



Manuscript Repositories Section Newsletters

FALL 1999

From the Chair, by Mary Wolfskill

The Pittsburgh meeting was one of the most enjoyable SAA conferences that I've attended. This was due in no small part to the many Manuscript Repositories Section members who contributed their time and talents to the annual event. Special thanks goes to Pittsburgh historian, Frank Kurtik, for his interesting, slide-illustrated talk highlighting primary sources for the study of eighteenth-century Pittsburgh. Regrettably, our second speaker, John Smith of the Andy Warhol collection, was in an automobile accident on the way to the meeting and arrived too late to address our group. Luckily, John was not injured, although we can't say the same for his car, and he graciously offered us a rain check for a presentation on the Warhol collection at some future date.

By all accounts, the small discussion groups were a great success, and I'd like to thank our expert and engaging leaders. Peter Hirtle led participants through the complicated labyrinth of the new Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Christine Weideman shared her experiences in establishing an off-site storage facility at Yale, and Kathryn Allamong Jacob offered guidance on the delicate matter of asking donors for money to process collections. Danna Bell-Russel coordinated a discussion on dealing with reference on the web, and Kathryn Neal helped put together program ideas for SAA 2000. Tom Hyry, along with Australian archivist Adrian Cunningham, led a group struggling with processing electronic records in manuscript collections. Ideas for future programs came out of these information exchanges, and we are grateful to Susan Hamburger, Herb Hartsook, Peter Blodgett, Karen Spicher, and Pam Hackbart-Dean for taking notes and providing descriptions for this Newsletter on the major points covered.

There are several people who have been extremely helpful in countless ways over the past year, including Danna Bell-Russel and Connie Cartledge, my LC colleagues. Peter Blodgett, Mark Greene, and Herb Hartsook can always be counted on to provide thoughtful ideas and suggestions, and Clark Center was ready to assist in any way that was needed. Christine Weideman has been an energetic vice chair and a conscientious Newsletter editor. Despite her best efforts at gathering timely information and meeting deadlines, circumstances beyond our control intervened, and the summer issue failed to reach many of our members before the annual meeting. We are still not certain if everyone received the last Newsletter, but most of it dealt with the annual meeting, so there is no reason to republish the entire issue. The article by Ann Lawless on the "First Collection Processed" is being reprinted just in case some of you failed to receive a copy.

It has been a very special and enjoyable year for me, and I encourage all of you to think about becoming more involved with your colleagues in the work of the Section. They are a great group!!!

First Collection Processed

Ann Lawless Fairbanks, Museum and Archives Center, St. Johnsbury, Vermont

If you remember, we reported in our Spring newsletter that the Fairbanks Museum recently processed its first archival collection. Here is the story behind the story.

The Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium is a natural science museum founded in 1891 and located in St. Johnsbury, Vermont. Education has always been central to the Museum's mission. Along with its distinguished natural science collection, the Museum also holds ethnographic materials and a local history collection which burgeoned in the 1960s. The history collection includes both three-dimensional objects and archival formats.

Weather observation has been an important facet of the Museum since its founding. The Museum's founder, Franklin Fairbanks, was an amateur naturalist who kept weather records at his home in St. Johnsbury. He continued this work after establishing the Museum, and in 1894, he set up an observation station at the Museum and started sharing his weather data with the National Weather Service Bureau. In the late 1940s, the Museum began to broadcast weather forecasts on local radio in addition to continuing its weather observations. With regional corporate funding for new state-of-the-art facilities, the Museum created the Northern New England Weather Center (NNEWC) in January 1986. Staffed by professional meteorologists, the Weather Center began an alliance with Lyndon State College and its worldwide computer and satellite weather data service. The NNEWC creates local weather forecasts covering Vermont, New Hampshire, upstate New York and adjacent areas in the US and Canada.

The Museum identified the need for increased and improved archival management in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A first attempt to secure an NHPRC grant was unsuccessful and helped to identify the need to develop a better archival infrastructure. Registrar Ann Lawless was successful in getting small grants from the Vermont Museum and Gallery Alliance (VMGA) and Vermont Historical Records Advisory Board (VHRAB). The VMGA grant supported a survey of both the archival holdings and management needs in 1996. The VHRAB support enabled the Museum to survey its institutional records. The museum was fortunate to gain the services of Anne M. Ostendarp, archivist of Dartmouth College. The records of the Northern New England Weather Center were selected as the first processing project.

The decision to begin with the NNEWC records was based on several factors. First, the demand for their use by staff meteorologists was high and their preservation was perceived as critical. Second, the "Eye on the Sky" broadcasts over Vermont Public Radio make the NNEWC one of the Museum's most visible outreach programs, stimulating widespread public interest in meteorology. There was also potential for use of the records by Lyndon State's meteorology program.

In her final report to VHRAB, Anne Ostendarp summarized the project's importance: "VHRAB recognized the opportunity to reinforce museum registrar Ann Lawless's novice processing skills as well as to support a project offering volunteers a chance to gain exposure to historical records as well as training to perform processing tasks. . . The records proved particularly suitable for an introduction to processing for both Ann Lawless and volunteers." The records were systematic. Series identification was clear with only one series needing reconstruction. The "Eye on the Sky" guys - the experts - remained available for appraisal questions. Series descriptions were straight forward to write since most series were forms or charts. Further, the volunteers were involved in a project that had community recognition and interest. Perhaps most importantly, the Fairbanks Museum has ready access to the frequently used weather records and the records themselves have appropriate housing. The Museum then reached out to the four other town institutions whose history and collections are intertwined with those of the museum. With VHRAB planning support, this initiative led to one of the Museum's most recent successes, an NHPRC grant award of \$143,191.00. In partnership with the St. Johnsbury Athenaeum; the town's public library; St. Johnsbury Academy, a private secondary school; the Town of St. Johnsbury; and the St. Johnsbury Historical Society, the museum will administer a three year project to arrange, describe, catalog and preserve the documentary holdings of these five organizations.

Museum Executive Director Charles C. Browne said in announcing the award, "We are delighted to receive this extremely prestigious and competitive grant award. The historical materials in these collaborating institutions offer an important and intact record of St. Johnsbury people, places, businesses, institutions, and activities and how these have changed over 200 years. These archival records offer a rich and coherent view of our history, but until now the documents have been largely inaccessible. The project is extraordinary because when it is

completed, it should serve as a model for other towns who wish to preserve their history, and it will simplify the ways in which researchers access primary sources about community history."

Reports on small group discussions at the Pittsburgh section meeting

Dealing with Reference on the Web

The discussion was led by Danna C. Bell-Russel, of the National Digital Library Visitors' Center, and was attended by about twenty members, many of whom shared their experiences in providing online reference services. The group discussed the design of web-based reference request forms and how these forms can be used to solicit information from readers usually asked in reference interviews. Also discussed was the use of FAQ pages, which some participants have found helpful for clarifying the scope of repository holdings and directing inappropriate questions to other institutions. Members generally are experiencing an increase in email reference requests, reflecting use of web-based finding aids by both experienced and inexperienced readers. The group discussed the usefulness of help pages and tutorials aimed at inexperienced readers, with some members pointing out the difficulty of designing pages which will direct new readers through tutorial links without creating unnecessary barriers to experienced readers.

The group also discussed the establishment of repository electronic reference policies. Most participants said that they do not have an official policy now, but many felt that this would be useful in coordinating electronic reference with general reference practices, in such areas as acknowledging reference questions on receipt, queuing questions for response, directing questions to appropriate staff, and managing the amount of staff time spent on individual questions. In discussing the use of standard responses to frequent questions, a few members of the group said that they are planning or developing databases of questions and responses to facilitate record-keeping and for use in responding to frequent requests or those concerning similar subject matter.

Karen Spicher, Yale University

Digital Millenium Copyright Act

The Digital Millenium Copyright Act, passed in 1998, contains three changes important to the archival community: 1) it allows three copies to be made (instead of only one in facsimile form), and they may be in digital form; 2) these digital copies can be made available on a server only in your own building but not on the Web; and, 3) for interlibrary loan, the copy must include the copyright statement as it appears on the piece (not just a warning notice), but it makes no provision for items in the public domain.

The discussion, led by Peter Hirtle of Cornell University, focused on several key problem areas. The encryption of digital files especially for videotapes makes it a criminal act to make a copy on machines that override encryption but also thwarts our ability to migrate the data to a new format. For public domain materials, should the United States adopt the Canadian rules for orphan work (after reasonable effort to search for copyright owner, Canadians can apply for a license to copy the work)? However, Canadian law doesn't apply to unpublished works. The determinants of fair use for research, the amount of the work used (1-100%), nature of the materials, and the market value factor into each decision we make. We need to decide as a profession how to address fair use so we don't lose it.

The Sonny Bono Act extends copyright protection to the author's life plus seventy years. Whereas before digitization, the onus fell on the patron to comply with copyright law, we are now users of materials when we put them on the Web. See the article ["Fair Use of Unpublished Works: Burdens of Proof and the Integrity of Copyright"] by Kenneth D. Crews in the Spring 1999 issue of the Arizona State Law Journal [31 Ariz. St. L.J. 1] on copyright. We must do a risk analysis for the copyright status of collections weighing the rule of thumb for fair use against the chance of being sued.

At Harvard they've decided that thumbnail images are okay and they scan for onsite use only. Only one repository, The University of Florida, was sued for making Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's copyrighted materials available. The Harry Ransom Center only makes photocopies if they have written permission of the author. Should we be able to use primary materials to write about living authors or does copyright preclude asking the author for permission?

Susan Hamburger, Pennsylvania State University

Asking Donors for Money to Process Collections

Kathryn Allamong Jacob (Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College) began this well-attended discussion by describing the genesis of the session, arising from a program at the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians in June 1999. She pointed out first that a debate continues within our profession about whether archivists should ask for processing funds from donors at all. If an institution does decide to do so, joining a growing number that do solicit such support, how can it do so successfully?

To answer that question, based on her experience in various institutions, Jacob outlined a process that begins with the archivist(s) educating the donor(s) of the collection about all the aspects involved in housing and processing a collection. She then noted that the timing of such requests was crucial, so that the donor(s) would not be scared off, and discussed who might be approached for financial support and how such support might be acknowledged by the institution. Among the points she put forward to the group, she suggested that:

- * Requests for financial support should be made based upon a budget for processing costs that has been compiled well before the processing begins.
- * The timing of such requests should be considered carefully since they could scare away potential donors if made too early in discussions about a donation.
- * Such requests could be directed to the donor of the collection, if it consists of his or her personal papers, or to the heirs of the collection's creator, if they are the donors, to friends or associates of the creator if it is a collection of personal papers, or to the founders, officers or clients if the collection consists of an organization's papers..
- * Any gifts of financial support should be widely acknowledged in finding aids, on institutional web sites, in newsletters or, if appropriate, even on container labels.

No one participating in the session expressed any opposition to the idea of requesting processing support from donors as discussion developed but many individuals, relying on their own experiences, elaborated on points raised implicitly or explicitly by Jacob in her opening remarks. Those points included the following matters:

- * Requests for such support may come from a different administrative level than the archivist's but the archivist provides the essential details upon which such requests should rest.
- * No such request can proceed without adequate processing budgets, generated by the archivist, that will include supplies, salaries, and where appropriate, storage and environmental controls.
- * If the donor or other interested parties cannot provide direct financial support, sometimes they can provide assistance with fund raising such as identifying other potential sources of money and contacts with funding sources.
- * The archivist must be aware of any commitments that the institution makes to potential funders about timetables for completion of processing, use of a collection in an exhibit or establishment of a web site in order to meet any deadlines.

* The archivist may need to work with other offices or departments in the same institution such as a Development Department in cultivating potential donors. This process may require the archivist to draw upon their expertise while ensuring that their objectives do not overwhelm the archivist's objectives in cultivating the relationship.

One session participant, Ann Newhall from the NHPRC, also spoke about her organization's willingness to support certain types of processing projects including but not limited to electronic records. NHPRC grants, she added, could work well in situations where matching funds could be

Peter Blodgett, Huntington Library

Space: What Can You Do When You Have None

Christine Weideman of Yale University headed a discussion group which focused on off-site storage. More and more institutions are utilizing off-site facilities for records storage. Many repositories have inherited older buildings not well suited to the task. These stopgap facilities often provide space but not space particularly well suited to records storage and often space which lacks proper humidity and temperature controls. Some institutions have had to split their less heavily used materials among multiple smaller offsite facilities.

As institution's acknowledge that they will be unable to fund expansion of their existing physical plant, more and more are building special purpose off-site facilities designed for long term storage of little used materials. These are often located some distance from the main facility, where property is less expensive. Regular shuttles provide access to the distant holdings, usually within twenty-four hours of a patron request.

Weideman talked of Yale's success with their facility, which opened in November 1998 and now houses two thirds of the repository's footage. Over the past nine months, numerous bugs have surfaced and been corrected in their operating procedures. Weideman emphasized the importance of error control and good communication among the staff to assure that information is shared and that users are not given different information by different staff members.

Facilities such as this one at Yale appear to be the wave of the future. The University of South Carolina recently opened an offsite facility to be shared by its library system and special collections units. The newly constructed building is designed to have storage cubes added on to the processing and staff area to handle substantial growth. It also includes the system's new preservation lab. The University of Delaware is planning a new facility and new buildings are planned for the Huntington and the Clarke Library at Central Michigan University.

Obviously, we have a lot to learn from one another. We hope members will use the newsletter as a forum for sharing information about such sites.

Herb Hartsook, University of South Carolina

Program Ideas for SAA 2000

A small group comprising Kathryn Neal, Susan Malbin, Beth Bensman, Susan Potts-McDonald, and Mary Wolfskill gathered to brainstorm about possible session topics for the upcoming SAA meeting in Denver. A variety of topics came to mind including a joint SAA/ALA session on governance and recharging the relationship between these closely-allied organizations. Plans for this session proposal were already well underway. Promoting collection use through exhibitions, particularly with Internet displays for a wider viewing audience, was discussed as a possible session topic, focusing on the creation of online digital presentations and teaching packages, as well as other outreach tools such as books and videos. Related to this idea was the development of lesson plans for the K-12 grade level, working from digitized archival or primary resource materials. Other ideas of interest included proposals relating to the papers of journalists and literary figures and to donor relations, particularly with regard to deeds of gift and/or the legal issues arising from the absence of

such documentation. Fund raising also continues to be of interest to many archivists and a proposal for working with "friends" organizations and/or development offices is in the works.

Mary Wolfskill, Library of Congress

Processing Electronic Records in Manuscript Collections

Most contemporary electronic records that are accessioned with collections consist of word processing files. There are not a lot of databases at this point, but that may change. The old formats include 5 ¼" disks, 9 track tapes, etc. Duke University utilizes a program called Quick View Plus. It can read over 2200 file formats. It sometimes loses some of the formatting, but it can bring up the records. Unfortunately, it does not save records in a different/new format.

The discussion turned to whether an institution should hold on to the original electronic format. An institution may consider doing this because once you eliminate the original the information can never be retrieved. The information may not be retrieved, however, because the equipment needed to read the material is no longer available.

The actual format is not viable for very long, in terms of preservation. One option would be to print out copies from the disk, since paper is stable. But this is not really a solution. Computers allow a volume of information with search functions. One should copy/migrate electronic records every few years. This would hopefully provide easier access to materials for researchers.

Time, money, and other priorities are used in appraisal decisions. Do we sometimes put more emphasis on the importance of electronic records over original manuscripts? Possibly. There should be some basic guidelines in processing electronic records. These would include remember to back up files, place these back ups in another area (not next to the computer, but ideally off-site), do not store records in a basement, and always provide good recordkeeping of what has been done to these materials.

The discussion concluded with the question, what kinds of guidelines do archival institutions have for these kinds of materials? There is a need to look for a long-term solution. If institutions have guidelines and are willing to share them, maybe these could be placed on the Manuscript Repositories Sections web page.

Pam Hackbart-Dean, University of Georgia

National Forum on Archival Continuing Education

Danna Bell-Russell, National Digital Library

As we face the end of the 20th century archivists find that their jobs are more difficult than ever. The creation of information is occurring at a greater rate than ever before. Electronic records are becoming a larger part of incoming collections. Changes in copyright law may change when we can allow patrons access to specific collections. Plus the Internet provides new ways for us to provide access to our collections and for patrons to contact us for information and assistance. To better handle the changing archival environment archivists must have access to continuing education opportunities.

However archivists may be unsure what opportunities are available for them to obtain continuing education. If they are not affiliated with one of the archival professional organizations they may be unaware of what programs are available. In fact those who become "accidental archivists" because of added work responsibilities or because there is no archivist at their repository may be totally unaware that there are specific skills that one must possess to be an archivist.

A variety of different organizations provide continuing education opportunities for archivists. However these organizations are also facing problems. They must meet the needs of all levels of archivists from those who have graduate level training to volunteers and interns who may have little or no training in handling historical

collections. They must try to determine how to use scarce resources to develop training programs; resources that are harder and harder to locate and obtain. These organizations may also find themselves working in a vacuum, creating programs that have already been created by other organizations and unsure of what has already been created.

How can archivists get the training they need and how can organizations work together to develop that training. One way is to get the training providers together to share information and develop ways to collaborate on programs for archivists. We hope that NFACE will serve as the start of these efforts.

What is NFACE? NFACE is the National Forum on Archival Continuing Education. Created by the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators, NFACE plans to bring together many of the providers of archival continuing education to gather and share information about those continuing education resources that are already available, develop cooperative projects between education providers and an develop action agenda for archival continuing education for the next decade. This forum will be held from April 27-29 in Decatur, Georgia and will include national and regional organizations and many state-level bodies that currently provide archival continuing education to those caring for historical records or whose constituents are potential consumers of those services. The American Association of State and Local History is serving as a co-sponsor of this project and funding for the initial phase of the program has been provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

Though the Forum is the highlight of the NFACE program it is only one part of the process to insure that continuing education is available to all those who care for the nation's records. Prior to the forum the NFACE staff and Program Committee are working to gather data relating to the activities of the various providers of archival continuing education and to encourage their involvement with the NFACE program. In addition to assess the needs of those individuals involved in preserving the nation's records, surveys are being provided at various meetings and with the help of the State Historical Records Advisory Boards. This will allow NFACE staff to learn more about the educational needs of archivists throughout the United States. The results of this survey will be available on the NFACE website. You can help by filling out the survey found on the last two pages of this newsletter or at <http://www.coshrc.org/nface/research/surveyform.htm> and returning it to the address listed on the back of the survey.

Kathleen Roe of the New York State Archives and Record Administration is chairing the NFACE program committee. Edward Weldon of the Georgia Department of Archives and Records Administration is serving as the Local Arrangements Committee Chair. Terry Davis, the Executive Director for the American Association for State and Local History is serving as the Administrative/Financial Director for the project and Victoria Walch, archival consultant and author of the groundbreaking report "Where History Begins," is serving as the project coordinator.

For further information about NFACE you can visit the NFACE website at <http://www.coshrc.org/nface> or contact Kathleen Roe at 518-474-6926 or by email at kroe@mail.nysed.gov .

Section Website

A committee of Christine Weideman, Miriam Spectre, Karen Spicher, and Craig Wright, are currently developing a website for the Manuscripts Repository Section. To begin with, we plan on posting our newsletter and section bylaws to the site; we'll have more to report in the Spring newsletter.

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