

necessity of the historian to analyze the intent of the photographer in order to use effectively an image as a historical document. Using several well known photos as examples, Dr. Hales showed how pictures and the emotional values they hold can be misinterpreted and

misused if taken at face value without critical analysis.

The presentations were well received and appreciated by the audience. Maureen O'Brien from the Chicago Historical Society chaired the session.

THE MIDWESTERN INQUIRER

By Bruce H. Bruemmer

The *Midwestern Inquirer* is a free exchange of information and views on archival techniques and practices. It provides an opportunity for archivists to find out how their colleagues have approached a technical or policy issue, and is driven by the active participation of its readers. Each issue poses a new inquiry, invites readers'

responses, and summarizes the comments in a subsequent issue. Its methods are unscientific but have withstood the test of time. The best way to skew the commentary towards your perspective is to participate -- inquiring archival minds want to know!

KEEPING TRACK OF REFERENCE USE

If there were a bill of rights that applied only to archivists, the right to count patrons would undoubtedly rank high for most in the profession. Use statistics represent the front line of defense of archival programs. They underscore the importance of archival operations to administrators, and justify the existence (and expense) of our work. In the world of annual reports, nothing is quite so beautiful as the upward curve of a graph of patron use, rising geometrically over the x-axis of time.

obtained about research interests and use. Only at this point can an archivist assess how well the collection is serving patrons, and what collections are actually being used. Such data can also help set processing and preservation priorities, aid in collection development, and even support descriptive cataloging. Often the data can be used to refer patrons to others involved in similar research. The challenge is in collecting the data and knowing precisely what data to collect.

While a good annual census is a fine thing, most of us desire to know something more of our patrons. With only a slightly more cluttered registration form, archivists can gather information to provide a profile of their users. University archives typically want to know how many of their patrons are graduates, undergraduates, administrators, faculty, or individuals unaffiliated with the university. Corporate archivists find it useful to know what departments are using, or not using, the archives. Besides being useful for annual reports, such data can help direct outreach programs either to bring in new patrons or keep the current flow constant.

In his letter to the *Inquirer*, Paul Conway (SAA Preservation Program Officer) divided the process of gathering data into direct and indirect methods. Direct methods "include research techniques that involve open contact with researchers, actual and potential." This category includes everything from survey questionnaires to informal discussions with researchers. Indirect methods "make use of the 'residue' of the reference and access process, and include such things as analysis of call slips and photocopy requests, citation analysis, bibliographical surveys, and the monitoring of historical and genealogical research trends." By far most of the responses to this inquiry described systems that rely on direct methods, often using a survey (that is incorporated in a

The apex of reference statistics is reached when data is

registration form) and informal discussion with patrons. The objectives of this data collection vary considerably, as can be seen from the responses.

Most recognize the need to standardize descriptions of research so the data can be compared meaningfully, but this often requires more time than many are willing to devote to the process. An alternative is to have staff members fill out the forms; in that manner the descriptions will contain a vocabulary that will be more consistent from form to form. The easiest, though the most restrictive, solution is to divide research categories into a dozen or so areas, and simply have researchers check the appropriate term. While this introduces some bias to the information, it makes it easier to employ a microcomputer to manipulate data. A good portion of the respondents were using microcomputers to analyze the data, and many were anticipating such use. A number saw no significant advantage to computerizing their systems.

None cited extensive use of what Conway refers to as post-visit studies. This is research that is conducted to "find out how archival materials are actually being used and how archival information relates to other forms of historical information, published or otherwise." Many repositories gather some form of this information, since archivists commonly keep track of publications based on research use of their collections. However, unless a publications list is comprehensive and extensive, the use of such data is usually limited to an appendix in an annual report. Recently the Immigration History Research Center (Univ. of Minnesota) surveyed past users as part of a collection development project, but results were mixed and more impressionistic than was desired.

Conway notes that "not much progress has been made in the last three or four years to act on Elsie Freeman's call to action." (See [AA](#) 47 (1984) 112). Nearly all archives employ the standard uses of user information (e.g. annual reports); "less well known is how information from users is being or could be used for management purposes." Most of those replying to the inquiry felt that better systems could be employed, but ultimately the question centers on how much staff time a repository could devote to gathering such information. A good portion felt that their statistics sufficiently served their intended purpose.

The following are highlights of responses to the inquiry:

Case Western Reserve University (Jill Tatem) -- The staff is responsible for the logging of free-form descriptions of patron's requests, and noting the collections used (by record series code). On-site visitors formerly filled out their own forms, but the descriptions of their research use was "much too vague (term paper, history of the university, etc.) to be of any use to anyone." The data are manipulated using PC-File +, and the results used to assess the range and nature of the collection's use, develop processing priorities, and improve descriptive procedures. In the latter case they have retrospectively examined "subjects requested in order to develop a subset of Library of Congress Subject Heading from [their] cataloging project."

University of Illinois (William J. Maher) -- The archives has collected data on users, purposes of use, subjects of inquiry, and record series used since 1963, resulting in a most impressive twenty-year analysis of users. Data from user cards enable the staff to produce statistics on the use of record groups, but not on specific record series or collections. While this level of information is desirable, the extra staff time required to capture it would be significant. A Dbase II system was developed in 1985 to improve the system, but the bugs were not worked out before the student programmer had left town. There is some thought about a "computer-based check-in by archives' users, but we are a little short on hardware and staff time for the application." Each year a review of "subjects of inquiry" is made and the data analyzed. "While the process is quite time-consuming, it has been extremely valuable for understanding the use of the archives. This has major ramifications for understanding what the archives is, whom it serves, what material will be used, and what areas of research are active."

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Kathy Marquis) - Researchers are asked to list their projects and anticipated products on a user form. Their descriptions range from "a report" to paragraph abstracts of their research goals. The staff tries to discourage sparse descriptions, or will add notes from a reference interview with the patron. User information is employed in annual reports, and researchers are contacted for information about the products of their research. "I have also matched researchers with similar topics . . . 99% of the time both researchers are delighted to know of each other. Nonetheless, confidentiality is always an issue. . . ."

Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College (Lanae Graham) -- Researchers fill out a line on an annual registration form describing the subject of their research. This information is supplemented by a formal entrance interview or casual conversation. If the topic changes during the year, the form is annotated to reflect the nature of the changes. At the end of each week the topics are recorded in a computer and alphabetized. The information is used primarily for annual reports. Geographic information about patrons' research interests is obtained from cards that record the use of folders, sometimes items -- "Last year the stack of cards for collection dealing with China looked like the Sears Tower surrounded by mud huts." There was some hope to be able to conduct an analysis of the topics that have been studied over the years, primarily to improve subject indexing or to develop a better method of communicating the nature of the holding to researchers.

Loyola University of Chicago (Valerie Browne) -- For on-site users, a research registration form records information relating to research subject, purpose of research, type of research, whether the research is connected with Loyola, materials the researcher expect to request, sources suggested by the archives during a reference interview, and the sources actually consulted. For mail and telephone requests, an "archival search record" is completed by the staff covering the same information as the research registration form. Monthly tabulations of users and research interests are compiled, as well as a list of in-depth research topics. Patrons using routine sources such as yearbooks or student newspapers are not asked to fill out a registration, hence they are not reflected in the more detailed use reports. Besides helping patrons express their research needs and providing grist for annual reports, "it helps in setting priorities in other area of the archives which impact on reference service. For example, gaining a handle on research interests of patrons aids us in setting processing priorities." However, it is important to keep in mind the conscious or unconscious bias introduced by the manner data are collected. "What we choose to analyze may reflect the desire to gather data to promote a program rather than highlight its shortcomings. As a result, less track is kept of the instances when the archives or the researcher is not successful in a research quest."

North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies (John Bye) -- No formal analysis is conducted because of the repository's small size and limited number of researchers. Keeping track of research interests is not a prob-

lem; correspondence and business cards of patrons are on file, and it is a simple matter to inform interested researchers about others' related research.

Northeast Minnesota Historical Center (Pat Maus) -- Information about a patron's research interest is used to aid the archivist in locating appropriate materials and establishing a lead to someone who may be able to provide information about the topic for other researchers or the repository's staff. The form has significant limitations -- standardization of description is a problem -- and the letter-size sheet is judged to be somewhat inconvenient. More information about the date span of records consulted would be useful. Good analysis of the data would provide a way to redescribe collections. "Rather than staff making time to reassess collection subject content, the patron can be 'used' in this way." No long-term assessment of manuscript use has been attempted, though the use of the photograph collection has been analyzed. "Too much of the day-to-day activity of the one-person shop is handled by that one person and will remain in the head of that worker."

Texas A&M University (Charles R. Schultz) -- A user card is filled out by every patron; it asks for the name of the collection and subject of research. The frequency of use of various categories of collections is tabulated for annual reports. The data is charted over a five year period. "Crude as it may seem, the system seems to fill our needs in providing both statistical and narrative information for the annual report. One limitation to the system is our inability to get everyone to fill out the card. . . . We have discussed withholding the material until the card has been filled out, but that seems to be unnecessary red tape when we are trying to encourage use."

Unisys Corporation (Anne Frantilla) -- The archives tracks information about the requestor and type of information requested. The statistics help "justify" the program, but also yields data about which departments are the most frequent users, the types of information they are requesting, the priority for processing collections, and the time necessary to fill each request. The latter use is particularly relevant in a corporate archives, where most of the research is conducted by the archivist. The data are compiled monthly and loaded in a spreadsheet program for analysis.

Maryland State Archives (Ben Primer) -- Patrons are asked to fill out a registration form with questions about age group, occupation, purpose of research (divided into

eleven categories), research topic, geographic area of interest, genealogical lineage being researched, and how they learned about the collections of the archives. Information is entered daily into Dbase III, and type of use is coded along with the patron's name. The information is used to identify users, retrieve addresses, and match individuals with call slips.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Region III (Paul Daniels) -- Patron information is used primarily for security and annual reports. Since the collecting policy is established by institutional charge, user information does not factor into the collecting policy. However, decisions about storage and handling of collections are supported by these data. The computerized system has proven far more effective than the old, manual log system that it replaced. It appears that the data is fed directly into the computer, which uses a custom Dbase III program.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Elisabeth

Wittman) -- In the past information about "records used" was compiled along with a list of subjects, but analysis of the former is no longer being conducted, and the archives does not attempt to quantify the list of subjects. A single form is used for on-site and telephone (or mail) requests; the staff is responsible for supplying information about the result of the search, additional visits, referrals, and records used. Any cross correlation is difficult because the system is not automated. The system is adequate for reporting to the Church Council, but does not support collection development or outreach functions. Statistics on referrals are particularly important because the ELCA archives is decentralized.

Ward M. Canaday Center, University of Toledo (Barbara Floyd) -- Patron information is collected on a user form, which includes questions about the purpose of research and the research topic. The information is used in the annual report, and is compiled manually. Since the center services 500-600 patrons annually, the process is not perceived as burdensome.

THE NEXT INQUIRY: Looking for an Honest Label

A nerve has been struck! The preview of this inquiry has already generated responses from archivists frustrated with labels that fall off, become goeey, or fade into oblivion. All of the archival theory in the world won't amount to a hill of beans if the labels to our collections have all fallen off! Even if we find the labels they may not say anything. I developed a high-tech system that would run box labels off a computer, and the ink from the dot-matrix printer started fading in three months!

I NEED your testimonials! I WANT your expertise! I DEMAND your creativity! How do you get labels to stay stuck? What products do you avoid or embrace? Is there anyone out there who can tell us if self-adhesive

Preview of Inquiry #10: Dealing with Book Dealers

Most curators find themselves with collections of unneeded books, even if their repository does not collect monographs. Some of these publications can be quite valuable, historically and monetarily. One option is to sell such books to rare book dealers. What are your

labels are better than the ones that must be moistened? Should carbon ribbons be avoided? Does the quality of ink vary among computer printer ribbons? We need some answers here! Lacking that, sing me your label blues!

Responses received by December 15, 1988 will be reported in the January Newsletter.

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procedures for selling off unwanted publications, and what are the ethics of conducting such transactions?

Comments and suggestions about future inquiries are encouraged.