COMMENTARY

"POST-WATERGATE MORALITY" AND THE ARCHIVIST

The various facets of the Watergate investigations, the charges arising over 1972 campaign contributions and the allegations that special interests received favors from regulatory agencies have made clear to everyone the vital role of records in documenting actions and policies. It would be nice to think that exposure will make officials abandon illegal or improper activities, but healthy cynicism must lead to the conclusion that a more likely approach will be to attempt a more skillful cover-up.

Such a cover-up could take two forms. One, the records will be hidden more carefully from public scrutiny. Two, damaging documentation will not be created, and activities will be based on the whispered word of one conspirator to another. The first of these alternatives presents a threat to the archivist in that well-hidden files may never be "found." The second possibility is fatal, however. A conspiracy of silence would leave the archivist with a mound of paper which would not reveal, for example, the policy underlying a seemingly unimportant public act or the necessity for taking action in opposition to official policy.

How does a problem which would seem to largely involve only the Fereral Government affect MAC members? Because all of us are responsible in one way or another for preserving the official record of an institution or agency. Perhaps the documents of, let us say, a university are not earthshaking, but they are important to an understanding of educational history. If a university dean, or a governor, or a chairman of the board, or a bishop, or the head of a union, or the leader of a political group attempts to falisify the record of his or her organization's activities, either by destroying documentation or forbidding its creation, the archivist must do everything in his or her limited power to prevent it.

To the archivist, "post-Watergate morality" is not a new interpretation of old rules. The archivist is morally bound--as he or she has always been--not to determine the morality of the institution's acts but, rather, to preserve the records of those actions, however immoral.

JFC

ARCHIVES AND APPRENTICESHIPS

Archivists have long discussed the problem of standardizing qualifications for entry into the field. Some contend that extensive primary research experience and seminar-level training in history is a necessary prerequisite, that an MA in history is a minimal entry criterion, and a PhD in history is a must for "advanced" administrative positions. Others argue that archives is primarily a service field, hence training in library science with special emphasis on archival courses should be required including an MA in library science.

A third view, articulated in the main by archivists who came up through the ranks with minimal or no training in history or librarianship, maintains that archives is essentially a craft with its own requirements, and that while training in librarianship or history might be useful in certain instances, it certainly is not and should not be mandatory. Further, it is suggested that no formal training at the entry level, including even an undergraduate degree, is necessary. If archives is a craft, then the best way to learn how to be an archivist is to do archival work.

This would not, of course, preclude taking archival education courses. At the end of an appropriate period of time, the trainee-archivist would be given a comprehensive oral and written examination covering the archives field in general and his/her institution's archival functions in particular. Upon successful completion of the exam(conducted by a Master Certified Archivist), the archivist-trainee would be certified as a journey-archivist. As the journey-archivist accrued seniority, a further exam would allow entry into the Master ranks of the craft. The certification process and apprenticeship program would be administered by the SAA in conjunction with the various regional organizations.

This proposal seems, at first appearance, to be a radical departure from the current norms of the field. Upon closer examination, however, one discerns that there are no current norms. The apprenticeship approach to certification of archival competance is based upon the premise that one acquires expertise in the craft through actual on-the-job work. Proposals of this nature must be given consideration if we are seriously interested in maintaining and improving the quality of the craft of archives in an increasingly unstable job market.

Patrick M. Quinn

systems designed to insure their safety and longevity. The internal temperature and humidity of the building are maintained at a constant state. Fire protection in the stack area is entrusted to an unusual Halon gas system. A bromine compound which has the capacity to combine chemically with the products of combustion and extinguish any fire almost instantaneously without hazard to materials or people is stored under high pressure in large globes under the stack roof. Smoke detectors throughout the stacks can trigger the release of the gas. When the building is closed it is protected by a remote control security system linked by computer to The University of Michigan Security Office.

The total cost of construction was $1,300,000 with an additional $120,000 invested in furnishing. R.T. Mitchell Construction Co. of Ann Arbor was the contractor. Construction began at the end of July 1972 with a formal groundbreaking on August 2, 1972. The cornerstone was laid November 17, and the move into the new library was completed by November 15, 1973. Dedication of the building will take place on May 2, 1974.

ATTENTION/ATTENTION
SUPER-NEWS NOTE

MAC dues are due! Dues for 1974-75 are due on May 1. Please note that MAC has raised the yearly dues from $2.00 to $3.00. Make your checks payable to the Midwest Archives Conference and mail to: Ms. Mary Ann Bamberger, MAC Secretary-Treasurer, The University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, The Library, (Box 8198), Chicago, Illinois 60680.

$58,000 HISTORIC RIP OFF. (AP) One of the many historic markers scattered throughout the eastern states proclaiming 'George Washington slept here' turned out to be phony and very expensive. Restoration had begun on Bucks Tavern in Delaware when Dr. Ronald Finch, director of Historical Affairs for Delaware, discovered it had been built in 1820 about 21 years too late for Washington to have been there. Washington died in 1799.

ETHICS AND THE ARCHIVIST CONT.

National Archives had been tarnished with its acceptance of the Nixon Vice-Presidential papers on the basis of an allegedly back-dated deed of transfer. Porter's second principle states that repositories deal with two publics, donors and researchers. The former are more important for if "donor agreements and requirements are not met, there will be no new sources for the researcher." In eliciting his third principle, that it is essential to formulate policies in anticipation of problem areas before rather than after a crisis occurs, Porter discussed the Ohio Historical Society's policy as regards it obligation to honor court-issued subpoenas. He also noted that it is absolutely necessary for every institution (no matter how small its staff may be) to have a personnel policy which will cover such possibilities as the bringing of charges against a staff member to the effect that he or she breached agreements and conditions under which collections were donated to that agency. In conclusion, Porter dwelt briefly on the dangers inherent in the administration of state archival and manuscript repositories by political appointees rather than by professionals independent of the whims of politicians, noting Bill Alderson's article in the March 1974 History News on the situation at the North Carolina Department of Archives and History.

The ensuing question & answer period featured a lively and informative discussion on a variety of topics, particularly institutional competition for important collections and the honoring of subpoenas. Nick Burckel of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside suggested that professional organizations identify and censure individuals and agencies which engage in disreputable field work practices, and Lydia Lucas of the Minnesota Historical Society discussed legal efforts to examine the Maurice Stans papers in that agency, an effort which stopped short of subpoena. Dan Porter also elaborated on the Ohio Historical Society's handling of Governor Gilligan's papers, which are being turned over to the OHS while Gilligan still serves as governor.