major themes associated with NWA's continuing vitality and value:

1. Attention to *local* needs and issues.
2. Financial, geographic, and interpersonal accessibility.
3. The inaccessibility of SAA. While more than half of those who belong to SAA also belong to another archival association, a significant number of those who belong to a regional association such as NWA do not belong to SAA because its dues, meetings, and offerings are prohibitively—and increasingly—expensive.<sup>21</sup>
4. Organizational adaptability, which allows for flexibility, responsiveness, and innovation.

In addition, there are some regional characteristics, some remnants of our frontier history, that arguably give NWA a unique identity. I would describe this identity as independent, entrepreneurial, and progressive.<sup>22</sup>

***“What substantive good can be served by regionals in the future? Do these autonomous programs harm either SAA or the U.S. archival community?”<sup>23</sup>***

The question about how the regionals should be related to SAA has remained

<sup>19</sup> Quinn, “Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists,” 433–40.

<sup>20</sup> “A\*CENSUS,” *American Archivist* 69, no. 2 (2006): 509.

<sup>21</sup> “A\*CENSUS,” 343.

<sup>22</sup> This spirit, in the context of religion, is explored in James K. Wellman, Jr., *Evangelical vs. Liberal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), see especially 39–43.

<sup>23</sup> Please note that due to a midsession departure from the panel organizers' prepared plan, the following comments were not presented during the annual meeting session.

open since the regionals were established.<sup>24</sup> During the first generation of this relationship, the answer seems to have emphasized the complementary over the competitive nature of the regionals and SAA. And this seems to have promoted, for the most part, a spirit of cooperation. But Gottlieb is right that there is now some duplication of effort and perhaps even fragmentation of energy.<sup>25</sup>

A few months ago, at the last NWA conference, we discussed Gottlieb's proposal to unify the archives profession through a federation. When I organized the session, I framed the discussion in terms of the sustainability of NWA, but by the end of the discussion, which focused on the four themes I mentioned earlier, I began to wonder more about issues related to the long-term sustainability of SAA.

There is among our membership a desire for collaboration on bigger and broader issues, and we have a record of successful collaborations at the regional level (for example, with joint conferences and establishing the *Journal of Western Archives*). Gottlieb mentions collaboration as an option in his address, but he quickly dismisses it: "To unify our profession through repeated collaboration," he says, "seems cumbersome, time-consuming, and costly."<sup>26</sup>

There is another way of looking at collaboration, though, that I would like to highlight. The 2008 OCLC report *Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration among Libraries, Archives, and Museums* uses a collaboration continuum, which represents a range of collaborative possibilities from contact through convergence. The continuum begins with *contact*, basic discussions. This is followed by *cooperation*, perhaps on some small project. *Coordination* occurs when cooperation becomes something less ad hoc and more formal and organized. *Collaboration*, in the strong sense of the word, happens when something new, collectively created, emerges. At that point, institutions are transformed. Finally, when collaborative activities become infrastructural—part of an organization's infrastructure—there is *convergence*.<sup>27</sup>

What Gottlieb proposes approaches convergence. Most of us though, with respect to our regional professional activities, are at the other end of the spectrum, somewhere between cooperation and collaboration in the strong sense of the word. Perhaps the challenge for the next generation of relationships between the regionals and SAA will be for us to move further along the continuum toward deeper and more persistent forms of collaboration. Whether or not convergence is possible, or even desirable, remains the next open question.

<sup>24</sup> Quinn, "Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists," 436.

<sup>25</sup> Gottlieb, "Unifying the Archival Profession," 30.

<sup>26</sup> Gottlieb, "Unifying the Archival Profession," 31.

<sup>27</sup> Diane Zorich et al., *Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration among Libraries, Archives and Museums* (Dublin, Ohio: OCLC, 2008), 11–12, <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2008/2008-05.pdf>, accessed 3 December 2011.

## A MAC Leader's Perspective

Tanya Zanish-Belcher

A group of twelve archivists met in Chicago on 7 January 1972 to discuss forming a regional association of archivists and manuscript curators from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The original steering committee consisted of a number of familiar names, including Frank Cook, Gerry Ham, Mary Ann Bamberger, Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, and of course, Archie Motley, who also served as MAC's first president.<sup>28</sup> In their first call for organizing, the group stated, "The primary aim of the regional organization is to attract those people now working in various facets of archival activity who have found it difficult, if not impossible, to become actively engaged in the work of the national organization." So, from its very beginning, MAC was conceived in some way as the antithesis of SAA. The impetus for its founding, however, was not "negative," but rather a desire to fully participate in a professional organization and to network throughout the Midwest region. As first MAC president Archie Motley stated in one of MAC's early newsletters, "The increased friendships and associations made through MAC will enable all of us to bring more to the national organization as individuals." MAC was seen, in many cases, as complementary to the work of SAA, and, as Archie finally notes at the end of his column, "the benefits of mutual respect and cooperation will eventually prevail."<sup>29</sup>

Many of the differences that Archie notes are certainly true today: that MAC offers professional opportunities for many archivists who will never join SAA, and that it serves as a training ground for many who have maintained an SAA membership as well. The very first professional paper I gave at a MAC meeting (Topeka, 1996) was on the topic of purchasing supplies, and through the years I have gained additional experience by presenting on a variety of topics, serving on committees, and being elected to MAC office. Certainly, Peter Gottlieb, Frank Boles, Mark Greene, Dennis Meissner, and Elizabeth Adkins, who have all held leadership positions in MAC, were better prepared for their roles in SAA. MAC has provided an important training ground to develop skills for national leadership.

In a 1972 session on relationships between the regionals and SAA, the early leaders of MAC articulated some of their goals:

<sup>28</sup> For a fuller description of MAC's first two decades, see Patrick Quinn, "The Midwest Archives Conference: A Rich History Revisited," *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference* 18, no. 5 (1993): 5–13, Minds at UW, <http://digital.library.wisc.edu/1793/45655>; and Joel Wurl, "Archival Issues: Past, Present, and Future," *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 304–8, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015071393865>, accessed 3 December 2011.

<sup>29</sup> *Midwest Archives Conference Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (1973), Midwest Archives Conference Records (UWM Manuscript Collection 194), Box 98, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.

- To involve junior staff members, paraprofessionals, archivists from smaller institutions/lone arrangers;
- To promote the exchange of ideas and technical information;
- To facilitate personal contacts by meeting twice a year; and
- The importance of geographic closeness and connection

Although there were early discussions of affiliation with SAA, the founders also recognized that while the organizations shared goals, they were perhaps catering to different audiences. In those early days, the group set out the characteristics that still distinguish MAC today (a midwestern sensibility, if you will):

- Grassroots;
- Affordable (or cheap);
- Action oriented/Flexible;
- Participatory membership;
- A focus on the practical side of the profession; and
- A way to connect for those in the heartland and rural areas.

These characteristics have been numerous demonstrated through the years. One need only peruse the meeting programs and *Archival Issues: The Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference*,<sup>30</sup> examine the registration and workshop costs; see the large number of volunteers who basically run MAC; and of course, hear any stories about “Raiders of the Lost Archives” and the infamous MAC Mixers. MAC has a distinct character and personality, and our archives world would be a lesser place without it.

One of the primary differences between MAC and SAA regards their audiences and membership. No one reading the Archives and Archivists List<sup>31</sup> over the past few weeks could have missed the somewhat contentious discussion regarding the role of community archives. Increasingly, nonprofessionals care for many archival collections, and the regionals are the obvious candidates to provide the direct training and contact for educational opportunities so sorely needed in our communities. This does not in any way denigrate the important role that SAA plays for the archives profession and its continuing growth and success. The organizations do fulfill different roles, and the archivists who participate in both certainly recognize this. However, differences do not mean we

<sup>30</sup> *Archival Issues* is available online at Minds at UW, “Archival Issues,” <http://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/43546>, accessed 3 December 2011.

<sup>31</sup> For additional information on this and other listservs hosted by SAA, see Society of American Archivists, “SAA E-mail Discussion Lists,” <http://www2.archivists.org/listservs>, accessed 18 December 2011.

are disconnected. We must be prepared to work closely to be more effective protectors of our cultural, historical, and social heritage.

***“Are there specific partnering opportunities that exist between SAA and regionals?”***

Of course there are. Many partnering opportunities are possible, and some already exist. Regionals often host SAA workshops at their conferences, and those in leadership often come together on matters of national import for archives, such as the support of Preserving the American Historical Record (PAHR).<sup>32</sup> That being said, however, I would like to note several areas where I believe we could work together more closely.

The regional organizations are an additional resource for SAA to draw upon. Their collective memberships provide SAA with an opportunity to further examine major archival issues beyond SAA membership. Joint meetings and discussions should be held between the leadership of the regionals and SAA, so potential opportunities or solutions can be discussed and issues more easily communicated. One of the most important qualities of the archival profession, like no other, is its small size and the importance of networking and knowing each other.

Continuing education is another area where these professional organizations could collaborate. Certainly SAA should provide quality continuing education for archives professionals, but maybe it is time to explore the educational needs of those who simply cannot afford the workshops or who do not consider themselves archival professionals. The regionals provide a viable and affordable alternative, and there could certainly be discussion about better coordinating our efforts.

Finally, I would recommend that SAA and the regionals explore collaborative grant proposals. SAA could lend its national stature and structure to oversee a wide variety of projects for maximum impact throughout the United States. Projects such as the Archival Training Collaborative (ATC) funded by the IMLS for Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi, could certainly be replicated and provide much-needed education for those most in need.

Although resources are increasingly scarce, the regionals (such as MAC) and SAA still fulfill their missions for their core audiences. That being said, it would behoove all archival organizations to constantly communicate and to collaborate where we can.

<sup>32</sup> For more information, see Society of American Archivists, “PAHR,” <http://www2.archivists.org/initiatives/preserving-the-american-historical-record>, accessed 3 December 2011.



## **An SAA Perspective: Let's Get on the Bus—The Pluribus Unum!**

*Teresa M. Brinati*

Competition for time slots at the SAA annual conference is a monumental challenge. Workshops, sessions, plenaries, component group meetings, exhibits, tours, and receptions are carefully jig-sawed together in an action-packed week. So, last year in Washington, D.C., as an experiment, the Presidential Address and the Awards Ceremony were held back-to-back in the same space. The hope was to draw a capacity crowd for two important events that have often experienced “under-attendance.” All of this was to be accomplished within two-and-a-half hours so that attendees could go to a big reception afterward. Timing was everything. As the SAA staffer in charge of the Awards Ceremony, my logistical hope was that the Presidential Address, which preceded it, would not run over and thus create a domino effect. That evening in August of 2010 exceeded expectations on all fronts, but I should have anticipated as much. The date was Friday the thirteenth.

In the cavernous, dimly lit ballroom of the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, hundreds of conference attendees eagerly anticipated presidential words of wisdom. They would not be disappointed. Looking statesmanlike in an olive-colored suit and dark tie, the bespectacled and silver-haired SAA president Peter Gottlieb approached the podium to deliver his address, when he suddenly appeared in triplicate. Two JumboTrons were stationed on each side of him on the stage, and, as it turned out, neither the jumbo screens nor the vastness of the room could contain President Gottlieb’s *ginormously* provocative idea: a proposal to unify the archives profession.

The idea caused the crowd to murmur. Well, maybe not audibly, but certainly internally. In his address, President Gottlieb declared: “Our goal should be to build the right kinds of connections and relationships among our associations so that we gain a single national organization with the strength to pursue a national agenda that also allows its constituent groups to continue serving members in ways they are best equipped to do.”<sup>33</sup>

Gottlieb then planted seeds to achieve this audacious goal: “We need to make the effort, and we could start by forming a joint commission on federation to which our associations would send representatives to adopt organizational principles, governance structures, membership categories, and financial plans.”<sup>34</sup> Ever the pragmatist, President Gottlieb also recognized there would be risks: “A major challenge will be balancing the needs and interests of component groups with the imperative to strengthen the profession overall and to

<sup>33</sup> Gottlieb, “Unifying the Archival Profession,” 34.

<sup>34</sup> Gottlieb, “Unifying the Archival Profession,” 35.

achieve a level of national influence without which we cannot reach long-cherished goals.”<sup>35</sup> But great risk brings great reward, and President Gottlieb believed that the return on the investment would be substantial: “I think we stand to gain in at least three areas: advocating for archives; defending archives; and enhancing our members’ professional resources.”<sup>36</sup> Here is what President Gottlieb *emphatically* did *NOT* propose: “Dissolving our associations and trying to regroup on a new basis would be a complete nonstarter.”<sup>37</sup>

There was applause at the end of his presidential address, but it’s always hard to know at these types of functions if people are cheering because it’s over or if they really liked the idea shared by the speaker! Then, almost on cue, the lights came up in the ballroom and, metaphorically, it felt like the dawn of a new day. Of course I was grateful that the president finished his address in the allotted time so that the Awards Ceremony could go off as scheduled, but even more so, in my mind, there could be only one answer to President Gottlieb’s *ginormously* provocative proposal to unify the archives profession: YES! And SAA should spearhead the way given its leadership history, its sophisticated organizational structure, its geographic reach—SAA’s nearly six thousand members hail from every state and U.S. territory<sup>38</sup>—and the fact that SAA has a staff.

Later that evening after the all-attendee reception at the Museum of American History, I sat next to President Gottlieb on the bus ride back to the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. This was purely coincidental. Naturally I told him his presidential address gave us much to think about. What else could I say?! Then, I privately had this thought: “Son of a Buck.” Quite literally, too, as in Solon Justus Buck, SAA’s fifth president. I thought of Buck because at the time I had just finished working on a project with the *American Archivist* Editorial Board to digitize 242 back issues of the journal, and volumes from the 1930s and 1940s coincidentally were approved for uploading to our website earlier that month. Buck’s 1945 presidential address, “The Archivist’s ‘One World,’” was a memorable part of that content, with Buck enthusiastically laying out a plan for the establishment of an International Archives Council tied in with the then-developing United Nations. Buck’s opening line was pertinent to Gottlieb’s proposal: “Anyone who surveys the evolution of human relations from prehistoric times to the present must inevitably become aware of a general trend toward the formation of larger and larger units of organized social activities.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Gottlieb, “Unifying the Archival Profession,” 35.

<sup>36</sup> Gottlieb, “Unifying the Archival Profession,” 35.

<sup>37</sup> Gottlieb, “Unifying the Archival Profession,” 31.

<sup>38</sup> SAA Director of Member and Technical Services Brian Doyle, email to author, “SAA Members by State and Key Contact District,” 31 July 2011.

<sup>39</sup> Solon J. Buck, “The Archivist’s ‘One World,’” *American Archivist* 9 (January 1946): 9, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015014985538>, accessed 3 December 2011.

Ernst Posner's 1956 presidential address also came to mind: "What, Then, Is the American Archivist, This New Man?"<sup>40</sup> That evening the title could have been recast as "What, Then, Is the Archives Federation, This New Organization?" Gottlieb was definitely on to something and clearly had antecedents in SAA's presidential leadership, but what about farther afield—as in the regionals, which come in all shapes and sizes, and in the "broad sense refer to all non-national archival organizations, including multi-state, state, and local groups."<sup>41</sup> Plenty of ink has been spilled regarding what led to the rise of regionals, and there's been a dichotomous view within SAA about their impact on the association: "some viewed regional associations as increasing the grassroots support for the profession and, in the long run, for SAA; others saw in them a further fragmentation of the national organization."<sup>42</sup>

No matter the viewpoint, one thing is clear: 1972 was a pivotal year. It saw the birth of six regional archival organizations, four of which are represented here today: MAC, MARAC, NWA, and SSA. Before that there were five regional organizations. Over the years, they would reproduce like bunnies. By 1974, there were twelve.<sup>43</sup> By 1983, there were thirty.<sup>44</sup> Today, there are more than sixty listed in SAA's *Directory of Archival Organizations*.<sup>45</sup>

Ironically, 1972 was a significant year for SAA too. It was a time of "rebirth," and SAA's *rebirth certificate* was the "Report of the Committee of the 1970's," which was published in the April 1972 issue of the *American Archivist*.<sup>46</sup> The report was arguably *the* blueprint that transformed SAA into a vibrant association, one celebrating its seventy-fifth anniversary as we meet.

SAA's rebirth was an enormous undertaking that required sweeping recommendations to be acted on collectively by the Society. Its successful growth and development depended on it. The report addressed a multitude of association functions that bear repeating because several would have implications for a federation:

<sup>40</sup> Ernst Posner, "What, Then, Is the American Archivist, This New Man?," *American Archivist* 20 (January 1957): 3–11, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015072452900>, accessed 3 December 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Quinn, "Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists," 434.

<sup>42</sup> J. Frank Cook, "The Blessings of Providence on an Association of Archivists," *American Archivist* 46 (Fall 1983): 390, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015072452975>, accessed 3 December 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Quinn, "Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists," 436.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas C. Burckel, "The Society: From Birth to Maturity," *American Archivist* 61 (Spring 1988): 12–35, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015061939974>, accessed 3 December 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Society of American Archivists, "Directory of Archival Organizations in the United States and Canada," <http://www.archivists.org/assoc-orgs/directory/index.asp>, accessed 19 August 2011.

<sup>46</sup> Philip P. Mason, "The Society of American Archivists in the Seventies: Report of the Committee for the 1970s," *American Archivist* 35 (April 1972): 193–217, HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015072452793>, accessed 3 December 2011.

- office of the executive director
- officers and council
- nomination and election procedures
- regional affiliates and other professional groups
- the committee system
- membership relations and development
- education and training
- annual meetings
- finances
- research and publications

The committee was composed of nine SAA members and the results of their work single-handedly focused the attention of the organization *and* the profession on the direction it needed to take for the future—not just to survive, but to thrive. Their handiwork undoubtedly had a ripple effect on the organizational development and evolution of the regionals.

The archives profession is at a similar nexus today, only there is much more at stake than the vibrancy of a single professional association. It needs the same type of catapult provided by the Committee of the 1970's. *Gottlieb is spot on*. The time *is* ripe to muster the will and spirit to harness the collective energies and pool the resources of *dozens* of archives associations to achieve common and critical goals in the areas of advocacy, defending archives, and enhancing professional resources. Think about it: One of the profession's resource allocators is on the verge of being zeroed out, *again*, by its resource allocator.<sup>47</sup> The country is in a recession. Jobs are scarce. How much more writing needs to be put on the wall about the value a convergent voice would provide?

When these panelists were sharing their content with each other prior to this presentation, Michael Paulus discussed a “collaboration continuum” for organizations, which begins with

*contact*, basic discussions. This is followed by *cooperation*, perhaps on some small project. *Coordination* occurs when cooperation becomes something less ad hoc and more formal and organized. *Collaboration*, in the strong sense of the word, happens when something new, collectively created, emerges—institutions are

<sup>47</sup> As just one example among many of the perennial call to combat budget cuts for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), see Society of American Archivists, “Save NHPRC from Devastating Budget Cuts,” <http://www2.archivists.org/news/2011/save-nhprc-from-devastating-budget-cuts>, accessed 3 December 2011.

transformed. Finally, when collaborative activities become infrastructural—part of an organization’s infrastructure—then there is *convergence*.<sup>48</sup>

With respect to SAA’s regional professional activities, I believe it has achieved all of the *C*’s on some level. SAA’s attention to, support of, and influence by regionals has been constant across decades and provides a solid foundation from which to further develop Gottlieb’s proposal. Consider these fourteen early and ongoing activities by SAA and where they fall on the “collaboration continuum”:

1. The Committee on Regional Archival Activity established around 1978.
2. The *American Archivist* devoted a section under the News Notes department to news of state and regional archival associations beginning in 1979.
3. SAA first published *Directory of Regional Archival Organizations* in the 1980s as a supplement in the *SAA Newsletter*. It listed officers, annual dues, and total number of members of each association. The directory is migrated to SAA’s website in the mid-1990s. Today, the Issues and Advocacy Working Group is updating the resource.
4. Countless articles in the *American Archivist* are written by members of regional organizations and also address regional issues, including an article every panelist in this presentation consulted: “Regional Archival Associations and the Society of American Archivists” by Patrick M. Quinn, which was published in the fall 1983 issue.
5. The *SAA Newsletter/Archival Outlook* has featured dozens of articles about the regionals. Raising awareness about regional meetings, institutes, and workshops was a staple of the Calendar of Activities department.
6. SAA has engaged in sponsorships, provided materials for, or exhibited at regional annual meetings.
7. The Modern Archives Institute, the Georgia Archives Institute, and the Western Archives Institute use SAA publications.
8. Review copies of SAA books are distributed to regional publications, both newsletters and journals such as *Archival Issues* and *NEA Newsletter*, whose reviews sections are looked-to channels of communication about the professional literature.

<sup>48</sup> Michael J. Paulus, Jr., email to author, 8 August 2011. See footnote 28 in this article for a full citation to the source for this collaboration continuum construct.

9. Before the Academy of Certified Archivists (ACA) achieved its own organization, it developed within SAA, which maintained ACA's database and produced and distributed the *ACA Newsletter*.
10. The SAA Annual Meeting location changes yearly, which provides it with regular opportunities to interact regionally across the country. Over the years, meetings have been jointly held with regionals and other organizations, most recently in 2010, with CoSA and NAGARA. However, the *mother* of all joint meetings occurred in Montreal in September 1992: The International Council on Archives convened the week preceding SAA, which was held at the same time as the conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists and Association des Archivistes du Quebec. *Talk about convergence!*
11. Regarding educational programming, SAA established a practice early on to hold jointly sponsored workshops in conjunction with meetings of the regionals, and the list is long and winding. It includes the associations of my copanelists—SSA, MARAC, NWA, and MAC—as well as the Society of California Archivists, Northern California Archivists, Seattle Area Archivists, the Council of Inter-Mountain Archivists, the Society of Indiana Archivists, the New York Archivists Round Table, New England Archivists, Delaware Valley Archivists, the Society of North Carolina Archivists, the Society of Florida Archivists, the Society of Alabama Archivists, the Society of Georgia Archivists, the Louisiana Archives and Manuscripts Association, and the Society of Louisiana Archivists, to name a few.<sup>49</sup> SAA is launching the Digital Archives Specialist Certificate program and is coordinating with regional archival organizations to make it easy for archivists across the country to pursue the DAS certificate close to home. The DAS curriculum kicks off in fall 2011 in conjunction with the New England Archivists. *How do you spell collaboration?*
12. In the area of recognitions, the Society of Southwest Archivists and SAA annually cosponsor the Sister M. Claude Lane, OP, Memorial Award, created in 1974.
13. The SSA/SAA Emergency Disaster Assistance Grant Fund was established in 2005.
14. In its advocacy, "Typically SAA has marshaled support by contacting the regional leaders and asking them to spread the word to their members about the need to contact Congress with a particular message. When SAA has been able to target members of Congress on

<sup>49</sup> SAA Director of Education Solveig De Sutter, email to author, 18 August 2011.

a particular issue, we then contact the state or regional leader to really focus the effort on those members of Congress. We've asked them to encourage constituents to phone, fax, or email individual members of Congress to tell a compelling story that is relevant to that member's district. Although SAA benefits from having a national scope, the regionals and states are key partners in any advocacy effort because they can 'speak' to members of Congress 'where they live.'<sup>50</sup>

I think we're closer to "collaboration" and "convergence" than folks realize. By the way, I would add other *C*s to the continuum, such as "cross-pollination" and "commingling of assets." By my definition, these two *C*s transcend "collaboration" and are an informal version of "convergence." The commingling of leadership and intellectual assets across regionals and within SAA is staggering. As the A\*CENSUS data demonstrates, between three-fifths and two-thirds of many regional association members are also SAA members. Historically, there has been overlap between leadership in the regionals and leaders in SAA.<sup>51</sup> It goes in both directions and everybody—*everybody*—benefits.

The long history of working together is best illustrated by the very folks sitting at this table for this session—Dennis Meissner, Michael Paulus, Brenda Gunn, Danna Bell-Russel, and Tanya Zanish-Belcher. These five folks are the tip of the iceberg in a regional and national association culture that encourages and rewards cross-pollination and commingling, and every step in the "collaboration continuum." Collectively, my co-panelists are Fellows of SAA, authors of SAA books and seminal articles in our journal, an associate reviews editor of the *American Archivist*, workshop instructors, and, clearly, content contributors at the annual meeting. They have chaired or co-chaired important groups, such as the Publications Board, Program Committee, Committee on Education and Professional Development, Nominating Committee, and more. They have been elected to the governing Council. They are instrumental in fund-raising and have established an emergency disaster recovery grant. And they are past or current presidents of MARAC, MAC, SSA, and NWA, where they have also published and held myriad other leadership positions.

The regional archival organizations are strong and distinctive, and they are not going away. *Ever*. They make SAA stronger and the profession stronger. But there are things that we *cannot* do alone because we just don't have the political might or the financial resources, like saving NHPRC or getting PAHR enacted. Bigger and stronger is better in those instances, and we need to join forces so

<sup>50</sup> SAA executive director Nancy Beaumont, email to author, 17 August 2011.

<sup>51</sup> Society of American Archivists, "Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States," <http://www2.archivists.org/initiatives/acensus-archival-census-education-needs-survey-in-the-united-states>, accessed 19 August 2011.

that *together* we can be bigger and stronger to advocate for archives, defend archives, and enhance our members' professional resources.

So let's build something *together*. You already have unknowingly but productively greased the skids for beginning to build a federation. Let's brainstorm about forming a Joint Commission on Federation to which archives associations would send representatives to adopt organizational principles, governance structures, membership categories, and financial plans. We could do it with just the people alone in this room given your interest in this session.

What would it look like? And could we cultivate the idea of a federation on multiple fronts?

- For instance, what about organizing a forum of current leaders of the regionals and, within SAA, to begin to address the idea? And make Peter Gottlieb the recording secretary! He can't lob a hot rock in the middle of the room and then retire into the sunset.
- Let's tap veteran voices and engage SAA Fellows via the Fellows List—that would be a no-cost activity.
- Let's hold a youth summit, harnessing new media to bring together student members, who now comprise 27 percent of SAA membership. Let *them* dream up this new federated superstructure. After all, they're going to inherit it and have to run it!
- Let's develop an online publishing collective where issues of the nearly dozen regional and national archives journals—our shared and overlapping intellectual capital—could commingle and flex their collective muscle.
- Let's encourage archives associations to join the National Coalition for History (NCH),<sup>52</sup> a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit educational organization providing leadership in history-related advocacy. SAA, MARAC, MAC, and CoSA are already members, and SAA's executive director is chair of NCH's Policy Board. The scales could be tipped in favor of greater archives advocacy by NCH if more archival organizations joined.

I wanted to share these thoughts with you to get the conversation rolling. And you've heard from my co-panelists too. We can't wait to hear from you.

<sup>52</sup> For more information, see The National Coalition for History, <http://historycoalition.org/>, accessed 3 December 2011.



## Comments from the Audience

*Ellen Garrison*

When I went to this session I knew that very likely it would be my last session ever at an annual meeting of SAA, an organization I had belonged to for over three decades. Chatting before the session with two bright, eager first-time attendees, both from Portland State University, made me feel quite good about the future of the profession I had retired from last year. However, I still couldn't resist the urge to live up to my gadfly persona one last time.

So, before the panelists began their presentations, I rose to point out that none of them represented one of the seven southern state archival organizations, an all too common occurrence at SAA meetings. (Other audience members later pointed out that both the New England Archivists and the Society of California Archivists had also been overlooked.)<sup>53</sup> I also added an occasional waspish question or comment during the discussion period.

After what proved to be a lively and enlightening session, panel chair Dennis Meissner asked me to send him my comments to be included with the session papers in a planned seventy-fifth anniversary electronic publication. I replied that while I knew how to spell "curmudgeon," I didn't think including the viewpoint of one would add very much to the session report. I still don't think so, and therefore what follows goes beyond my comments at the session to include my reflections on the subject of SAA and the regionals during my flight home.

As Meissner explained in his introduction, the session had been organized partly in response to Peter Gottlieb's 2010 Presidential Address, in which he argued that having national, regional, state, and local organizations diluted the strength of the profession and weakened our advocacy for archives. He then proposed the unification of all archival associations in a single federation and examined several potential models, including those of the American Library Association and the American Association of Museums.

As far as I could tell, nobody in the audience supported the creation of either a new federated administrative framework, as Gottlieb proposed in his address, or a hierarchy in which the regionals would adopt the SAA five-year plan, as one panelist suggested during the session. Most thought that, since SAA and the regionals serve different, although frequently overlapping, constituencies and perform complementary functions, all should be maintained as separate entities.

<sup>53</sup> Note from William E. Landis, Guest Editor: Both the Society of Georgia Archivists and the Society of California Archivists were represented by speakers in a companion seventy-fifth anniversary session, "The View from Here: Perspectives on Educating about Archives" (Session 306), whose contents are also included in this *American Archivist Online Supplement*. The nearly sixty U.S. regional, state, and local archival organizations captured in the current *Directory of Archival Organizations in the United States and Canada*, which Teresa Brinati mentioned earlier in this article, are too numerous and diverse to be adequately represented in the context of a single ninety-minute conference session.

Participants generally saw SAA as a more effective advocate for the profession at the national level (although there was some feeling that SAA didn't always respond to regionals' requests for support of state and local advocacy efforts). Conversely, participants saw regionals as better able to connect with and meet the needs of the many individuals who care for and advocate on behalf of records, but are not professional archivists, as well as members of cultural resource organizations who share archivists' interest in our documentary heritage.

So on my flight home I didn't ponder the question "What is the appropriate administrative relationship between SAA and the regionals?," but "How can SAA and the regionals support each other more effectively in carrying out that aspect of our common mission each is uniquely qualified to fulfill?" and "How can SAA and the regionals work together to define that common mission?"

Needed in the future, I think, is a more collaborative and mutually respectful relationship rather than the creation of yet another organization as suggested by Gottlieb, or the hierarchy suggested by one panelist who thought that all regionals should adopt the goals and priorities in SAA's five-year plan. Looking back over my long involvement in SAA, I find a more appealing model in the lengthy and sometimes contentious process of developing and implementing archival certification that I participated in at both the national and regional levels.

That process began when members of SAA became concerned about establishing professional standards for archivists in an era when the number both of archives and of archival education programs proliferated like baby rabbits. For two years, we dissected and debated the purpose and value of "professional standards" and the methods (institutional evaluation, accreditation of educational programs, and certification of individuals) used by other organizations to establish them. For a variety of reasons, all well reported to the membership, Council settled on certification as the most feasible and cost-effective solution to the problem and appointed a task force to develop and present a plan for initiating that process.

That task force chose to invite the regionals to participate actively in the planning process. Articles and updates by members of the task force appeared regularly in regional publications throughout the process. Members of the task force asked every regional to supply its mailing list so they could distribute the draft proposal directly to members of the regionals when it was completed. This was in the days before the Internet, email, and the Web.

Collaboration didn't stop there, however, and the task force asked every regional association to conduct a session on the proposal at its annual meeting, supplied information packets including both the proposal and a variety of viewpoints on the process for distribution at that session, and made an effort to dispatch a task force member to every one of those meetings. Each regional then sent a summary of the discussion at its session that the task force used to compile a report on public response to the proposal.

The key here was communication up and down, regularly and repeatedly, to create an ongoing feedback loop. We could do that again. For example, every president-elect could write a letter to each regional organization at the beginning of his or her term, asking about its priorities and plans for the next year, then summarize the responses in a column in *Archival Outlook*. Later, officers of the regionals could submit material for the same column, which would appear in every issue. Council could produce a “news from SAA bulletin” to be distributed through regional newsletters to reach beyond the membership of SAA to generate support for its actions and plans. An SAA staff position could be designated as the interface with regional newsletters, tracking deadlines for submitting material to each publication and funneling information from the regionals to SAA for publication or distribution.

Collaboration has to be a two-way street, however, and better communication would facilitate greater resource sharing by the regionals in support of SAA’s role as the premier advocate for the profession, using the SSA-SAA disaster fund as a model. An advocacy fund could be administered by SAA and managed by a group representing contributing organizations, perhaps also including a member selected by the vote of individual donors. Being a southerner and a historian, I immediately envision the arguments that would arise over issues of representation, minimum contribution, weighted voting, and so on, but surely if a task force could develop a mechanism for certification, another task force can develop a plan for governance of this fund.

The possibilities for cooperation in building the fund are endless. What if every regional included a check-off on its dues form that would enable its members to add a contribution to the fund to their dues payment or even earmark a small part of their dues for the fund? Or maybe SAA could offer each regional something to raffle off (lunch with the SAA Council? discount on membership?) at its annual meeting, with proceeds going to the fund.

*Communication. Collaboration. Cooperation.* I vote for combining all of these C words to create a flexible strategy to meet the need that Peter Gottlieb articulated in his presidential address. Sounds as if I have watched too many episodes of *Sesame Street*, doesn’t it?

#### **Gregor Trinkaus-Randall**

Last year, in his Presidential Address, Peter Gottlieb proposed investigating the idea of a federation between SAA and the regionals.<sup>54</sup> As has become quite obvious throughout this discussion, there is quite a bit of resistance to the

<sup>54</sup> SAA’s 2011/2012 president, Gregor Trinkaus-Randall, proposes looking much more closely at the possibility of cooperation and collaboration between regionals, between regionals and SAA, between archival institutions, and between archivists to advance the profession at all levels.

concept of federation. This resistance, however, does not preclude the pursuit of ways in which SAA and the regionals, or the regionals themselves, can cooperate and collaborate on a number of topics or areas of importance to the profession. By their very nature, SAA and the regionals have different strengths and weaknesses. SAA has a full-time staff with an executive director. The regionals operate with volunteer officers and staff. SAA operates, obviously, on a national scale, while regionals address the issues that may be particular to their regions.

Unfortunately, except in infrequent circumstances, there really has not been much coordination of activities between regionals, or between regionals and SAA. In a number of areas, discussions could enhance the learning experience and professional growth of archivists at all levels. As it now stands, regionals have a tendency to reach many archivists, or those with archival responsibilities, in small repositories who, for one reason or another, do not belong to SAA. The question then is how can we provide opportunities for these people to take advantage of SAA's offerings, or for that matter, the offerings provided by other regionals? Are there workshops, for example, that are offered in one regional that would "sell" well in another that has not previously offered them? Are there other ways that SAA could distribute its educational programs that have not yet been examined? Would it be feasible to have regionals offer basic and intermediate workshops and have SAA offer the more advanced ones because of its national scope? Are there ways in which the regionals and SAA can collaborate on areas such as advocacy, digital preservation, and outreach, to name a few?

For all intents and purposes, in spite of the fact that many regional officers are SAA members and have often held positions of varying responsibility in SAA's sections and roundtables, and on the Council, regional archival organizations and SAA have (usually) worked completely independently of each other. Maybe it is time, especially in a period of financial uncertainty and hardship, to examine how SAA and the regionals, and the regionals themselves, can cooperate and collaborate for the benefit of the profession without being detrimental to each other. There is a serious possibility, in this case, that the benefits of the sum of the parts could really be much greater than the individual parts. Federation is not the answer, but cooperation and collaboration have some real possibilities both between and among the regionals and between the regionals and SAA.

**Daphne O. DeLeon, CA**

**Galvanizing a Nationwide Dialogue.** Peter Gottlieb presented the notion of an archives federation in his presidential address in 2010, and in 2011 this Annual Meeting session was conducted to continue the conversation. Discussion at this session convinced me that at this stage a reachable goal is *enhanced collaboration* in lieu of federation. By re-focusing on enhancing collaboration among archival associations the process will allow for discussions regarding leveraging resources (e.g., member skills, dissemination networks, and shared advocacy agendas) without implying any revenue sharing. I believe this will allow the building of stronger relationships that have the potential of evolving into a federation in the future.

The need to nurture the development of this dialogue also struck me at the session. SAA should take the leadership role in “jump-starting” the dialogue and at the same time creating an atmosphere of equity among all participants. Participants should include regional archival associations, CoSA, NAGARA, AMIA and other specialized archival associations. Added details about what this “nurturing” process could look like follow below.

1. Bring the Message to the Regions:

A point was made during the 2011 session that many of the potential participant associations were not represented on the panel or among the attendees. With the restrictions placed on travel budgets, I am assuming that representatives that would have added valuable viewpoints to the discussion were not able to attend. By conducting “focus” groups in the regions this barrier to participation would be removed.

In order for the focus meetings to be most effective in moving the dialogue to the next step, I believe the following questions should be emphasized:

- a. What form would this “collaboration” take?
- b. How could your association become involved?
- c. What would be the benefits for your membership?
- d. What would be the disadvantages for your membership?

This is also a good opportunity to invite representatives to participate in the steering committee.

2. Formalize a Steering Committee:

Invite representatives from all potential participating associations to be involved. This steering committee would be the group to analyze the focus group findings and develop an action timeline. Each association has one rep. on the committee and the chair is voted on by members of the

committee. The steering committee will be the driver of implementation of future actions.

3. Analyze Findings:

The steering committee should be tasked with analyzing the information from each of the focus meetings and presenting a report on the feasibility and possible next steps to SAA, to the leadership of participating associations, and to the SAA membership at large. A focus on the development of a list of “incentives” for all participating associations is needed. Anxiety over any revenue sharing issues will be forestalled by the emphasis on enhanced collaboration vs. federation.

One incentive that quickly jumps to mind is the ability to better coordinate and influence national legislation (i.e., PAHR). If this work can, at a minimum, result in better and quicker ways to send PAHR updates and have members from all associations contact their congressional delegations, then we can get PAHR authorized. This success would be a tangible benefit that would fuel the collaboration dialogue.

**About the panelists:**

**Danna Bell-Russel** is an educational outreach specialist at the Library of Congress. She is the immediate past chair of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC). In 2011 she was elected vice president/president-elect of the Society of American Archivists.

**Teresa M. Brinati** is the director of publishing for the Society of American Archivists, where for more than twenty years she has developed and directed a dynamic publishing program. In addition to running a lean and serene publishing enterprise, she participates in all aspects of association management.

**Brenda Gunn** is the associate director for Research and Collections and the Janey Slaughter Briscoe Archivist at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. Active in professional organizations, Gunn is the 2011/2012 president of the Academy of Certified Archivists and a former president of the Society of Southwest Archivists, for which she spearheaded the disaster recovery grant program for archives in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. For her efforts, she was named a Distinguished Service Award recipient for that organization.

**Dennis Meissner** is the head of Collections Management at the Minnesota Historical Society and a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists. Most of his archival career has focused on the arrangement, description, and management of archival holdings, including their discovery and use in networked environments. He was elected to the SAA Council in 2011 and is a former president of the Midwest Archives Conference.

**Michael J. Paulus, Jr.**, is university librarian and associate professor at Seattle Pacific University. Previously he was head of archives and special collections at Whitman College and, prior to that, a special collections librarian at Princeton Theological Seminary. Paulus is the current president of Northwest Archivists and a Council member of the Orbis Cascade Alliance.

**Tanya Zanish-Belcher** is the director of Special Collections at Wake Forest University. She is the editor of the forthcoming book, *Perspectives in Women's Archives: A Reader* and was elected to the Council of the Society of American Archivists in 2012. She has served as president, vice president, and on the Council of the Midwest Archives Conference (MAC).