
This paper is a content analysis of the *American Archivist*, the journal of the *Society of American Archivists*. Eight volumes of the journal were analyzed to review the decade by decade thematic and structural evolution of the journal from its foundation in 1938 to the present. Analysis was conducted to determine if the journal had fulfilled its initial requirement “to be as useful as possible to all members of the profession.”

Headings:

- American archivist (Periodical)
- Archivists
- Archivists—Education
- Society of American Archivists
- Society of American Archivists—History
ARCHIVAL LITERATURE:
ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF *AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*

by
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Helen R. Tibbo
“To be as useful as possible to the members of the profession.”

“Announcement”

American Archivist Vol. 1

Introduction

In January 1938, the barely year old Society of American Archivists began to publish a journal titled American Archivist. This journal was initiated with the goal to “render important service through professional publications.” The editorial policy was defined simply as “to be as useful as possible to the members of the profession.” The content policy was defined as to “emphasize the concrete and practical rather than the general.” Finally, the editors acknowledged that the journal could easily fail unless each Society member “recognizes a personal responsibility for furnishing it with worthy material. In the hands of the membership, therefore, rests the ultimate fate of the publication.”

In short, the editors of American Archivist acknowledged that the journal could satisfy a need by publishing articles that would educate archivists and aid them in performing their duties. The editors also acknowledged that the journal would not be a success unless its members took an active role in the publication.

American Archivist has been continuously published since that first edition in 1938 and is currently the primary archival journal in the United States. Although there are now a number of other archival journals that are published which focus on varied archival interests, American Archivist has continued to endure. What keeps American
Archivist in publication? Does it continue “to be useful” in ways its creators envisioned? Has it evolved through the decades to fulfill its mission and to address the needs of archivists of today?

History

In the broadest sense, archivists are record keepers and record keeping has existed from the beginning of human thought. From cave paintings and oral storytelling, to using clay tablets, papyrus sheets, and parchment scrolls, man has kept records of his deeds. British archival practice dates back “into the medieval period.”² Archivists were amongst the first British and Europeans who arrived in America to colonize the new continent. Richard Cox wrote that “even when the first European settlers in America struggled for their very survival, a few fashioned time to write down their experiences, compose histories, and preserve papers.”³

As Lester J. Cappon explained in 1952, “the practitioner always precedes the profession.”⁴ Colonists brought the practice of keeping records with them from the Old World and records only flourished in the process of establishing a functioning society in the New World. As it is succinctly described on the Society of American Archivists website,

the first settlers in America brought with them the knowledge and practice of precise record-keeping. Records of marriages, births, and baptisms were saved by the Church, and often by individual families as well. Hunters and trappers listed their business transactions, merchants kept track of sales, homemakers and famous figures alike wrote letters, diaries, and memoirs, land titles were recorded and filed away for safe-keeping, and as settlements grew into towns and territories, civic documents increased. After the Revolutionary War, the first Continental Congress acknowledged that it was expected to keep official records on behalf of all citizens, and followed the practices they had learned in Europe.⁵
In the late eighteenth century, while the new United States of America was struggling with independence, Paris established the Archives Nationales, the first “central” governmental archives, in 1794. This was only one of many European archival accomplishments during this era. Swedish archives were maintained in the Riskariv from 1618, but were not formally established until the middle of the nineteenth century.

According to Donald R. McCoy,
during the nineteenth century most European countries would establish national archival institutions, and French, German, and Dutch archivists would develop an impressive body of archival theory and practice. The United States was, however, left at the starting gate. The development of European archival agencies and the establishment of history as a research discipline had negligible influence on how the government of the United States cared for its records. True, some Americans took note of developments abroad, and many were alarmed by the parlous state of their nation’s older records. However, while some improvements in records preservation and management were archived randomly on the state and local levels, no significant changes were effected at the national level.

The Public Records Office in Great Britain was established in 1838. The British Records Association was founded in 1932 to “encourage and assist with the preservation, care use and publication of historical records.” German archives were not formally founded until 1918 when they were established to preserve records from the World War.

While the United States government did not establish a national archives until 1936, individual states and agencies worked to establish societies to preserve documentary history. In 1791, the Massachusetts Historical Society was established as the first American historical association; its goal was “to collect, preserve, and communicate historical information about Massachusetts and the nation to the widest possible audience.” In 1859, the Society began to publish a periodical titled The Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society. This periodical
captured the dynamic intellectual achievements and contributions to historical scholarship of the Society's members and friends. Each issue includes annual reports that chronicle the Society's activities, as well as documents and essays that illuminate the Society's collections and New England history.13

*Proceedings* was the first such periodical in the United States established to review the holdings and activities of American documentary history. *Proceedings* was published until 1997. After the Massachusetts Historical Society was founded in 1791, other such archival institutions were slowly established throughout the new nation. Some of these institutions were established by historical societies, others were created by individual states.

The *American Historical Association* was established in 1884 out of the *American Social Science Association* and was officially inaugurated in 1889.14 From its inception, the *American Historical Association* worked to retain the “raw materials of history” and to establish documentary preservation. From these early roots, came the realization of the importance of American documentary preservation.15 In 1889, the Executive Committee of the *American Historical Association* established a Public Archives Commission. The Commission held the first annual conference of archivists in 1909 and provided information on the survival and state of archival records in its annual reports.16 In 1895, the *American Historical Association* began to publish the *American Historical Review*. This journal was established as the “journal of record for the historical profession in the United States--the only journal that brings together scholarship from every major field of historical study.”17 The *Review* contained articles about America’s documentary history; however, there was no formal independent publication for archivists published in the United States.
Official connections between the two fields continued until the 1936 establishment of the Society of American Archivists made the American Historical Society’s archival concerns somewhat “redundant.” As explained by Cappon,

a new profession usually stems from an older one in response to the need for specialized work and services developing in a single clearly defined field or through the cross-fertilization of diverse interest brought together under new circumstances.

The official establishment of the American archival profession and the eventual foundation of the Society of American Archivists was indeed such a case.

It was not until 1934 that an official National Archives was established for the United States. According to the American Historical Association, it was due largely to the efforts of the AHA’s Committee on Governmental Historical Documentary Publications, the Committee on a National Archives Buildings, and particularly to J. Franklin Jameson, managing editor of the AHR during the early 1900s, the National Archives was established. This involvement in governmental support of history continues to the present day, when the Association remains involved in advisory boards for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the Advisory Committee on Historical Diplomatic Documentation.

Considering the almost one-hundred and sixty years that it took before the establishment of the National Archives, American archivists wasted relatively little time in creating an official organization to support archival practitioners in the United States. The Society of American Archivists was founded in December 1936. According to H. G. Jones, one of the most imperative issues concerning the new National Archives was “the development of principles and procedures” that would properly address the more than a century and a half of records under its control. With the establishment of an official National Archives, it was now important for the diverse group of American archivists to establish and maintain comparative standards and goals.
The *Society of American Archivists* was accordingly established with recognition of the need for “the development of an archival profession with a body of literature upon which” American archivists could base their work. According to the *Society*, the *Society of American Archivists* was founded

"to promote sound principles of archival economy and to facilitate cooperation among archivists and archival agencies.” A more democratic body than its predecessor, it opened its ranks not just to directors of large archival institutions, but to all “who are or have been engaged in the custody or administration of archives or historical manuscripts.” This included archives of all sizes and orientation, from small private and business archives to large historical collections.

The *Society* was founded by two hundred-twenty six members from diverse professional backgrounds. The members included nineteen State Archivists, eighty-three staff members of the new National Archives, fifty-six historical manuscripts curators, and twenty academic historians. Many members had formally studied history. There were also a few librarians who “helped nurse the infant society.” This diversity of membership continues to exist today and is reflected in the variety of subjects examined by the *Society* including history, theory, administration, archival arrangement, description, and preservation.

In order for the *Society of American Archivists* to “promote sound principles” and “facilitate cooperation,” archivists needed a support system that would encourage archival training and the dissemination of ideas and techniques. *Society* founders decided that the *Society* could “render important service through professional publications.”

With this early realization, the *American Archivist* was established as the *Society’s* journal within the acts of the initial *Proceedings* of the society in 1936. According to
Ken Munden, the journal has been “more instrumental than any single factor in bringing to maturing the long-needed profession.”

Other than publications like the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, American archivists had no instructionary texts to follow to facilitate them in establishing a unified archival presence. According to Jones, the only known textbook concerning archival methodology had been published in London in 1922. In addition, S. Muller, J. A. Feith, and R. Fruin’s *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, the “Dutch Manual,” was not translated into English until 1940, when it was published by the H. W. Wilson Company, New York, with Arthur H. Leavitt as translator. The first American textbook on the subject—T. R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)—was not published until 1956. As late as 1938 there was a dearth of archival literature written by archivists for archivists. *American Archivist* filled this void of by establishing itself as the central focal point of American Archival literature. No other English language based archival journal was established until 1949, when *Archives*, the journal of the *British Records Association* began publication. In 1972, the *Society of Georgia Archivists*’ journal, *Georgia Archive*, now *Provenance*, became “the first professional archival journal published by a state or regional organization.” The journal focuses on “the archival profession in the theory and practice of archival management.” *Archivaria*, the journal of the *Association of Canadian Archivists*, (ACA) was first published in 1975. This journal is devoted to the scholarly investigation of archives in Canada and internationally… various issues serve well to indicate the breadth of possible subjects relating to archives. Each of these journals follows a similar format to that utilized in *American Archivist*. 
Methodology

As of March 2004, the *American Archivist* had published its sixty-fifth volume. During the period from 1938 to 1997, the journal was published quarterly with four distinct issues creating one annual volume. In 1998 the *American Archivist* converted to semi-annual publication. A decade by decade analysis of the *American Archivist* was performed focusing first on the primary articles and then on the general format of the journal itself. Because a sample based on the even numbered “tenth” volumes ran the risk of anniversary year “special” editions, the fifth journal of each decade of publication was analyzed beginning with volume number one and continuing by fives to include: 1, 5, 15, 25, 35, 45, 55, 65. Each volume contains twelve or more articles for a total of ninety-six (96) articles used in this analysis.

The primary articles were reviewed in chronological order to evaluate the evolution of American archival literature. The subject, date of creation, author’s professional affiliation, and reason of creation was analyzed for each article. These articles were then reviewed in context of published archival analysis, such as the articles and books written by Richard J. Cox. In addition, the editorials, meeting notes, and records of the *Society of American Archivists* that were published in each of these journals were utilized to provide appropriate context. Conclusions were drawn based upon the reviewed volumes and texts, not on the complete publication of the journal.

Analysis

According to Richard J. Cox’s seminal article, “American Archival Literature: Expanding Horizons and Continuing Needs, 1901-1987,” American archival literature evolved in four distinct stages. Period one began with the establishment of the first state
archives at the turn of the twentieth century and ended with the 1936 establishment of the Society of American Archivists. Cox called this the “time of gestation,” The establishment of American Archivist and the publication of its first volume is the direct result of this period.

In the 1942 publication of Volume I of American Archivist, the editors established the essential format of the journal: editorial announcements, primary articles, book reviews, brief information notices, and archival/ Society of American Archivist news. This format was based on the traditional format seen in other journals and has persisted into the latest issues with alterations based on changing needs. This first volume’s primary articles reviewed Preservation, International Archives, the National Archives, Archival History, Archival Administration, Business Archives, State and Local Archives, and Archival Method. In this volume, the editors chose to inaugurate American archival literature with a two part series discussing European archival techniques in Great Britain and in Continental Europe. This series was established to provide American archival literature with an appropriate context in association with international literature. As the authors wrote,

Europe preserves a great body of archival lore gained from the practice and experience of the past. Slavishly copying it would be, for American archivists, an error second only to ignoring it altogether. Appraising it in the light of American conditions, letting the logic behind its practices suggest solution of American archival problems, may make it more useful. In addition to articles on “Manuscript Repair in European Archives,” the volume contained descriptive abstracts of European archival publications. The authors of these first articles were archivists, manuscripts staff, historians, staff members of the National Archives, university historians, and members of the Historical Records Survey.
This first volume of *American Archivist* established the format of future American archival literature. If the first volume of the new journal did not find its place within the community, there was a good chance that it would cease to exist. The Editorial Board explained that “the editors are quite aware that in spite of the co-operation of the Society, *The American Archivist* may be a failure. Without that co-operation, no matter what their efforts, they know it cannot succeed.”\(^{38}\) While it was established that the journal would rely on the archival community for its content, the first volume needed content that would inspire future submissions. *American Archivist* bore the responsibility of establishing itself through publishing new literature while distinguishing itself from previous archival literature available in publications such as the *American Historical Review*; As the Editorial Board’s “Announcement” explained

> the journal can never be a success unless each individual member of the Society of American Archivists recognizes a personal responsibility for furnishing it with worthy material. In the hands of the membership, therefore, rests the ultimate fate of the publication.\(^{39}\)

Because there was little codified archival practice in the United States and because the knowledge held by European archivists could provide valuable wisdom to American archivists, the editors wisely made the decision to review European archives. They determined that European archival expertise was important to analyze and utilize, but not necessarily copy, for American archival use.\(^{40}\)

The importance of maintaining and organizing archival materials was established in several of the articles. Preservation alone was discussed in the context of European manuscript repair; achievements at the National Archives; past, even, historic, preservation attempts; and business archives. This volume also established the
importance of archival administration, archival arrangement, and state and local records as well as the importance of the specific buildings which housed the archives.

Richard Cox’s second period of archival literature lasted between 1936 and the 1972 publication of the report of the Society of American Archivists Committee of the 1970s. This was the period where “American archival writing slowly formed into a significant corpus, although it remained uneven at best.”

American Archivist had been established, but now it had to prove its worth. This evolution can be seen in Volumes Five, Fifteen, and Twenty-Five.

Volume Five of American Archivist was published in 1942. This volume contained articles concerned with daily archival priorities such as the development of proper finding aids, records management, and archival history. Unlike Volume One, there was only one preservation minded article and that focused on preserving records against war rather than preservation techniques. Volume Five also contained an article on the establishment of a presidential library as well as one detailing an international library. In addition, there was one article describing historic Native American archives.

It appears that by 1942, the editors of American Archivist could tap enough professional archival resources from American professionals to produce complete volumes of varied content; however, as it does today, the journal continues to disseminate articles on international archives. Even so, Philip C. Brooks, the Secretary of the Society felt the need to solicit materials from the membership so that the editors would have a “stock of materials from which to select.” Brooks also stated that the archival and historical manuscript field is far from limited as to subject matter or as to capable authors who should welcome the opportunity to have material
published. The initial statement of the editor that THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST would contain “articles on various phases of archival economy and administration, or articles describing bodies of archival material of general interest” and “notes concerning personnel, material, new methods, new buildings, and such matters: constitutes practically a standing want list.”

This was not the last time that such a plea would be issued to the membership.

When this volume was published, the United States had only recently entered War II. The four issues of this volume each contain four primary articles as well as book reviews, current archival news, and short informative information. Even though the January 1942 edition would have been in a planning stage well before the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into the War, it would seem sensible that this volume would be concerned with the issues related to archival preservation and war as well as war records; however, only three of the sixteen articles truly focus on this subject. These records which described archival activities during World War I, discussed issues of sovereignty, and described federal record protection also continued to extend American archival literature.

Volume Five demonstrated several differences from Volume One. First of all, each issue of Volume Five contained four articles while the issues of Volume One contained from one to four articles. This can simply be explained by the fact that Volume One was indeed the first issue of the journal and that by Volume Five it was easier to obtain articles. Six of the articles in Volume Five were papers presented at the Fifth Annual Society of American Archivists meeting in October 1941. Two of the articles were previously published as miscellaneous government documents by the National Archives while at least one was presented at the 1940 American Library Association conference.
In the few short years since Volume One was published, topics concerning American archives and American archivists had changed dramatically. Presentations at the national conference covered a variety of subjects including administration, finding aids, and types of record keeping. Timely articles resulting from these conferences and recent research of the time were included in Volume Five reflecting a balance of archival interests. If *American Archivist* was to succeed at being “as useful as possible to the members of the profession,” it needed to discuss the various aspects of the profession. This increase of professional content over four years proves that the journal had begun to find its niche and had begun to gain acceptance amongst the archival community.

Indeed, authors in this volume were from such various institutions as the Bureau of the Census, the Connecticut Mutual Life Company, the University of Chicago, the Virginia State Library, the Hoover Library on War, Revolution, and Peace, the Historical Records Survey, and the National Archives, amongst others.

Volume Fifteen was published in 1952. The volume consisted of over one hundred pages more than were published in Volume Five; each issue of Volume Fifteen contained at least five primary articles in addition to sections of book reviews and current news. Issue One also contained the “Society of American Archivists Reports for the Year 1950-1951.” This volume contained articles on archival arrangement, finding aids, subject archives, archival history, historical archives, federal archives, state and local archives, church archives, business archives, and university archives. There were also three articles on international archives.

Like the previous volume, this volume contained far fewer preservation focused articles than were seen in the first volume of *American Archivist*. In fact, there was only
one article on preservation in this volume and this article again focused on preservation
maintenance rather than techniques.53 This was the first of these reviewed volumes to
contain an article on motion picture records indicating that archivists were concerned
with the issues inherent in alternate mediums.54 This was also the first volume to contain
an article on church archives.55 This volume contained an article on Native American
archives as was the case in Volume Ten.56 The increased amount of subject specific
articles showed that the American archival community had evolved enough in fifteen
years to become aware of the differences in varying archival subject specifications and
the need to create appropriate literature to address those concerns.

The lack of articles focused on archival preservation can be seen as a continuance
of primary interest in the creation of essential archival literature focused on basic
arrangement and management techniques. As seen in Volume Five, several of these
articles were written for the previous Society of American Archivists annual meeting. In
Volume Five nearly fifty percent of the articles resulted from Society presentations; by
Volume Fifteen, the percentage had dropped to thirty-two percent.57 Two additional
articles were written as term papers and for a joint American Historical Society and
Society of American Archivists conference, respectively.58

Volume Fifteen also contained an article written in review of the journal, itself.
In “The American Archivist: The Voice of a Profession,” Karl L. Trever, editor of
American Archivist, discussed the value of the journal as well as the alterations needed to
be made to it. This article was originally a paper presented at the October 1951 meeting
of the Society of American Archivists. Its publication in the April 1952 issue of the
journal served as a “substitute for the report of the editor.”59 In his article, Trever
discussed that the *American Archivist* was responsible for providing the “essential bond of union” between the disparate specializations within the archival community. He felt that the journal was responsible to

serve as the medium through which the common interests and objectives of the profession can be expressed, reiterated, and clearly called to the attention of every group. It should strive to prevent misinterpretation of those interests and objectives and should combat separatist tendencies, should they arise, with every means at its disposal. Since certain developments in recent years have tended to increase specialization within our ranks, with resultant emphasis on the difference between us, the responsibility of the *American Archivist* for the maintenance of unity within the profession is particularly heavy.\(^6^0\)

Trever’s article showed that while there was increasing specialization within the community, it was the responsibility of the community to share information and concerns through a central medium. *American Archivist* was this medium.

Trever called for a journal that acknowledged the specialization within the community by allowing equal space to all concerns. He wrote that annual subject matter must be balanced so as to not ignore any one group. Trever reiterated the concerns raised in Volume One’s “Announcement” when he acknowledged that balanced content could only be achieved “if the editor receives a sufficient *variety* of articles to enable him to juggle space and subjects successfully.” He noted that while there had been complaints about the lack of variety, “some who are loudest in their criticism of our journal’s contents are numbered among its most prominent noncontributers!”\(^6^1\) In addition, he wrote that the paucity of copy forces your editor to use what materials he has on hand. He cannot use any editorial judgment as to what will be published. He cannot develop a periodical balanced as to subject content and, worst of all, he cannot develop a planned policy of publications. The *American Archivist* can continue publication in this catch-as-catch can fashion, but unless the editorial “ditty bag” is kept filled with a wide selection of good copy, the journal can never hope to fulfill the broad professional purpose it ought to serve.\(^6^2\)
Trever’s concerns show that, as with the very first volume, the editors of the *American Archivist* desired to create a journal with a broad scope that would aid all of the profession; however, this endeavor could only succeed if its members recognized “a personal responsibility for furnishing it with worthy material.”

Trever believed that submitted articles needed to include more information “bearing on the practical aspects of archival work.” He suggested that there were too many submissions of “learned essays,” but not enough providing informative articles, technical information, and information on daily operations. He noted that the journal had been criticized in the past for a lack of these articles, but, once again, it was due to lack of submission of said articles. It is apparent that the editors could only do so much with a community that did not respond.

Trever also recommended that the *American Archivist* serve as the “voice of the profession” beyond the profession. He felt that through wider distribution it should also educate legislators, scholars, and the general public on the importance of the archival profession. It should serve as a way to strengthen connections with cooperative communities such as historians, political scientists, and librarians which supported the archival community at its founding and through its infancy. It must also be the conduit to provide international scope and knowledge as well as discussion of everyday concerns and general philosophy.

Volume Twenty-Five was published in 1962. Each issue contained more than six articles, book reviews, and news notes as seen in previous volumes. New to this volume was that each issue also contained a section titled “Abstracts of Foreign Periodicals.” Articles reviewed included discussion of types of archives, types of materials, historical
archives, archival arrangement, archival policy, administration, preservation, presidential papers, and foreign archives. Several of the issues contained a biographical sketch of a recently deceased member of the archival community. In addition, two of the issues contained bibliographic reviews of field specific materials.65

Preservation articles were again limited to two articles; one of which was also the single article on a non paper format; in this case, film. Both articles focused on daily care as well as problem repair.66 The recurrence of reviews of foreign periodicals seems to indicate that the American Archival profession had not forgotten the insight that could be gained through the review of foreign archival techniques and news. The October 1962 issue contained a number of articles on presidential libraries. These articles were likely written in response to the Presidential Libraries Act passed in 1955.

The April 1962 issue was a thematic issue devoted to local records. Within this issue the editors drew together articles concerning history, administration, organization, and the current challenges of modernity; the same concerns that appeared in other issues. This thematic issue is proof that the editors and the readers of American Archivist had realized the wide variety of archival concerns and had determined to devote appropriate space to these issues. The repetitive structure of the journal which produced similar content in both the general issues and the thematic issues shows that even with the differences in each form of archives, each archive shares the same core goal and needs. American Archivist, as a journal, continued to be useful to all of the archival community.

Volume Twenty-Five expanded upon the number of articles per volume. Each article was more substantially focused on professional needs. There were fewer articles focusing on archival history and more focused on practical concerns. Over fifteen of
these articles were originally given as presentations at the *Society of American Archivists* conferences. Five of these articles were written for the October 1960 issue and one was based on a paper written for the October 1959 conference. Certainly, it follows tradition that the best of the SAA conference presentations would have been published as *American Archivist* journal articles. It seems reasonable to question whether the publication needed to change its undue reliance on conference presentation articles and, instead, *call for* professional articles, from here and abroad to focus on current archival needs and themes. Apparently solicitation of the membership for new articles was still not successful.

Volume Twenty-Five evolved considerably from that of Volume Fifteen. Many of these changes seem to reflect Karl L. Trever’s call for changes to the journal. First of all, there were simply *more* articles published in the journal amounting to over one hundred more pages of content. Within the ten years since Trever wrote his essay, the journal had begun to publish more articles on technology and daily concerns. The journal, as evidenced by the April 1962 issue on local records, had also worked to recognize specialization within the field. Finally, there was greater analysis of international archives and concerns. While the editors continued to rely upon papers presented at *Society of American Archivists* annual meetings, the topics represented a greater variety than those seen in previous years.

Richard J. Cox’s third period of the development of American archival literature was from 1972 to the present, or at least the 1987 date when he concluded his article. During this period, “American Archival literature has matured” providing a variety of texts and “essays scattered in a variety of archival, library science, and historical journals,
and an assortment of monographs.” In this period, problems with the quality, depth, and breadth of current archival literature were addressed. This period can be seen in Volumes Thirty-Five and Forty-Five.

Volume Thirty-Five was published in 1972 in a quarterly format; however, issues three and four were published as one titled “July/October.” Volume Thirty-Five contained articles focusing on access, organization, international archives, and history. Each issue contained book reviews, technical information, current news, and news regarding foreign archival concerns. Each issue also contained a devoted “Editor’s Forum” where the Editor had an opportunity to explain issues relevant to American Archivist and the archival community. While such a section had appeared in Volume Twenty-Five issues one and three, this is the first reviewed volume to contain this column in every issue. Volume Thirty-Five included five articles that were based on papers given at the October 1971 conference of the Society of American Archivists. One article was based on a paper delivered at the October 1970 conference.

In addition to articles about archival issues and methods, Volume Thirty-Five contained several articles reflecting on the Society of American Archivists itself including the report titled “the Society of American Archivists in the Seventies.” Volume Thirty-Five also contained a complete issue devoted to “Archives in Developing Countries.” This issue barely qualified as a Special Issue as it only included four topic specific articles. In comparison, the Volume Twenty-Five issue devoted to Local Records contained twelve articles.

Volume Thirty-Five was the first of the reviewed issues to contain an article discussing technologically based records. January 1972 contained a reviewed article on
Machine Language and July/October contained an article on magnetic-media. This is also the first reviewed volume to contain devoted sections on technical issues. It is apparent that technology had been recognized as important enough of an issue to require the institution of reoccurring columns of useful information. The journal continued to evolve as necessary to reflect the needs of its community.

The “Report of the Committee for the 1970s” showed that the Society had evolved enough in three decades to necessitate a clear evaluation of its purpose and its future. *American Archivist* was considered an essential portion of that future. This report ultimately called for a re-envisioning of the direction of the SAA and the purpose of the *American Archivist*. It recognized that the journal had relevance to archivists outside of America by requiring subject expansion to cover the interests of both American and foreign Society members. It suggested that articles should include papers presented at external conferences as well as include translated foreign materials. It dealt with the lack of timeliness of the journal by suggesting the creation of a bimonthly newsletter. It also recognized the importance of educating archivists on “practical and technical problems” by suggesting the creation a series of educational pamphlets to provide “simple explanations.” These pamphlets would also be designed to educate archival students. It is interesting that many of these recommendations clearly reflect those offered by Karl L. Trever in 1952. Trever’s article can be viewed as a direct antecedent of this seminal report. It is unfortunate that it took more than two decades from the inception of Trever’s report before any action was made on his suggestions; however, considering the lack of timeliness of coverage in *American Archivist*, this might be viewed as a matter of course.
Volume Thirty-Five also contained Philip P. Mason’s article, “The Society of American Archivists at the Crossroads.” In this article, Mason discussed the evolution and current events of the Society as well as the results of the Committee of the 1970s. Amongst other issues, he wrote that there were a significant number of complaints that the Society did not meet the professional needs of its members; that its programs were aimed at the larger archival institutions; that the Society’s publication program was inadequate.  

It appears that the membership at large did not always appreciate what other members were writing for American Archivist; however, Charles Lee, the President of the Society, affirmed the importance of American Archivist in providing a place of “identity” for American archivists. He further stated that “the journal itself will change, as we change editors, as the membership and its leadership and their interests change; but we shall hold on, I think to the American Archivist.” In addition, the journal contained another editorial plea for submission of “something of substance.”

Volume Forty-Five was published in 1982. The four issues were no longer identified by month, but were instead identified by season: Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. This volume contained articles on archival buildings, arrangement, conservation, procedure, theory, archival history, international issues, and technology. Issue number three was a special issue devoted to Business Archives. Only six of these articles were presented at Society of American Archivist conferences. Five of these were presented at the October 1981 conference. The sixth article was based on a version presented at the 1980 conference. In addition to the primary articles, these issues included dedicated sections of “Shorter Features” as well as reviews, technical information, current news,
and international news. International news was mostly restricted to the limited sections of “The International Scene.”

This volume contained more articles concerned with archival theory and the future than articles focused purely on daily operations of archives. There were also more articles concerned with technology. The Business Archives Issue reflects back to Volume Twenty-Five’s issue focused on Local Records. This issue formed a microcosm of a volume in that it presented articles on archival history, organization, arrangement, and modern technology. This issue showed the then current archival issues within a condensed format. The diversity of topics within this volume clearly showed the effect of the 1970s mandate to create new literature for archives. Articles were more representative of the diversity of the profession.

Volume Forty-Five reflects a fundamental change in the organization of American Archivist. For over thirty years, the Society and the National Archives had cooperated in the production of American Archivist. The editor of the journal had been employed by the National Archives since 1949 as had several staff members.82 In 1980, the Administrator of General Services began an investigation of this relationship between the national archival body and the national archival society. Ultimately, the Society chose to have all National Archives employees sever their shared connections.83 The Winter 1982 issue was the first volume published independently by the Society.84

The editors of Volume Forty-Five, of course, requested submissions from the membership; however, this was the first of the reviewed volumes to contain a clearly defined editorial policy.85 This policy stated that the journal requested articles that reflect the thinking of archivists about trends and major issues in archival philosophy and theory and about the evolution of the archival profession in North
America. Its departments are intended to document developments and events relating to archival practice here and abroad.\textsuperscript{86}

With its emphasis on articles discussing current trends, major issues, and theory, this policy appears to be a natural evolution of policy established in Volume One. This policy still maintains interest in the “concrete and practical rather than the general.”\textsuperscript{87}

According to Eva S. Mosely, editor of the Spring 1982 issue, as a reader and writer for the journal, she had always “preferred articles that, while informative, were also provocative-or even provoking.”\textsuperscript{88} From this official policy, it was established that the journal would attempt to contain articles that produced some new knowledge or understanding. Apparently the work of the journal was appreciated by the membership. In Fall 1982, the “Minutes” of the May 1982 Society Meeting noted that a recent survey showed that “the membership depends heavily on the journal for information.”\textsuperscript{89}

The fourth period that Cox sensed was beginning to develop in 1987 was focused on the importance

- professional standards,
- recognizes the value of evaluating and assessing the archival profession,
- is committed to collective action to preserve America’s documentary heritage,
- and accepts the need to communicate to the public the importance of historical records.\textsuperscript{90}

This period can be seen in Volumes Fifty-Five and Sixty-Five.

Volume Fifty-Five was published in 1992. It again contained four quarterly issues. The articles focused on archival history, archival technology, archival theory, and archival education. Each issue included an introductory essay from the editor along with book reviews. Primary articles were divided into sections under specific headings such as “Research Articles” and “Case Studies.” The dedicated sections of current news,
technical information, and international news were eliminated. Only six of the articles were presented or published elsewhere before appearing in this volume.91

The Winter 1992 Issue was devoted to International Issues under the title “European Archives in an Era of Change.” These two hundred pages of articles from seventy authors from twenty-one countries discussed European archival history, education, and future.92 It was “conceived as a tribute to European Archival theories and practices, past and present.”93 The editors acknowledged that European archival knowledge had influenced American archives throughout the twentieth century. This issue shows how similar American archival issues were to international issues. Each community was concerned with creating an identity within the changing world as well as establishing useful programs of archival education and technology.

It appears that essays on archival technology and international news had been completely integrated into the primary articles so that there was no longer any need for a distinction. This shows that the archival community had accepted technology as a daily concern and did not feel it needed to be made separate. The elimination of the separate sections on international news shows that there was less concern with consistently analyzing the differences between American archival issues and international issues and instead focused on working towards gaining common ground.

Volume Fifty-Five’s Fall 1992 Issue included Mary Sue Stephenson’s “The American Archivist, 1971 to 1990: A Demographic Analysis of the Articles.” In this article, Stephenson analyzed authorship and subject variables of articles published in American Archivist from 1971 to 1990. In other words, she reviewed the numerical breakdown of who was writing what from where during this period. Stephenson’s article
does not negate this current paper because Stephenson’s article focused on evaluation of the demographics of the authors in a specific period, rather than the evolution of the journal as a whole. Her findings included an increase in articles written by women. Most of the articles were written by academic archivists; second most by federal archivists. More than sixty percent of the articles were dispersed amongst the subject categories of “General Literature,” “Use of Archives,” “Historical Manuscripts,” and “Repositories (History, Organization, and Activities.)” She also found that there was “considerable emphasis on articles considering the fundamental nature of the archival profession, itself.”

Stephenson’s findings regarding the highest number of articles being produced by Academic Archivists can be interpreted to explain the increase of analytical articles over practical. With the introduction of additional Society sponsored newsletters and technical publications, American Archivist was able to develop into a journal more concerned with the “big picture” rather than the daily details. This evolution which was first suggested with the 1970s analysis and then seen beginning within Volume 45, had matured considerably by Volume Fifty-Five.

The Editorial Policy of Volume Fifty-Five was different from the policy published in Volume Forty-Five. The Volume Fifty-Five policy stated that the journal seeks to reflect thinking about theoretical and practical developments in the archival profession, particularly in North America; about the relationships between archives and the creators and users of archives; and about cultural, social, legal, and technological developments that affect the nature of recorded information and the need to create and maintain it.

In this policy it was apparent that the function of the American Archivist had been adapted to be more concerned with the theoretical and developmental aspects of archival
research rather than the “practical and concrete.” While this was not exactly what the creators envisioned, it is doubtful that they could have anticipated the development of so many additional journals that cover the specificities of the field. In turn, *American Archivist* could specialize in thought and research. In Summer 1992, Richard Cox, stated that the journal should “serve as a forum for the publication of research, and it is hoped that the issues raised by these essays will stimulate more thinking, research, and writing about the archival profession."96

Volume Sixty-Five was published in 2002. In 1998, *American Archivist* was altered to a biannual publication of issues Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter. The issues were considerably diminished in size from Volume Fifty-Five’s seven-hundred plus pages to less than four hundred. Topics included archival technology, organization, finding aids, collection policies, and theory. In addition, the journal continued to include a number of reviews of available archival literature. Finally, this Volume contained essentially the same editorial policy that was published in Volume Fifty-Five. The policy statement was identical; however, the later policy placed greater emphasis on the fact that the journal was refereed.97

This volume showed significant change from the previous decade; however, it continued to reflect the goal of establishing modern archival literature as expressed by the 1970s report. As seen in the previous two decades, primary articles involving technical specifics had been farmed out to other publications. This volume had replaced the need for technical specificity within *American Archivist* with analytical articles focused on archival method and reasoning. Unlike when it was founded in 1938, *American Archivist* is no longer the only resource for American archival information. There are now other
journals and websites in print and on-line that provide technical information for the increasingly technical specifications of the archival and librarian communities. These include amongst others, *Archivaria*, *Archives: Journal of the British Records Association*, *Provenance*, the Society of American Archivist website, the American Librarian Association Website, *D-Lib Magazine*, and *Conservation OnLine*. In turn, *American Archivist* can now concentrate on the continuing development of the Archival community as a whole.

**Further Analysis**

As noted above, Richard J. Cox’s seminal article, “American Archival Literature: Expanding Horizons and Continuing Needs, 1901-1987,” described American archival literature as having evolved in four distinct stages. Period one began with the establishment of the first state archives at the turn of the twentieth century and ended with the 1936 establishment of the Society of American Archivists. Cox called this the “time of gestation.”

Period two lasted between 1936 and the 1972 publication of the report of the *Society of American Archivists* Committee of the 1970s. This was the period where “American archival writing slowly formed into a significant corpus, although it remained uneven at best.”

Cox’s third period was from 1972 to the present, or at least the 1987 date when he concluded his article. During this period, “American Archival literature had matured” providing a variety of texts and “essays scattered in a variety of archival, library science, and historical journals, and an assortment of monographs.” The fourth period that Cox sensed was beginning to develop in 1987 was more concerned with professional standards, recognizes the value of evaluating and assessing the archival profession, is committed to collective action to preserve
America’s documentary heritage, and accepts the need to communicate to the public the importance of historical records.  

Cox’s four stages of American archival literature closely approximate distinct evolutionary periods in the evolution of the *American Archivist*. Cox’s first schema, “the Beginning of Archival Writing, 1901-1936,” was the time of “the archivist’s quest for a separate identity” when archivists existed mainly as part of other occupations such as history. Many other nations began to establish national archival presences by the nineteenth century. France established the Archives Nationales in 1794. Swedish archives were formally established in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Public Records Office in Great Britain was established in 1838 followed by the British Records Association in 1932. German archives were formally founded in 1918. The United States did not formalize its archival presence for over one-hundred years after other nations.

During the late nineteenth century, the United States government had not yet formally acknowledged the need for a national archival format. There was no standard archival text or journal available for American archivists to utilize in order to better learn their craft. There were journals such as the *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* and the *American Historical Review*; however, such journals, by definition, were dedicated to Massachusetts History and American history. The retention and arrangement of American documentary history was only a subset of these journals. It was not until 1938 that United States archivists established *American Archivist* to “render important service through professional publications.”

Technically Cox’s first stage concluded before Volume One was published in 1938; however, by necessity, Volume One demonstrates the Society’s effort to establish a basic place for a useful journal in the
American archival community. Volume One reflect the trials of formation, and the struggle to convince its audience to contribute articles.

Cox’s second period, “the Formation of Archival Literature, 1936-1972” was the period that “led American archivists into a new phase of thinking and writing about their work.” This period parallels Volumes Five, Fifteen, and Twenty-Five where the essentials of archival literature were established. According to Cox, this is the period where the National Archives and the Society of American Archivists “provided a national focus and outlets for the publication of archival practices and theory.” As noted above, until 1938 there were only general history or locally based historical journals available for the distribution of American archival literature. If the foundation of the National Archives created the need for the development of American archival standards, American Archivist provided a “forum for archival writings that, prior to 1938, had little chance for publication.”

Volumes Five, Fifteen, and Twenty-Five illustrate the establishment of American Archivist. Amongst its first articles, Volume Five contained a plea for “meritorious contributions” to the journal. More specifically, Volume Fifteen and Volume Twenty-Five demonstrate the establishment of the format of articles focused on essential “how-to's” as well as the advent of specifications within the field. Volume Twenty-Five also shows that the journal editors’ had deemed certain subjects important enough to choose to devote an entire issue to a specific theme, rather than simply publish the traditional assortment of submitted materials. This type of thematic issue would be more problematic for the editors to assemble due to the established difficulties in soliciting materials. In this case, the editors had to directly solicit authors to collect materials for
this publication; therefore, the editors must have felt the materials were of consequence for the edification archival community. In addition, American perspective expanded further as the archivists continued to be interested in the activities of foreign archives.

Cox’s third period, “the Maturation of Archival Literature, 1972-1986,” commenced with the publication of the “Report of the Committee for the 1970s.” This report recommended a re-envisioning of the direction of the Society and the purpose of the American Archivist. It recommended subject expansion to cover the interests of both American and foreign Society members as well as a broader scope. It also suggested that the Society create a bimonthly newsletter for the publication of current information and a series of educational pamphlets to provide explanations of technical information and archival methods. This report altered the focus of American Archivist by making it one of several publications. While the stated goal may have been the expansion of content and scope, in reality, American Archivist’s editors recognized that the journal was no longer required to be solely responsible for providing information on daily concerns or providing for the education of its membership. In time it assumed a different role, and became the archival journal of advanced theory and research. This period of gradual evolution is reflected in Volumes Thirty-Five and Forty-Five.

This evolution away from the practical to the theoretical was essentially finalized in Volume Fifty-Five and Sixty-Five. These volumes reflect the establishment of Cox’s fourth period of evolution, that of archival theory and analysis. Cox explained that while archivists had established the “essential writings” for the field, the development was never over. He suggested that the fourth period needed to address

(1) the continuing lack of adequate archival theory, (2) the need for more opportunities for research and writing, (3) the need for more energetic national
leadership in the support and dissemination of archival literature, (4) archivists’ lingering doubts about their identity, (5) limitations of archival education, (6) the need to find suitable outlets for scholarly publication, and (7) archivists’ inability to write for broader audiences.\textsuperscript{116}

It would seem that many of Cox’s concerns were acknowledged by other archivists. Cox’s review was published at roughly the same time that the \textit{American Archivist} reasserted its focus on archival theory and research.

In Volumes Fifty-Five and Sixty-Five, technical specifications were largely been left to other publications. With Volume Sixty-Five, \textit{American Archivist} edited its editorial policy to reflect a focus on “theoretical and practical developments in the archival profession.”\textsuperscript{117} This change showed a greater concern with broader archival thought. While reports about personnel, methods, and buildings were still provided in the journal, they were increasingly provided in brief or as part of a reflection of a greater whole. The primary journal articles worked to develop archival theory, analyze progress, and provide new research. Volume Sixty-Five has fewer articles and less variety of content than any volume since the journal was founded. After sixty-six years of existence, \textit{American Archivist} has redefined “useful;” this time seemingly as theoretical rather than practical.

Conclusion

In the opening of this paper, the question was posed whether the \textit{American Archivist} has fulfilled its mission to be “as useful as possible to the members?” The answer to this question is a simple “yes.” The journal has fulfilled its mission of creating a place for the development and distribution of important American archival literature. It
has just altered the definition of that mission to reflect a new need in the archival community.

Since its foundation, *American Archivist* has evolved. It was established in 1938 with the recognition of the need for the newly official American archival community to create a useful source of information for members of the profession. In 1938 there were few texts that could help with the development of the American archival community. Articles published in historical journals such as the *American Historical Review* or *The Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* were likely more concerned with the evidentiary value of the documents rather than the arrangement and maintenance of the documentary artifact itself.

*American Archivist* was established as the first American archival journal. It was responsible for creating a “useful” body of literature when there was currently nothing in existence. *American Archivist* came to serve as a vehicle to disseminate new knowledge and techniques while allowing for the exploration of current ideas and issues. As the archival community developed and new journals and publications were established, *American Archivist* no longer had the responsibility of providing basic instructional essays; instead, its editors reestablished the journal so that it would once again be central to the evolution of American archival literature.

Creating an active literature has never been easy; to a large degree, the *American Archivist* editors have always been forced to make due with what was submitted. In effect, American archival literature as presented in *American Archivist* was shaped by whether a certain archivist felt the need to write and then submit an article on a given day. As was noted in practically every reviewed volume, the editors of *American
Archivist have had to constantly plead with the membership to encourage submission of timely articles. Though the editors repeatedly claim that the membership has stated that it appreciates the journal, it does not appear that the membership readily complied when it came to providing scholarly articles. As the number of academic archivists is quite slim compared to the number of practicing archivists, there may just not be enough incentive to convince non-academics to publish.

By its very nature as the official journal of the Society of American Archivists, American Archivist has the responsibility of advancing the progress of the Society as well as the progress of the greater archival community. Today, the journal provides an appropriate location for authors to analyze and establish the future direction of archival theory and evolution. Technical specification, such as “how-to utilize EAD,” are better suited to educational pamphlets and texts that are published by other branches of the Society or other organizations in total. By evolving to its current form, American Archivist is attempting to continue to be “as useful as possible to the members of the profession.” It is true that it no longer “emphasizes the concrete and practical;” however, it does not need to do otherwise. Instead, American Archivist is promoting research that has the potential of providing great benefit to the archival field. It seems likely that the founders would approve of this new direction.
Notes

9 Burnette, Jr., *Beneath the Footnote*, 6.
22 Jones, The Records of a Nation, 19.
25 “Announcement,” v.
34 “Announcement,” v.
36 “Announcement,” v.

38 “Announcement,” vi.

39 “Announcement,” vi.

40 “Announcement,” v.

41 Cox, “American Archival Literature,” 308.

42 Harris, “Protect of Federal Records,” 228-240.


51 “Announcement,” v.


63 “Announcement,” vi.


69 This double issue was authorized in the April 5, 1972 meeting of the Council.


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74 Meyer H. Fishbein, “Appraising Information in Machine Language Form,” American
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81 Mary Jo Pugh, “The Illusion of Omniscience: Subject Access and the Reference
82 Ann Morgan Campbell, “Executive Director’s Annual Report,” American Archivist 45
83 Campbell, “Executive Director’s Annual Report,” 98.
86 “Editorial Policy,” 112.
87 “Announcement,” vi.
Archivist 45 (Fall 1982): 510.
91 Jackie M. Dooley, “Subject Indexing in Context,” American Archivist 55 (Spring
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93 Barritt and Bartlett, “From the Editors,” 4-7.


100 Cox, “American Archival Literature,” 308.


106 “Announcement,” v.


118 For example, see Campbell, “Minutes,” 510.
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