
ARCHIVAL HISTORY NEWSLETTER

A Publication of the Society of American Archivists Archival
History Roundtable

VOL. 3 NO. 1

MARCH 1989

SAA ANNUAL MEETING

The roundtable held its third meeting at the Society of American Archivists annual convention in Atlanta on September 29, 1988. The roundtable discussed current affairs and future plans. Nancy Bartlett of the Bentley Historical Library reported on her work on 19th century French archival history.

Minutes of the meeting, as recorded by Nancy McGovern (National Archives), are as follows:

I. Report of past year's activities

A. Newsletter/membership

The roundtable produced two issues of the newsletter during the past year. Copies of past issues of the newsletter are available upon request. Members who did not receive copies should notify the roundtable to get on the mailing list.

A roundtable is defined by SAA as an interest group. SAA has provided funding of up to \$50 for roundtables to produce newsletters.

At the Council meeting in Atlanta a decision was made to raise the funding for newsletters to \$75. The roundtables have more latitude in their mailings than do interest sessions because roundtables are not centralized within SAA. This gives the roundtables greater opportunities for individuality. The Archival History Roundtable should give additional thought to goals and ways to achieve them.

B. SAA sessions for 1988

The roundtable sponsored two sessions on the 1988 program for the SAA annual meeting:

#78. [provenance]

#82. [archival records and the South]

- II. Leadership change for 1990
SAA is trying to encourage new people to get involved in SAA committees. Michele Pacifico, Rod Ross and Greg Bradsher have co-chaired the roundtable since its inception two years ago. The co-chairs would also like to get more members involved. This will be the last year the present co-chairs will run the committee.
- The co-chairs asked for volunteers. Jim Corsaro (New York State Library) expressed interest in the newsletter, and was chosen as editor for 1989-1990. Members interested in becoming actively involved in the roundtable should contact the roundtable.
- III. Possibilities for the 1988-89 year
- A. SAA sessions for 1989
The tentative theme for the 1989 SAA Annual Meeting will be "Prospects/Retrospects." The roundtable is interested in sponsoring more sessions at the next meeting. Greg Bradsher suggested a session based around a review of archival literature. Members who have suggestions for sessions for sponsoring or presenting a session should contact the roundtable.
- B. Plans for Winter newsletter
The co-chairs requested that members submit information on activities, publications, events of interest to the roundtable. They have not had much input for the newsletter.
- There are plans for a self-mailer survey to be included in the newsletter. The roundtable would like to prepare a new membership listing that will include addresses, phone numbers, publications and/or research interests. The old membership listing needs to be updated and it is an opportunity to expand it. *A survey is included in this newsletter

C. Possibility of other projects

Fred Stielow suggested that the roundtable sponsor a "Dictionary of American Archival Biography." Fred said, when asked, that he would be willing to help, but he did not have the time to do it alone. Michele Pacifico indicated that the roundtable would have to submit a formal proposal to do such a project. It was decided that the roundtable would try to get the proposal written and submitted. *A prospectus is reprinted in this newsletter. Fred also said the Library History Roundtable of the American Library Association is looking for publications if anyone wants to prepare a submission.

IV. Talk by Nancy Bartlett, of the Bentley Historical Research Library, on "Doing France Archival Administrative History"

Nancy Bartlett has done extensive research on French archival administrative history in this country and in France. Her tale for the roundtable focused on how she did her research in French archives. *It is reprinted in this newsletter.

Other business:

At the meeting of the Oral History Section there was some discussion of an oral history project on SAA or archives in the U.S. A possible session might have some older archivists talk about their careers. The roundtable might become involved in some way in the oral history project or in sponsoring such a session.

Lee Stout (Pennsylvania State University) gave a followup to the presentation he gave at last year's roundtable meeting on the survey of records projects in Pennsylvania.

Lee added that the Committee on Automated Records and Techniques (CART) is sponsoring a session at next year's meeting that will provide historical perspective of data processing in the federal government and discussion of the records that document that history and the implications of research and appraisal. The roundtable expressed interest in co-sponsoring that session.

PROSPECTUS

"Dictionary of American Archival Biography (DAAB)"

Frederick J. Stielow
Chief Editor

Introduction:

As Richard Cox has stressed, a field rooted in historical inquiry and documents should be aware of, and honor its own history. American archivists, however, are in danger of losing valuable portions of their own documentary heritage. The question--Who were the archivists of the past?--is also vital for professionalization of the field, as well as the teaching of archives.

The absence of a collected biography was lamented by Ernst Posner more than thirty years ago. Similar calls have reappeared from Maynard Brichford and Frank Evans, but financial and other considerations got in the way. If the effort has long been needed, then today's microcomputers and the hidden subsidies from the new archival education programs may finally have made it feasible.

The Plan:

The project is under the sponsorship of the Archival History Roundtable, but will require the support and contributions of a large number of archivists. The work will take from three to five years and result in a 400-500 page dictionary, plus an ongoing data base.

Catholic University of America will house the project and provide computer equipment; thus, only minimal funding will be requested for postage and a student assistant. To ease the process, contributions will be requested in machine-readable forms, either on floppies or by modem; moreover, the project will be managed by computer.

Project Outline:

1. Ascertaining the level of support from the archival community and choice of a publisher (Society of American Archivists given co-sponsorship rights and the right of first refusal).

2. Assembling a board of ten to fifteen editors, who represent a cross section of the discipline. Those already invited to serve: Roland Baumann, Frank Burke, Andrea Hinding, and Rodney Ross.
3. Address basic editorial issues through the board; for example:
 - a. Should the work be limited to only deceased archivists and major contributors, or extended to retirees also?
 - b. Should the scope extend to Canadian archivists, Mexican archivists, European archival theorists?
 - c. What methods in addition to those below need to be employed to capture all the proper individuals?
4. Construct a "stoplist" of the most obvious candidates for inclusion.
5. Circulate nomination forms to the profession. These simple forms would ask the person's name, approximate dates, major institutional affiliation, and a rating of importance at the local, state, regional, or national level, plus the nominator's willingness to write the biography. This information would then be entered into a database.
6. Make selections for inclusion, determine size of respective articles, invite prospective authors, and construct production schedule, including the reissuance of subjects to newsletters.
7. Enter into an ongoing editorial phase as articles enter and are forwarded to the editorial board and back for final editing.
8. Prepare table of contents, indices, frontis material, and present text to publisher.

* * *

RESEARCH ON FRENCH ARCHIVAL HISTORY by Nancy Bartlett

Shortly before I left for Paris this summer, to continue my Ph.D. research, Greg Bradsher phoned me at the Bentley Library to ask if I would give a brief presentation at the SAA annual conference on the process of doing archival history research abroad. I am pleased to do so, especially because it is wonderful to share my interest with fellow archival history enthusiasts.

My dissertation focuses upon the articulation of an archival consciousness, with all its debates, promises and problems, from the July monarchy through the Second Empire of nineteenth-century France, 1830-1870. In pursuing this topic I have undertaken research visits to the Archives Nationales and the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. In a couple of days, I will present a part of my findings in a session with Maynard Brichford entitled "Provenance and the Modern Theory of Archives Administration." Therefore, today I will present observations relating more to the process of conducting research on archival history in France, than to the resulting thesis emerging from that research. I will mention both the strongest advantageous features of the French archives' procedures, past and present, for my topic as well as some of that same system's "complexities"--"disadvantages" is too harsh a criticism for any situation in Paris. These present-day mechanics of the French archival system obviously shed light on the past of French archives.

However, the preliminary stages of my research on French archival history occurred at home in Ann Arbor. Readily available at the University of Michigan are published guides to the holdings of the Archives Nationales, as well as many of the ninety-five state archives in the departments, or regions, of France. These guides provide brief descriptive summaries of series, preceded by names and call numbers for each series--therefore in Ann Arbor I was able to estimate that within the records of the Ministry of Public Instruction and the Ministry of the Interior--under whose direction the nineteenth century French archives fell--the most important series for me would include the minutes of meetings of the National commission to inspect regional archives' inventories after 1814, the minutes of the commission set up to determine proper ownership of pre-revolution state records housed at the national library, and

the records of the alumni association of graduates of the Ecole des Chartes, whose records span from the late 1830s to the present.

Upon returning to Paris this June, I realized that in order to continue my reaching backwards into the history of French archives, I had also to step forward into new procedures. The Archives Nationales public services had just this year all been transferred into a brand new building, next door to the two former palaces which serve as the archives headquarters. Along with slick marble floors and designer furniture from New York, the building features a partially automated retrieval system. Call slips are passé there--any request for materials must be made through computers stationed in the reading room. The procedure for making such a request is quite simple--all that is required is seat assignment, researcher identification number, and call number of the box or volume of interest. (This system is based on a somewhat older system at the Public Record Office in London).

Yet what lies behind this automated circulation system is a very informative bit of archival history. The identifying call numbers--consisting of a string of letters followed by numbers--were conceived by the first archivist of the Archives Nationales, a Monsieur Armand-Gaston Camus, who served as the director from 1800 to 1804. Camus died shortly after his appointment. However, Monsieur P.C.F. Daunou, appointed by Napoleon Bonaparte as his successor, continued and further implemented this system. Evidence of these men's ideas appears in the administrative records of the Archives Nationales - one can find notes, dating as far back as 1791, of Monsieur Camus' so-called "order of work" with the elements of description necessary for each item of some importance: the object of the item, the date, and the name of the person or organization who has sent the item.

There is an incredible continuity in these series-level descriptive headings, or "côtes," of French archives, which lent themselves very well to the 1988 automated system. The new descriptive system's continuity and concurrent flexibility for an automated system are a tremendously enviable strength. However, the new retrieval system is at this point nothing more than that - it is not possible to conduct any type of search, either by subject or by

provenance, through this system, for sources unfamiliar to the researcher. This too is a reflection of long-term practice. Ever since the big push in the 1840s, when archivists throughout the country were urged to cooperate in publishing standardized guides to regional archives' holdings, the French have emphasized general, series-level listings of holdings as informative guides beyond the archives. In somewhat of a reaction to the earlier concentration, in the early nineteenth century, on item-level analysis of medieval documents rounded up during the Revolution, descriptive text analysis became less a characteristic or employment and more a personal endeavor among ambitious archivists honing their medievalist skills learned at the Ecole des Chartes.

The traditionally strong distinction between the steps of identification of sources, request for access, and ultimate use had been perpetuated in the architect's design of the Archives Nationales' new public services building. The inventory room and the main reading room are separated by a flight of stairs and two locked doors for which passes, in the form of plastic cards with magnetic strips, are required. Iterative consultation of inventories and archives in such a setting requires much movement back and forth between floors. In the case of French archival history, in fact, published guides, located in the inventory room, are very much a primary source. Not quite as standard as the inspecting commission would like, I suspect, some of the introductions to nineteenth century published guides provide a wealth of information about the archives' history (typically described first of all by their physical condition - rats in barns play a big part here, often a fire or two is mentioned), the appreciation or disdain for local history demonstrated by the archivist's employer, and the archivist's assessment of his predecessors' careers. Of course one has to proceed with caution in looking at these inventories, and consider the intention of the author. One of my next steps is to prepare some sort of sample investigation of series T3 of departmental archives - according to the nationally standardized arrangement system T3 should include all retained administrative records of the departmental archives.

The high level of articulation about the activities and status of archivists in nineteenth century France continues to impress me. They have left a tremendous amount of evidence not only in their published guides, but also in the administrative records of the archives, as well as in the

records of various archival working committees and the publications and records of the Ecole des Chartes. My work on this topic, in fact, began at the University of Michigan library with a survey of the serial publication of the alumni association of the Ecole des Chartes. This item, entitled *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes*, was and is devoted primarily to medieval studies but also includes a small section of brief announcements on such matters and academies' competitions, recent job placements, legislative action affecting archives and archival education, and notices on a few new publications on archival principles. It also includes a listing of each year's curriculum at the Ecole des Chartes, the titles of students' theses, and oral and written exam questions.

What also impresses me is the current confidence of the French archivists in their professional identity. There is a very strong esprit de corps among these graduates of the Ecole des Chartes, who profess a proud sense of continuity with their nineteenth-century predecessors. They have, at least in theory, had a monopoly on public archives administrative positions since 1846. Their pride seems to be based on spirit more than precise knowledge about the accomplishments of those referred by one as "the real heroes of French archives." Many at the National Archives expressed to me an interest in their own history along with an acknowledgement that it has yet to be written. When I asked a recent graduate of the Ecole des Chartes about just how the very historical principle of "respect des fonds" figures into classes at the Ecole des Chartes, he replies that "respect des fonds" was something he learned about on the job, not at school. Another one claimed he had never heard of Messieurs Camus and Daunou. Apocraphyl overstatements for an American visitor? Maybe, but then again my impression is that nineteenth-century French archival history is perhaps too recent for the personal interest of the medievalists who are by training the majority of French archivists.

I will conclude by noting that while the French archives lend themselves well to their own history, by the volume of evidence so well described in their standardized, published guides, they do challenge the historian with the clues they leave of a tremendously complex denouement of periods and political alliances of their own type. Ultimately, these complexities must shape my dissertation. I must address the fateful alliances of archivists, who would gain or lose appointments by association, in some cases by refusing to

pledge loyalty to the new regime; I must monitor the shift in efforts to centralize, abiding by provenance or not, matched by the resistance of local determination or inertia; I must consider the political reasoning behind the shift from item-level analysis of medieval documents to repository-level guides; I must measure the affect of a strong push for assimilation into the profession by first the Ecole des Chartes and then the alumni association of that school. Hopefully the end result of the effort will be a dissertation which will serve to help place archival history along side the more numerous companion studies of other administrative and cultural agencies of the past. Furthermore, it will hopefully help demonstrate that the history of archives and archivists is able to further refine our understanding of nineteenth-century administrative and cultural sensitivities to a national, public heritage.

* * *

NEWS NOTES

Managing Archives and Archival Institutions, edited by James Gregory Bradsher with a foreword by Frank Evans, was published in November by Mansell Publishing Limited (London and New York) and in this country by the University of Chicago Press. Chapter two of the book contains an essay on archival history by Bradsher and Pacifico.

Members interested in presenting papers at meetings of the roundtable or at SAA sessions, or writing pieces for this newsletter, should contact Michele Pacifico. Michele is a member of the SAA 1989 Program Committee. Also, be sure to let Michele know your professional activities.

Any individuals who wish to be added to the mailing list (and thus membership in the roundtable) should send the name and address to Michele.

The Archival History Newsletter is published in the winter and summer by the SAA Archival History Roundtable. The Roundtable Co-Chairs and Newsletter editors are: Greg Bradsher, Michele F. Pacifico, and Rodney A. Ross. Greg can be reached at the Archival Allocation and Records Evaluation Staff (NN-WS), National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. 20408, (301) 763-1083. Michele can be reached at the Program Analysis Branch (NAAP), Room 404, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC

ARCHIVAL HISTORY NEWSLETTER

page 11

20408, (202) 523-3214, and Rod can be reached at the Legislative Archives Division (NNL) National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408, (202) 523-3223. Any communications to be considered for inclusion in the newsletter should be sent to Michele by December 15 for the winter issue and by June 15 for the summer issue.

* * *