SAA AND REGIONAL GROUPS MEET IN CHICAGO

Reported by Tom Elliott and Archie Motley

The eagerly-anticipated meeting of representatives of the various state and regional archival groups with the Council of the Society of American Archivists took place Thursday, April 12th, in Chicago. The SAA had made this session possible by assuming the travel and related expenses of a designated member from each of the state and regional groups to attend the meeting. Open to all interested persons, the meeting was attended by virtually every SAA council member and officer and by nearly all MAC council members and several other interested members of the conference. Although the meeting had an agenda, it was characterized by a free interchange among those present. All of us in attendance were greatly encouraged by this sharing of ideas--an openness which can only be of great benefit to the state and regional groups, the SAA, and everyone engaged in this field.

The session began with a discussion of the relations between the regional groups and the SAA, viewed from the standpoints of structure and program. There was agreement that the current structural situation should continue to prevail, there being no current need or desire to require the regional groups to affiliate with the SAA or to compel the individual members of the local groups to take out a membership in the national organization. It was also concurred that there is no reason for the SAA to impose any territorial or other limitations upon the regional groups in their formation and development. Dave Larson of the Ohio Historical Society then introduced a controversial affiliation plan whereby the various state and regional groups would be guaranteed representation in the governing body of the SAA, similar to the representation enjoyed by the various states in the Congress of the United States. Dave distributed copies of his proposal for study and the matter was discussed by the conferees, but after much discussion back and forth, nearly everyone decided that this was not yet the proper time for its further consideration.

A fruitful air-clearing discussion of the program relations between the SAA and the regional groups then took place. Wilfred Smith, Herb Finch and other SAA council members reaffirmed that the society will do all it can through its speakers bureau and other services to assist the regional groups in their program presentations and other undertakings. Several speakers from the regional groups averred that the SAA has not been doing all it could to facilitate various projects and programs within the profession. Howard Applegate, Elsie Freivogel and others responded by stating that archivists seeking assistance from the SAA must present their proposals to the society in sufficient time for proper evaluation before anything can be done to aid them, something they have not always done in the past. This advance notice is particularly applicable to publications and other funded endeavors. The conferees agreed that the state and regional groups have a responsibility to the SAA and that they should promote voluntary membership in the SAA whenever possible, for one can better work for the improvement of the SAA from within than without. The more representative the membership of the SAA is, the better equipped it will be to meet the needs of the entire profession. It was also agreed that the SAA should go out to identify and meet the needs of those in the field and to make it easier for archivists to participate in the SAA, rather than to take a passive role in these matters.

The comments on the program relations between the SAA and the state and regional groups led to a highly useful dialogue on the overall status of the SAA and on its future aspirations. The SAA council members who addressed themselves to these matters were not particularly optimistic in this regard, since they pointed out again and again that if the SAA is to become more viable in the profession and of more service to its members, it simply must increase its membership and enhance its operating capital. They did not confine all possibilities for improvement of the SAA to financial considerations, but

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they duly emphasized that the limited membership rolls of the SAA renders it nearly impossible for the organization to secure foundation and other moneys available to larger professional associations. And most significantly, the fact that the SAA has not yet been able to afford a full-time paid executive director compels the organization to get by on the services of officers and council members who, though highly skilled and unquestionably dedicated to their work, can only devote relatively small segments of their time to the work of the SAA.

It is quite clear from this that the SAA can make a quantum jump in the scope and depth of its work only through increased participation from those employed in archival work, and that the society urgently needs sufficient funds to employ a staff which can devote full time to the archivists' needs. Near the end of the session, Herb Finch noted rather eloquently that there is a great deal of participation and camaraderie in the SAA simply because so many who participate in it do so voluntarily as a labor of love. This is unquestionably true, but one must also bear in mind that there are many instances where certain matters and issues (such as the improvement of salaries and job security) can be met sucessfully only through a more professional, well-staffed and adequately financed approach.

The SAA council on April 13th (in response to a suggestion made during the April 12th session) agreed to conduct an open forum during the SAA's 1973 annual meeting in St. Louis this September. During this forum, interested people will be able to direct questions to SAA council members in a public session. With the SAA council and officers making themselves more accessible and publicly airing their views also, the responsibility is there for all of us to address them on matters we deem important at this Fall meeting.

MAC'S MAY MEETING

We may be a bit biased in the matter, but the MAC council feels that not only was our May meeting in Chicago our best to date, but that its program fare was of a particularly high caliber. Feedback received from those in attendance indicates the program was marked by first-rate presentations and enlightened audience participation, which made for vitally informative sessions. Without going into much detail here, since the program sessions are covered in depth on pages 11 & 12 of this newsletter, we would like to note that the success of our May meeting was in no small degree attributable to two innovative programming devices which were employed.

The new program format included the repetition of program sessions on both days of the meeting so interested people could attend more than one presentation, and our informal "specialist" sessions, the format of which greatly facilitated exchange between the available experts and those in attendance. The latter device was particularly useful, since it enabled people with various levels of professional expertise to have their questions answered and their idea considered in the same session. No doubt these two programming features will be utilized again by MAC and adopted by the SAA and other groups in the near future. We are also pleased to annouce that our evening mixer went off splendidly, affording the members of the conference a fine opportunity to get to know each other.

For the first time, we are taking the MAC show on the road out of Chicago with our next meeting scheduled for Madison, Wisconsin on Friday & Saturday, September 7-8, 1973. The superb facilities of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the State Records Center and the University of Wisconsin will make for a fine get-together in the Badger State. If you can possibly be with us then, please do so. We look forward to seeing you this Fall in Madison, where a grand time should be had by all. We would especially like to urge you to attend the dinner Friday evening. It won't be a formal (and therefore dull) banquet but rather will be a chance to share some good food and wine at the best price in town.