



The American Archivist Reviews

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Oestreicher, Cheryl, ed. "*Provenance XXXI, Issue 1, Special Issue on Advocacy*,"
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<http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/provenance/vol31/iss1/>

Sometimes the best choice between solutions A and B is actually solution C. The trick is finding C—and letting go of A and B. A special issue of *Provenance*, dedicated to the advocacy efforts surrounding the near de-funding of the Georgia Archives, demonstrates this principle quite effectively. After a series of slashed annual budgets, the initial goal of the campaign was to restore funding to the department under the auspices of the Secretary of State. However, the most viable solution to saving the mission of the program turned out to be accepting an offer to transfer the entire operation to the University System of Georgia.

Many archivists, this reviewer included, first became aware of this situation from Society of American Archivists bulletins, and subsequently via outlets like the Facebook page "Georgians Against Closing State Archives." From the outset, it was clear that the archives profession would be witness not simply to another devastating joust between politics and funding levels on the one hand, and, on the other, long term preservation needs and access to documentation of citizens' rights and culture. The difference was that this perennial dilemma would now take place on the 21st century playing fields of social media and awareness of archival advocacy.

The authors in this volume include the then State Archivist, representatives from the Society of Georgia Archives, the Friends of Georgia Archives and History (FOGAH), the Georgia Genealogical Society, and the Coalition to Preserve the Georgia Archives (comprised of members of many of these same groups). Each

relates their part in, and perception of, the campaign to save the Archives, as it unfolded. Former State Archivist David Carmicheal's account is particularly frank concerning the evolution of the Archives as a political football. Concluding the issue is a study by the SAA Issues and Advocacy Round Table (IART) concerning archivists' perceptions of advocacy as a concept, and uses of advocacy techniques.

According to the accounts presented here, keys to the success of this advocacy effort were:

- A broad base of support
- Use of social media and all available PR outlets
- Hiring of a public relations professional to coordinate final efforts
- Advice of that professional to focus on one message: the support of all parties for the University of Georgia University System Regents' offer to incorporate the Archives
- The remarkable ability of all parties to accept the wisdom of this solution, though it might not have been anyone's first choice.

When FOGAH retained the services of a governmental affairs consulting firm late in 2012, a corner was turned. Archival supporters had built the necessary advocacy network. The public had been educated, the relevant professional groups alerted and mustered, facts gathered and rallies held. Now, the consultants were able to look at the situation and give sound professional advice as to which efforts would keep the archives alive in some form (staying on one message and recognizing the viability of the University's offer) and which would not (diluting the focus by stressing the general value of archives to society, or being wedded to the archives remaining in its previous home).

Interestingly, in the IART's advocacy questionnaire neither the option of hiring outside experts, nor the availability of PR expertise within one's larger institution is

ever raised. If the situation were reversed an archivist, learning of organizational records in disarray, would think to themselves: “hire an archivist!”

Ultimately, this publication will be of greatest use in an academic or workshop setting, as a case study on archival advocacy. To a lesser extent, it will be valuable to archivists encountering their own support crises, but as this is very much a blow-by-blow account, rather than a manual, it may be frustrating for such readers.

The inclusion of an overall timeline for the fate of the Archives would have been very helpful. It would also have been nice to include some reproduction of the “emergency deck” of informational slides used with legislators, as well as Facebook posts, Twitter feed items, and change.org petitions to illustrate the extraordinary PR efforts employed. And, it is unfortunate that, while several authors, and many survey respondents, refer to Larry Hackman’s recent publication *Many Happy Returns: Advocacy and the Development of Archives* (2011), no one mentions SAA’s advocacy workshop, taught by current SAA Vice President Kathleen Roe. Also, the inclusion of the final article on archival advocacy in a broader context, seems out of place. It is academic while the others are pragmatic, general while they are specific.

Overall, this is a wonderful primary document: it contains accounts from most of the major players and will give future generations an excellent view into this potential disaster and its eventual resolution. At the time of this review, the proposed Archives budget for the next fiscal year has been increased beyond supporters’ projections; certainly an encouraging sign!

¹ Hackman, Larry J. *Many Happy Returns: Advocacy and the Development of Archives*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011.