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“And You May Ask Yourself, ‘Well, How Did I Get Here?’”¹

Amy Cooper Cary

I’ve been thinking a great deal about the trajectory of our journal. As Editor, I’ve been writing about how exciting it is to see the content for each issue develop over time. I’ve mentioned to anyone who will listen that I love talking with authors about ideas, and I love reading each iteration of the articles as they go through revisions. So, of course I ask myself, “Well, how did we get here?” In exploration, I started at the beginning.

Have you ever read the very first issue of *American Archivist*?² Published in January 1938, the issue is slim compared to those of today. It lists SAA officers, Council members (including Margaret Cross Norton), the members of the journal’s Editorial Board, and Theodore Calvin Pease as managing editor. There is a single article about manuscript repair in European archives—“Part I: Great Britain”—and Pease’s review of Hilary Jenkinson’s *A Manual of Archive Administration*. There are professional notices and abstracts of European archival publications. The style is formal, the information specific and primarily technical.

It’s interesting to read this brief issue, because it is clear that *American Archivist* is not the “same as it ever was.” Even as we remain concerned about preservation and practice, the content we are currently writing is far from where we stood in 1938. What was then a budding professional concern—specifically the work of American archives—is now a vibrant network of professional scholarship, research, and communities of practice. Where we once looked to Europe to find structure and “suggestions” for our institutions, we’ve cultivated a professional mindset

that reaches toward diverse voices and international colleagues to collaborate and contribute to an ongoing discussion about theory, practice, and the implications of our work.

Our content in this issue is a mix of material—all in that continued vein of moving our professional conversation forward. This issue invites readers to read a handful of elegant articles about specific practice areas such as born-digital archives, finding aid aggregation, and reference staffing. We're considering assessment of our technical skills, how we teach with primary sources, and how the classroom provides us with a way to connect to underserved students. Case studies address how modern soldiers create their own archival record, and two international contributions—from Germany and Australia—consider disaster planning and a retrospective look at an important digital project.

In addition, this issue asks us to look inward to examine the development of our profession. In particular, these articles explore archival education programs and the Guidelines for Graduate Programs in Archival Studies (GPAS)³ as well as the relationship between educators and the Academy of Certified Archivists.⁴ We also have the opportunity to consider the influence of the Archives Leadership Institute on professional career-building. This introspective look at how we have formed/are forming our profession is a first foray into examining professional identity.

I say a first foray because, in forthcoming *American Archivist* issues and on the journal's Reviews Portal, we'll see some interesting reflections on that question of "Well, how did we get here?" Upcoming issues will bring you the opportunity to consider different segments of our professional work, our history, and implications for the future. We will begin to publish information from and about A*CENSUS II, and we're excited to be developing a special section on Middle Eastern and North African Archives. The Reviews Portal will debut a series entitled "Intergenerational Conversations," which will bring new voices into conversation with articles and authors from the archival canon. *American Archivist* 85.2 is wonderful. Issue 86.1 is shaping up to be just as engaging.

So, in my reflection on the trajectory of this journal and in reading its first issue, I realized that there is a statement made in the Announcement of *American Archivist* 1.1 that represents where I return, again and again:

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. . . . 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.⁵

This statement was written in part as a consideration of the journal's finances—important to understand at the beginning of a publishing venture. But more than that, this statement prioritizes from the outset what we continue to see 84 years

later—that the contributions to this journal are made by our members, that the work of peer review and editorial guidance are done by our members, and that the journal is used and shared and valued by our members. You all have made this journal what it is. This is how we got here, same as it ever was. . . .

NOTES

- ¹ With a hat-tip to the Talking Heads, “Once in a Lifetime.” Yes, I’m a big fan of 80s music!
- ² For PDFs of the individual sections, see <https://meridian.allenpress.com/american-archivist/issue/1/1>.
- ³ See <https://www2.archivists.org/prof-education/graduate/gpas>.
- ⁴ See <https://www.certifiedarchivists.org>.
- ⁵ “Front Matter,” *American Archivist* 1, no. 1 (1938), vi, <https://meridian.allenpress.com/american-archivist/issue/1/1>.