

the

AMERICAN ARCHIVIST



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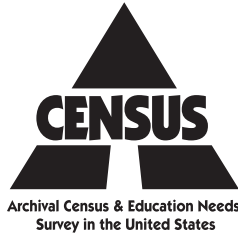
Ronald Reagan kept a jar of jelly beans in the Oval Office and passed it around during Cabinet meetings. But these colorful beans are bipartisan and they represent you—and other members of the archival profession who wanted to “be counted”—in the 2004 Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States (A*CENSUS). The A*CENSUS results, summarized in a special section in this issue, present an extraordinary example of profession-wide research. Vicki Walch, Elizabeth Yakel, Jeannette Bastian, Nancy Zimmelman, Brenda Banks, Susan Davis, and Anne Diffendal provide their analysis of the first survey taken in nearly 30 years. (Cover design courtesy of Matt Dufek.)

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FROM THE EDITOR

Mary Jo Pugh

Archival Research

The dramatic expansion of research is one of the most important developments in the profession in recent decades. As a professional journal, the *American Archivist* brings the results of three types of research—practice-based, university-based, and profession-wide—to practitioners, educators, students, researchers, and related professions.

Mark A. Greene and Dennis Meissner published “More Product, Less Process: Revamping Traditional Archival Processing” in *American Archivist* 68 (Fall/Winter 2005), certainly one of the most provocative practice-based research articles published in recent years. Their research was first presented at the SAA annual meeting in 2004 in a session titled “Real-World Archives: Reports from the 2003-2004 NHPRC Archival Research Fellows.” After publication, it sparked substantive discussion on the Archives and Archivists Listserv.

Program committees from several archival associations recognized widespread interest in this research. At the 2005 SAA annual meeting, the session “‘More Product, Less Process’: New Processing Guidelines to Reduce Backlogs” explored practical applications of this research, and in 2006 an SAA session considered “‘More Product’ in the Image Archives: Applying Minimal Processing Guidelines to Visual Materials Collections.” At the 2006 annual meeting of the Society of California Archivists, attendees packed a room for the session “Busting the Backlog.” The Midwest Archives Conference devoted a day and a half in its first Fall Symposium in 2006 to the background, practice, and implications of applying the “More Product, Less Process” guidelines. The Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference presented a session, “More Product, Less Processing in the Real World” at its fall 2006 program.

To add to the published literature about minimal processing, this issue features Christine Weideman’s and Donna E. McCrea’s case studies from the 2005 SAA annual meeting. These case studies are fine examples of research grounded in the day-to-day practice of the archival profession. The authors are to be commended for sharing their experiences. Although practitioners often find it difficult to conduct more extensive practice-based research, some financial support is

available to provide the time to aid practitioners in this effort. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission supported the Greene-Meissner research. Succeeding the Mellon Fellowships at the Bentley Historical Library, the NHPRC funds research fellowships. Now funded as the National Historical Publications and Records Commission Electronic Records Research Fellowships at the University of North Carolina, these NHPRC research fellowships are “designed to support broad participation in the research process among archival practitioners and collaboration between archivists and academics.” The program awards four \$15,000 grants each year to archivists and records professionals who wish to conduct electronic records research and explore related issues “to facilitate both basic and applied research regarding all aspects of electronic records.”¹ At least one manuscript from this research program has been submitted to the *American Archivist* and I hope that we will see more. According to the A*CENSUS, 1.9 percent of respondents received NHPRC fellowships, which means that at least 109 practicing archivists have received support for research from this source!

Universities provide time and resources for both faculty and students to do theoretical and applied research that may be difficult for practitioners due to time and resource constraints. Such academic research was ably represented in the last issue of *American Archivist* by faculty and students from the University of Michigan, the University of Toronto, and the University of Texas-Austin. SAA’s annual Theodore Calvin Pease Award recognizes superior writing achievement by students such as, in the last issue, Ian Craig Breaden from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and, forthcoming in the spring issue, Ben Blake from the University of Pittsburgh. Universities will be represented again in forthcoming issues.

The A*CENSUS (Archival Census and Education Needs Survey in the United States), summarized in this issue, presents an extraordinary example of profession-wide research. Funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), it focuses on topics of interest to the Institute in preparing the next generation of archivists, such as education and training, credentials, aging of the profession, diversity, and leadership, as well as surveying the profession as called for by the SAA Council. As Vicki Walch, principal research consultant, notes, the A*CENSUS was one of three such wide-ranging surveys sent to the American archival community in 2004. The second, the Heritage Health Index (HHI) survey, also supported by the IMLS, issued its final report, *A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America’s Collections*, in December 2005.² It surveyed 15,000 repositories nationwide and provides

¹ See <http://www.ils.unc.edu/nhprcfellows/> for more information. Accessed 30 Oct. 2006.

² Heritage Preservation (Washington D.C.) Report can also be found at <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/HHI/index.html>. Accessed 23 October 2006.

“a comprehensive picture of the condition and preservation needs of this country’s collections.” It received responses from 3,370 archives, historical societies, libraries, museums, and scientific organizations. Finally, the Council of State Archivists (CoSA)³ also conducted a comprehensive survey of all state archives and records programs and State Historical Records Advisory Boards (SHRABs) in late 2004 and early 2005. As Vicki Walch states,

Taken together, these surveys will provide a foundation for understanding and studying the individuals, institutions, and historical records that help define the archival profession in the U.S. They will contribute to each association’s understanding of the needs and priorities of its members and to each program administrator’s assessment of his or her own repository in relation to others of similar size and scope. They will also provide an abundant body of information for analysis from which articles, term papers, and theses should evolve over the next several years.

A public use data set from the A*CENSUS is now available through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan. I hope to receive further studies mining this rich resource.

Although I have not been involved in the compilation of the A*CENSUS results, I found many interesting points in the draft reports and look forward to reading the reports published here and to using the additional resources to be published on the SAA website. The *American Archivist* is, after all, a professional journal, so it’s good to understand the profession. The A*CENSUS is certainly the most comprehensive survey of individual archivists, building, in collaboration with other archival associations, a mailing list of just under 12,000 individuals, of which some 5,620 responded. A*CENSUS looks at archivists’ professional identities and affiliations with professional associations. Walch notes that the boundaries around the work done by archivists “are still very fluid,” and that many people working with archival records do not identify themselves as archivists or manuscript curators. It is good to learn, however, that “once people begin working in archives, they often become passionate about their work. A*CENSUS respondents expressed remarkably strong ties to the archival profession. . . .” Also, respondents “demonstrate an extraordinary level of participation in archival professional associations. Nearly 80% belong to a professional association serving archivists, while more than half belong to one serving another field.” A challenge for the *American Archivist* is to reach the many people who work with archival records, but do not consider themselves archivists or manuscript curators.

The consultants’ reports also offer insights for further reflection. For example, Elizabeth Yakel and Jeannette Bastian report that, “The A*CENSUS

³ CoSA was first known as the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators (COSHRC). The organization changed its name to the Council of State Archivists, in October 2005.

results overwhelmingly demonstrate a strengthening relationship between graduate education and the archival profession primarily expressed through the increasing recognition of the Master's, degree as a necessary requirement for entry into the archival profession." Nancy Zimmelman notes that "more advanced or specialized training will be needed in the future as those entering the profession are coming into the field with greater knowledge and skills acquired from graduate education." As she further notes, "The increased knowledge and skills of entry-level archivists, manuscript curators, and others working with archival records affects continuing education in that more emphasis will need to be placed on more advanced or specialized topics than on what could be characterized as 'basic' core education."⁴ The *American Archivist* has published cutting-edge research in the areas that the respondents indicated they would most like to learn about: new technologies including digitization, electronic records, digital media/asset management, and website creation/management. See, for example, in the last issue, "Building Preservation Environments with Data Grid Technology" and "'The Old Version Flickers More': Digital Preservation from the User's Perspective." More manuscripts relating to these topics are in the pipeline.

Brenda Banks underscores the importance of the SAA strategic initiative to build diversity in the profession. The *American Archivist* Editorial Board has expressed particular interest in articles about all aspects of diversity. We hope to include a diversity section in a future issue of *American Archivist* and encourage submission of manuscripts on this topic. Susan Davis reports that 27 percent of respondents had authored an archival publication. The *American Archivist* Editorial Board hopes to encourage a culture of active research and publication in the profession. The range of the book reviews so ably compiled by Jeannette Bastian provides another example of research and growth of the profession.

I am delighted to report on the support I have received for the *American Archivist*, especially the substantial increase in the number of papers submitted for consideration. The last issue was 40 percent larger than initially planned, and the SAA Council has budgeted increased pages for the journal. The Editorial Board has devoted time and energy to the work of the journal, undertaking several significant initiatives. Most important perhaps is the work of the subcommittees to publish the *American Archivist* online as well as in print. The board is also planning to conduct a readership survey to learn what the profession wants to see in its journal and how it wants it presented.

Because of editing errors, the following acknowledgments were not published as part of the article "'The Old Version Flickers More': Digital

⁴ Zimmelman notes, "There has been much debate in the profession concerning definitions of 'basic' and 'advanced' education and training. For the purposes of this analysis, 'basic' education and training is meant to include introductory, fundamental, or 'core' topics as opposed to topics that are more specialized."


Preservation from the User's Perspective," by Margaret L. Hedstrom, Christopher A. Lee, Judith S. Olson, and Clifford A. Lampe, in *American Archivist*, Vol. 69, No. 1, Spring/Summer 2006.

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The Finding Aid for the Duderstadt Papers and selected documents in MS Word format are available from the Bentley Historical Society Web Page at <http://www.umich.edu/~bhl/EAD/index.html>, accessed 30 October 2006.

* * *

We welcome your manuscripts, your letters to the Forum, and your ideas to improve the *American Archivist* and make it useful to you and the profession.



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