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Introduction

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Introduction

Karen M. Benedict

On first reading this group of articles on the international archival scene, I was struck by the degree to which advances in technology and changes in attitudes about professionalism have affected our profession over the past twenty years. Back in 1968, at my first archives job, my institution felt fortunate to have acquired IBM Selectric typewriters for the staff. Connections to the international archival community were limited to the privileged few, primarily at the National Archives, with travel budgets large enough to allow them to participate in international conferences or to visit institutions abroad.

For today's archivists, the proliferation of computer technology has changed the approach to description of collections; provided them with enormous appraisal challenges due to the geometrically growing volume of email and other computer-generated documentation; and given them both impetus and means to develop new tools to increase access to collections through the Internet. Where once archivists created programs to reach out to specified groups of poten-
tial onsite users, now archivists reach out to an unlimited worldwide community of potential users via the Web, and many of these users conduct their basic research online.

The effect of this revolution in communication transcends national borders. It has brought the entire international community of archivists together. In the past, interaction with our colleagues was limited to attendance at conferences or information exchange through books and journal articles. Now, through the Internet, an archivist in the United States can as quickly and inexpensively communicate with a colleague in Australia or New Zealand as with one living in the same city.

This issue of Provenance illustrates the wide-ranging interests of archivists and scholars in the international archival world. These articles offer us both comparisons and contrasts of the North American professional scene with that of Europe and Asia, often focusing on the impact on archives of the rapidly changing world of technology. We learn about collaborative training efforts to provide archivists with the skills needed to operate in this new environment, and cooperative efforts to develop databases and other technological tools that are needed to share information about our holdings on a worldwide basis.

Because governmental archives dominate on the world scene, and in some countries are the only archival institutions, we have analyses of the impact of political changes on national archives. We are told how events like the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the resulting development of new governments, the reunification of Germany, and the efforts of China to make major economic changes and improve relations with the West have all had a substantial effect on archives in these countries.

Dr. Ioan Drăgan, the director of the Arhivele Nationale-Directia Judetana of Cluj, Romania, provides us an overview of the development of archives in Romania from antiquity to the present. Drăgan discusses how Romanian archivists were influenced by the development of modern ar-
chival theory in Germany and France. It is a dramatic narrative of the impact of war and changes of regime on the archives of a country. The Communist takeover in 1951 led to a change in administration of archives from the Ministry of Culture to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The educational and cultural functions of the archives were subsumed by the administrative role taken by the state to control all public, governmental, and private documentation. Public access to information was restricted and all contact by Romanian archival professionals to the international community was cut off. The fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent resumption of contact with the rest of the world has made clear the problems faced by Romanian archivists. They have to find a way to address overcrowded and disintegrating facilities, limited resources, and the shortage of hardware, software, and trained technological personnel. These serious problems must be addressed in the near future in order to insure the preservation of the valuable historical resources held by Romanian archives.

Morris Bian and Robert Jakeman, associate professors of history at Auburn University, help us to understand better the structure of the regional archival community in China and its central administration by the State Archives Bureau. The authors give us an in-depth description of the holdings of the Chongqing Municipal Archives and the Yunnan Provincial Archives and analyze the operations of these institutions from the researcher's perspective. They point out that there is no free access in Chinese archives for either Chinese or foreign researchers and describe the myriad fees imposed on all researchers, although the rates are highest for foreigners. It is a glimpse of the non-Western archival traditions. The discussion by Bian and Jakeman clearly illustrates that while the Chinese archival community has made enormous strides toward adoption of more liberal policies of access to information since the end of the Cultural Revolution there are still many changes in policy that need to be made to bring them into accor-
dance with the standards of the international archival community.

Kristine Wirts, a doctoral student in early modern French history at Auburn University, contributes a guide to using the resources of the Departmental Archives in France from the perspective of an American researcher. She discusses how changes in research interests have had an impact on archival institutions and the types of collections receiving heavy use. The current research emphasis on social and cultural history has led to greater use of provincial and municipal archives in France. Wirts ably describes the French finding aid system of subject-based indexes used by the provincial archives, none of which are currently available in electronic format. She informs the reader that municipal libraries in France still rely on separate card catalogs for the description of their holdings of rare books and manuscripts. The challenge for French archivists and librarians today is to devise a national descriptive database that will integrate the bibliographic information in the current finding aids and provide all users with broader access to these valuable research materials.

Russel Lemmons, associate professor of history at Jacksonville State University, Alabama, discusses his research experience in Germany during the time that the Federal Archives of East and West Germany were being united. Lemmons describes the problems encountered by archivists trying to establish ethical and reasonable access policies to extremely sensitive records from East Germany’s State Security Service or Stasi. We learn how the Reunification Committee created a commission headed by Joachim Gauck, the former chairman of East Germany’s Parliamentary Committee on the Stasi, to manage this collection of records. The article raises the problems faced by German archivists in reconciling the desire and need to provide public access to previously restricted information with the very strict privacy laws that prevail in Germany. As in the case of other former eastern bloc countries, the archives of the
former East Germany illustrate how the paucity of resources allocated for archives that were closed to research has left a legacy of poorly maintained facilities and important collections of records imperiled by environmental shortcomings. German archivists, along with colleagues around the world, face the need to create priorities for solving these problems and to determine how best to allocate the resources that are available.

Peter Carini and Kara Drake, respectively the director of Archives and Special Collections at Mount Holyoke College and former foreign policy archivist at the John F. Kennedy Library, provide an engagingly written description of the former Soviet Republic of Georgia and the problems faced by Georgian archivists as they struggle to improve the situation at the Georgian National Archives after it has suffered from decades of neglect. The authors put the current situation into perspective by providing historical background along with a vivid description of current conditions. This is a fascinating and sobering account of a committed group of North American archivists and scholars attempting to provide technological assistance to create a descriptive database of holdings that will increase access to the valuable documentary resources of the Georgian National Archives and to improve the technical skills of the professional staff that is essential to maintenance and to ongoing development of such a database.

Alfred Lemmon, director of the Williams Research Center of The Historic New Orleans Collection, describes the institution’s longstanding program for the acquisition of microfilm resources from France, Spain, and Cuba to document New Orleans and the region’s European heritage. The inception of the program was in the 1950s, when General L. Kemper Williams and his wife, founders of the collection, began acquiring microfilm copies of foreign documents pertaining to the region’s history and development. Lemmon puts the research value of these materials into perspective and focuses on the marketing and outreach pro-
grams that the Williams Research Center has developed to promote their use. While he offers us insight into what constitutes a successful outreach program to inform the public about an institution's holdings on microfilm, we realize the international components to his institution's marketing brings its patrons and staff members into the global community as well.

David B. Gracy II, Rebecca E. Kyle, Erin R. Lawrimore, Rebecca E. Romanchuk, and Stephen A. Naron of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Texas at Austin provide the reader with an illustrated tour of archives around the world in "Where Function Meets Form: Observations and Thoughts on Housing for the Archival Enterprise." Professor Gracy, who in addition to his American accomplishments, is a well-known figure in the international archival community, utilizes twenty-two years of experience visiting archival facilities in Asia, Europe, South America, and the Pacific Rim to provide us with an analysis of ten archival structures in Brazil, China, England, Italy, Spain and Russia. There are only a handful of articles that feature the planning of buildings and facilities for archives, so the authors provide a valuable introduction to the variety of structures that comprise archival architecture in the world.

Gracy et al. begin their analysis of these buildings from the basic architectural principle that form should follow function; in other words, the design of a building should facilitate the activities of its inhabitants. The authors discuss how optimal design of archival facilities must take into account the appropriate allocation of space for various functions including processing and storage, the need for environmental controls and security, as well as providing adequate space for public service activities. To assist the reader in assessing the design features of different structures, the article establishes three categories of buildings: (1) Purpose-built for single use, (2) Purpose-built for multiple use, and (3) Buildings constructed for another pur-
pose and adapted or renovated for archival use. The specific archives described have been selected because they exemplify the oldest, best, or first example of the categories defined by Gracy.

The article concludes with a brief description of what the authors refer to as “notable facilities in the United States” which include both purpose-built archives and adaptations of buildings or space within buildings. The short list of purpose-built facilities includes: The Public Record Office in Williamsburg, Virginia; Archives I in Washington, D.C.; Archives II in College Park, Maryland; The Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum in Austin, Texas; and The Massachusetts State Archives in Boston in the purpose-built category. Numerous examples also are given of renovated facilities and multipurpose buildings with archives as part of the original design.

In conclusion I would like to address briefly the question of why this issue of Provenance is significant. Articles often appear in American Archivist dealing with international archival matters and to a lesser extent in the regional journals. The SAA newsletter has a regular column, now edited by Tom Connors, devoted to timely discussion of international information and issues. In 1992 SAA published an issue (vol. 55, no.1) of American Archivist dedicated to European Archives in an Era of Change, edited by Marjorie Rabe Barritt and Nancy Bartlett with an introduction by Jean Favier, then president of the International Council on Archives. That issue marked the longstanding traditions and standards that European archivists had set forth for their North American counterparts and the sweeping administrative and technological transformations revolutionizing the profession in Europe toward the end of the twentieth century. Having an entire issue of a journal on international archival matters gives the reader a valuable opportunity to read in greater depth and provides a comparative framework for analyses of the issues that transcend national borders.
Nearly ten years later, the appearance of the regional journal *Provenance* fully dedicated to an international issue symbolizes the growing interest in international archival cooperation and a decline in provincialism in the North American archival profession. American archivists are increasingly aware that we are regarded as important leaders in the world of archival theory and practice and as such we have an obligation to play a more active role in the international arena. We both have much to teach and much to learn. I hope that discussion of some of the cooperative projects that individuals and institutions have engaged in will spark an interest in more such projects in the future. It is good for all of us to step back and realize that we are a part of a much larger professional community than simply our own institution and its daily problems. It also is important to realize that many of the challenges we face are universal challenges for the profession. We are not alone. Every professional archivist is a part of the worldwide community of archives. I hope that you will read, enjoy, and learn from this compilation of articles.

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