

**SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS**  
**ARCHIVAL HISTORY ROUNDTABLE**  
**NEWSLETTER**

Volume 5 No. 1

March 1990

**Annual Meeting in Seattle, September 1990**

The annual meeting of the Archival History Roundtable held September 1, 1990 in Seattle had 26 attendees. News consisted of noting that there were 85 names on the Roundtable newsletter mailing list and the Roundtable's three year plan had been submitted to the SAA Council Committee on Sections and Roundtables. The plan emphasizes the need to encourage interest in archival history through sessions at SAA meetings and elsewhere, publication of research and the possibility of a Dictionary of Archival Biography. Bob Martin reported on the progress of the SAA Library Archives Task Force mentioning that Wayne Wiegand of the University of Wisconsin has been tracing laws related to public library records and will be publishing a compendium of them in the near future.

The annual meeting had one session specifically devoted to archival history. Frank Evans chaired and Frank Cook and William Moss presented papers about the documentation of the Society of American Archivists. Cook noted the SAA Archives currently stored at the University of Wisconsin would like to accession additional SAA presidential papers (currently only 22 of the 50 years of SAA are covered) and that minutes and reports of various committees, task forces and so forth are also needed. The heart of the collection is the executive director series. William Moss's discussion of the potentialities and problems of doing an oral history of SAA included a lively discussion with the attendees and the possibility of cooperation with the Oral History Roundtable was noted.

**Greg Bradsher, Archives and the Persian Gulf:**

The major offering of the annual meeting was Greg Bradsher's fascinating talk about the Archives at Ebla. Ebla, located in modern-day Syria, was founded in 2900 B.C. Greg described the Royal Archives of Ebla which survived in the form of thousands of clay tablets after they were buried under their shelves during a fire. The archives not only provide a picture of the economy, legal basis and society of Ebla, but also a fairly detailed portrait of the life of a typical archivist at Ebla.

Greg's talk could not have been more pertinent and up-to-date as background for the events in the Persian Gulf during the past eight months. For archivists, librarians and archeologists the war, aside from its military and political ramifications, may have had permanent results in the destruction of libraries and archives in Iraq and Kuwait. As this newsletter "goes to press" there is not much publicly known of any damage to the archeological sites, the Iraq National Museum in central Baghdad or to libraries and archives in Kuwait. The Iraq National Museum contained not only one of the finest collections of ancient and Islamic art, but thousands of clay tablets and the fate of these treasures is not known yet. In addition, the Iraqi army appears to have looted the Kuwait National Museum which was the repository of thousands of artifacts including a parchment issue of an 8th Century Koran. Damage from the war was not limited to the immediate theatre of conflict, but elsewhere as the result of terrorist attacks as an arsonist destroyed some 10,000 books in the library of the French Cultural Center in Amman, Jordan. We can all hope that the Iraqi leadership stored the treasures of its National Museum in places safe from the bombing raids and that any Kuwaiti treasures looted by the Iraqi army are also safe.



The Persian Gulf has been of interest to Western Europeans and North Americans for centuries, of course, and that interest has not always centered around the energy resources to be found there. Arabic books, libraries and archives have fascinated since at least the 9th century and their survival and destruction has also been of interest, especially as Western Europeans have had a hand in that destruction at various times. Saul K. Padover in his chapter on "Muslim Libraries" in James Westfall Thompson's classic The Medieval Library (1939) discusses the rise and fate of medieval Muslim libraries. Although the Arab and Persian libraries contained mainly books, they were manuscript books and these repositories undoubtedly contained a certain number of archival materials as well. Therefore, the following quotes from Padover may be of interest:

#### **The Libraries of Baghdad:**

"Baghdad in its glory abounded with libraries. Even before the caliph al-Mamun, in the time of his father, Harun al-Rashid, the Arabian historian Omar al-Waqidi (736-811) possessed one hundred and twenty camel loads of books'...The scholar al-Baiquani (1033) had so many books that it required sixty-three hampers and two trunks to transport them. Another famous bibliophile was Mohammed ben al-Husain of Haditha, who was a friend of the author of the Fihrist (Note: a list of libraries and books compiled about 987). His collection of rare manuscripts was so precious that it was kept under lock and key...'All told, Baghdad possessed thirty-six libraries. The last library was that of the last vizier, Ibn al-Alkani, who owned 10,000 books. It perished during the sack of the city by the Mongols in 1258, when every other library was destroyed. Baghdad also had over a hundred book-dealers, who did business on stalls or in the bazaars and were stationers who sold paper, ink, pens, etc. Some of these were publishers, too, who maintained a corps of expert copyists who worked in a scriptorium."

#### **The Destruction of Arabic Libraries in Western Islam:**

"Before the middle of the thirteenth century the most valuable material in Islamic libraries had been acquired by European scholarship in the form of translation. It was just in time...for the Mohammedan East was nearly destroyed by the invasions of the Mongols in the middle of the thirteenth century and did not begin to recover until the rise of the Ottoman Turks in the fifteenth century. In the West a longer duration to Islam was granted. The expulsion of the Moors from Spain in 1492 was followed by a holocaust of thousands of Arabic books. What books were saved found lodgment in libraries in Fez or Tunis. In the sack of Tunis in 1536 by the emperor Charles V, all books written in Arabic were burned. Spain was so stripped of Arabic manuscripts that, when Philip II founded the Escorial, no Arabic manuscripts could be found in the kingdom. Fortunately, the capture of a Moroccan galley in which a considerable number of Arabic books and manuscripts was found relieved the royal librarian's embarrassment. But in June, 1674, fire broke out in the Escorial and destroyed 8,000 Arabic books. A century later, when Michael Casiri began to catalogue the Arabic collection in the Escorial, he found only 1,824 manuscripts---forlorn survivors, perhaps, of the once great libraries of Cordova.

#### **Sessions at Philadelphia**

The Archival History Roundtable is scheduled to meet on September 28, 3:30-5:30 p.m.. If you have any suggestions for topics for discussion or are interested in presenting a paper about archival history research, please call or write to Jim Corsaro.

#### **Archival History at SAA/ICA/ACA in Montreal:**

It is not too early to begin to think about potential archival history sessions for the Montreal meeting coming up in the Fall 1992. Perhaps joint papers on archival history in the United States and Canada or about archival development in a province and a state, say Quebec and one or two states? Anyone interested or have any other suggestions?

### New Publications of Interest:

You may find something of interest in the following several recent publications. Those listed are chiefly about archival history, although a few are mentioned for their applicability to archival history.

Cain, Piers. "Robert Smith and the Reform of the Archives of the City of London, 1580-1623," in The London Journal: A Review of Metropolitan Society Past and Present, v.13, no.1, 1987-1998.

Cook, Terry G.. "Paper Trails: Northern Records and Northern Administration, 1898-1958" in K. Coates and W.R. Morrison, eds. For Purposes of Dominion: Essays in Honour of Morris Zaslow, Toronto, 1989.

Cox, Richard. American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States, Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1990.

Craig, Barbara L.. "Hospital Records and Record-Keeping, c.1850-c.1950" in Archivaria, nos. 29-30, parts 1-2, Winter 1989-1990 and Summer 1990.

Dain, Phyllis and John Y. Cole. Libraries and Scholarly Communication in the United States: The Historical Dimension. New York: Greenwood Press, 1990. See chapter by Neal Harris on "Special Collections and Academic Scholarship: A Tangled Relationship."

Evans, Frank. "Archives," in International Encyclopedia of Communications, Oxford University Press, 1989, v.1, pp. 105-108.

Evans, Frank. "The Organization and Status of Archival Training: An Historical Perspective," in Archivum, v. 34, 1988, pp. 75-91.

Higginbotham, Barbara Buckner. "The "Brittle Books Problem": A Turn-of-the-Century Perspective," in Libraries and Culture, v.25, no. 4, Fall 1990.

Higginbotham, Barbara Buckner. Our Past Preserved: A History of American Library Preservation 1876-1910, Boston: G.K. Hall, 1990.

Koucky, Judith A., ed.. Proceedings: Second European Conference on Archives, Ann Arbor: International Council on Archives, 1990. See: papers by J. Peter Sigmond on "Divergences and Convergences of Archives: A European Looks at North America" and Francis X. Blouin on "Convergences and Divergences in Archival Tradition: A North American Perspective."

McDonald, Larry. "Forgotten Forebears: Concerns with Preservation, 1876 to World War I," in Libraries and Culture, v. 25, no. 4, Fall 1990.

Ross, Rodney. "Thoughts on Administrative Histories: A Preliminary Report, Part I," in Indian Archives, v. 37, no. 1, January-June 1988 (forthcoming).

Yates, JoAnne. Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

### Membership in the Archival History Roundtable

Because of the increasing membership of the roundtable and the subsequent cost of copying and mailing newsletters, I would appreciate it if you would complete the attached flyer and return it to me as soon as possible.



I wish to remain on the mailing list of the Archival History Roundtable to receive the newsletter.  
My name and address is:

Name:

Title:

Institution:

Mailing Address:

Street:

City/State:

Zip Code:

Return to: James Corsaro  
Manuscripts and Special Collections  
New York State Library  
Empire State Plaza  
Albany, New York 12230

I have the following suggestions for the newsletter and other archival history activities such as sessions at SAA annual meetings: