

Archival History Roundtable Newsletter

Summer, 1999

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Archival History Round Table Meeting

Two papers on different aspects of archival history will be presented at the 1999 Archival History Round Table meeting. A.J. DuFresne of The Archives Company will review the development of funding programs for governmental archives in recent years. He will discuss how state law circumscribes and impacts the ability of archives to raise self-generated funds. The second paper will be presented by Ellen Engseth of North Park, Illinois. The title of her papers is "Concern for the Public Record: Federal Records and the 1810 Committee on Archives." The author says, "The paper will consider the development of federal archives in the late 18th and 19th centuries, highlighting a Committee to Inquire into the State of the Archives, and will explore the experience of the United States by placing it within the context of contemporary France and Great Britain."

The Archival History Round Table is scheduled to meet Saturday, 28 August, 8:45 - 10:45 in the Pittsburgh Hilton.

Session on History and Development of State Archives at SAA Meeting in Orlando

At the 1998 SAA meeting there was a session on the development of state archives. Leon Stout, Pennsylvania State University, submitted the proposal to the SAA Program Committee with the endorsement of the Archival History Round table. Speakers were Lee Stout on the Pennsylvania archives, Jeff Jakeman of Auburn University on the Alabama archives, and Martha Clark of the Massachusetts State Archives on her institution. The session was chaired by Roland M. Baumann of the Oberlin College Archives.

Good information was given concerning writings on the subject of state archives. The section below contains excerpts from Mr. Baumann's introductory comments.

Introduction to SAA Session

Ernest Posner's *American State Archives*, published by the University of Chicago Press in 1964, is undoubtedly the most important single book to be written on state archives in the U.S.

In the opening paragraph to Chapter 1 ("The Genesis and Evolution of American State Archives"), Posner lays out the challenge for himself and for state archives professionals:

"To write a full history of the development of American state archives would require many and detailed preliminary studies. The record-making and record-keeping practices of colonial America should be investigated, with particular attention to their relationship to the practices of the respective mother countries; so should the practices of the states during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We also need histories of

individual archival agencies, their struggles, and their achievements. For the purposes of the present volume, however, it is hoped that the following historical sketch may serve to identify the main forces that have shaped the American state archives of today."

Posner's historical study, along with his clear guidelines on how to effect good programs, was well received by all accounts.

"The truth is that," writes book reviewer L.H. Butterfield in the April 1965 *American Archivist*, our individualistic society contains too many examples of "neglected and bungled business." Those that were mentioned in Posner's study are enough to depress anyone who cares about the development of state archives.

Of course, he adds, "the caring for public records," like conserving natural resources, "is both everybody's business and nobody's business." The significance of Posner's book is in its "overwhelming demonstration that no state can afford not to have such programs, grounded in law, adequately supported, and professionally administered."

Posner's call for the writing of state archival history moved forward slowly. Ten years after the publication of Posner's report Frank Evans was able to list only 69 new titles under section 27, covering 30 states, in his *Modern Archives and Manuscripts: A Selected Bibliography* (1975). These titles, mostly modest articles, also appeared in what I might describe as lesser publication enterprises. *continue on page 2*

Archival History Round Table

This newsletter reviews several of the sessions at the SAA conference in Orlando which delved into archival history. The Round Table meeting had two excellent presentations on very different topics. Jim Sickinger of the Classics Department at Florida State University gave a paper on archives in ancient Athens. Donnelly Lancaster, Auburn University, read a paper on the career of Margaret Cross Norton before she became Director of the Illinois State Archives. [A synopsis of this paper is elsewhere in the newsletter.] Ms. Lancaster had written the paper for a class taught by AHRT member Jeff Jakeman.

One of the conference sessions reviewed the development of state archival programs in three different states. Lee Stout spoke on Pennsylvania; Jeff Jakeman on Alabama, and Martha Clark on Massachusetts. The commentary presented by the chair Roland Baumann discussed the bibliography of studies on state archives. Excerpts from his introductory comments are in this newsletter. Jeff Jakeman referred to another article which should be noted by those interested in archival history. His comments on that article are noted in the newsletter section on the session.

Finally, it is time for a new chairman to lead this Round Table. Since its founding in the mid 1980s, chairs have usually held that position for four years. This will be my fourth year so it is time for a change. Currently the chair plans the Round Table meeting at the SAA conference and sends a newsletter to the membership. Several projects have been suggested for the Round Table over the years but none have been undertaken. Among these are an oral history program focusing on how the profession and practice of archives has evolved in the 20th century; a bibliography of writings on archival history; or a list of writings on archives which have become "classics."

If you are interested in becoming chair of the Round Table, please contact me or talk with me at the Pittsburgh meeting.

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Session on History and Development - cont.

Some good exceptions exist, however. Between 1965 and 1974 the American Archivist published eleven articles (or one/year) dealing with the history of state archival programming.

One of the more interesting pieces to appear in AA (April, 1965) was "Archival Standards and the Posner Report: Some Reflection on the Historical Society Approach," written by the young F. Gerald Ham.

Serious writing on state archival programming was not taken up by the state archival community until the mid 1980s. In "Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the State," edited by Lisa B. Weber (Albany, NY, NAGARA, 1984), readers will find reviewed the first twenty assessment reports prepared under NHPRC grants.

Remember the 12 million dollars expended by NHPRC between 1975 and 1983 was to save endangered records and to stimulate laggard state archival programs.

Ed Bridges not only concluded that archives "are in an impoverished condition," but also recommended for us all the archetype of an independent state agency/commission. As you may well remember, Richard Cox lamented over the "lack of leadership" in the Society of American Archivists to support public records programming.

The summaries, of what happened since the Posner Report, were prepared by Ed Bridges, Richard Cox, William Joyce, and Margaret Child. This update was followed shortly thereafter by pieces written by Larry Hackman in the Public Historian in 1985 and 1986, respectively. Hackman's "A Perspective on American Archives" is the most important. The advocacy documents of the 1980s, however, lacked the scope and depth of the Posner Report.

More recently Bruce W. Dearstyne edited a special issue on State Archival Programs for the American Archivist 60:2 (Spring, 1997). Dearstyne was also the editor of the 1986 special issue for the Public Historian.

As a former member of the State Archival Community I was glad to see this special issue because in recent years so little has been published by SAA with respect to state government records programming.

In the event that you seek summary background on the development and evolution of state archives and records management programs, may I suggest that you read Vicki Walch's "State Archives in 1997: Diverse Conditions, Common Directions," appearing in this same Spring 1997 issue of the American Archivist.

Fortunately the Spring 1997 issue of the American Archivist did not survey state archival programs as a whole, like most of the previous studies. Instead, editor Dearstyne asked that eight articles be written focusing on the growth of a number of dynamic programs (Delaware and South Carolina) and on the response of state archives to the challenge of electronic records, intergovernmental cooperation, records initiatives, and archival change in general. *continue on page 3*

Session on History and Development - cont.

In a way this session ("State Archives South and North: The Development of Archival Archetypes") constitutes a continuous thread with the Posner Report, the advocacy pieces of the 1980s, and the 1997 Dearstyne special issue that followed.

But, our SAA session actually goes beyond all of this in issuing the call to state archival agencies to celebrate forthcoming anniversaries.

In doing so I would appeal to the writers to make use of the departmental administrative files....

In closing this introduction please let me offer this additional comment in assuming the task of writing these histories you will learn much about where the road(s) traveled by state archival programs, the mix of institutional and professional issues, and in the process you may also extract some new funding from your resource allocators.

L.H. Butterfield surmised in 1964 that when it comes to supporting state archives, self-government is "a venture as yet unproved."

In his talk on the Alabama Department of Archives and History, Jeff Jakeman used a model proposed by Terry

Eastwood as a framework for examining the history of the state archives. The three phases of the Eastwood model (from p. 29) are:

1. "...the rescue of historical materials, usually seen to be at risk and valuable primarily as cultural artifacts."
2. establishment of "the legal authority and institutional infrastructure of archives"
3. "...managing, maintaining, and perfecting the authority and infrastructure."

According to Jakeman "Eastwood concludes by speculating on what may be the fourth (and yet unrealized) phase of archival development: overcoming the 'formidable obstacles in the way of realizing archives as arsenals of democratic accountability and continuity.'" (p. 38) [Terence M. Eastwood, "Reflections on the Development of Archives in Canada and Australia," in Archival Documents: Providing Accountability through Recordkeeping, eds. Sue McKemmish and Frank Upward, Melbourne, Australia: Ancora Press, 1993: pp. 27-39]

This model seemed applicable to the experience of state archives in the other states considered.

Abstract: Before Archives: Margaret Cross Norton's "Family, Education, and Early Career"

This is a synopsis of the paper read by Donnelly Lancaster of Auburn University at the Archival History Round Table meeting in Orlando.

Due to her achievements at the Archives Division of the Illinois State Library and her contributions to the Society of American Archivists and other professional organizations, Margaret Cross Norton is regarded as a significant early American archivist. This study examines Norton's life before 1922 when she began her career in Illinois and identifies early experiences that later influenced her archival career. Norton herself claimed that her family's work with and respect for government records had the greatest effect on her archival career. Norton's father was Deputy County Clerk of Winnebago County, Illinois, and her mother, until Margaret's birth, was Deputy County Treasurer. As a child Norton played at her father's office, and at home she listened to her family discuss county business. Thus her childhood was spent gaining knowledge of the creation and use of government records.

Norton attended the University of Chicago, and by 1914 she had graduated with a master's degree in history. When Norton entered college in 1909, there were primarily two contrasting types of female students. One type of female student embraced the co-educational lifestyle and welcomed the prospect of marriage. The other type, fewer in number, followed the older generation of female students and approached education more seriously, hoping for a successful career and without husband and family. Perhaps Norton, who never married nor left any evidence that mentioned a romantic involvement, was one of those female students who were influenced by older ideals.

Like all female students in her generation, Norton had to answer the question, "After college, what?" Norton wanted a career, but she was uncertain of the career choice. Norton believed she had three career options: nurse, teacher, or librarian. She omitted the other feminized profession, social worker, from her list. Despite their differences, these professions shared one common characteristic: they offered women of the Progressive period few opportunities for advancement and little prestige. Rather than pursue a non-traditional career, such as medicine or law, Norton chose the path of least resistance which at the same time seemed reasonably interesting to her. Although Norton held a graduate degree in history, she decided, following the advice of teacher, to enter the library profession.

After her 1915 graduation from the New York State Library School, Norton began work as an assistant cataloguer at the Vassar College Library. Performing perhaps the duller task in library work, Norton grew increasingly disenchanted with librarianship. Although she was a librarian, she continued her interest in history, and in December of 1915 attended the national meeting of the American Historical Association. When she heard Waldo J. Leland and Leo F. Stock of the Carnegie Institute give a presentation on the dismal condition of American federal archives, Norton wanted to become an archivist. She discussed her aspirations with Lucy Maynard Salmon, head of the Vassar history department, who advised her to prepare herself for any opportunity by reading books and articles on archival subjects. *continue on page 4*

Abstract: Before Archives: Margaret Cross Norton's "Family, Education, and Early Career" cont.

Three years later Norton left the Vassar Library for a two year fellowship in history at the University of Chicago. During her two free summers she calendared manuscript collections at the Indiana State Library. By 1920 her fellowship ended, and she had completed the residency requirements for a Ph.D. in history. Delaying the completion of her doctoral thesis, she then found a position as a cataloguer at the State Historical Society of Missouri. Norton enjoyed her work in Missouri, but in late 1921 she applied for a position in the Archives Division of the Illinois State Library.

- The Illinois Secretary of State informed her the Illinois
- General Assembly had recently created the Archives
- Division, and she would be its only employee. Until then,
- Norton had assumed the job involved supervising a small,
- established department; she was alarmed to think she would
- have to create a division herself. In spite of her doubts,
- Norton accepted the position and convinced herself she was
- prepared for the challenge. In her archival career Norton
- drew on a wide base of knowledge from her historical and
- library training, but her childhood experiences provided the
- most fundamental knowledge that would later influence her
- career.

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