

New Directions for Archivists in the USA

Yet another organization of archivists has appeared in North America. In St. Louis, Missouri, 22 July 1977, the National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators (NASARA) met to approve the objectives and articles of their agreement. One of the moving forces behind NASARA is the State Archivist of Maine, Samuel S. Silsby, Jr., whose position paper "Towards the Development of Standards for State Archival and Records Management Agencies" prefaced the adoption of a statement of principles. Canadians will doubtless recall his definition of the archivist which opened the first national conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists at Laval in June 1976 and will surely recognize in the following remarks the very sharp distinctions which Silsby draws in the care and management of government and non-government records.

The Association's purposes are printed below together with the statement of principles approved by NASARA. Silsby's remarks form an explanation for their appearance:

ASSOCIATION PURPOSES

To promote an awareness and understanding of State archives and records management programs; to encourage the continuous exchange of information among State archives and records management agencies; to improve their programs and services; to develop and improve professional standards of government archives and records administration; to promote the full application, utilization and progressive development of modern archival and records management principles, methodology and techniques in State records administration; to encourage study and research in the problems of concern to State archival and records administrators; and to represent the member States in matters of mutual or national interest in areas of archives and records management, especially those involving Federal-State relationships. (NASARA Bylaws, art. 1, s. 2)

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

1. *Legislation*: comprehensive legislation which recognizes the fundamental nature of the relationship of government records as instruments of accountability by the government to the people, evidence of public and private rights and obligations, an informational source on matters involving the continuous administration and management of the government; preserves the patrimony of the State as evidenced in its records; and provides exclusive authority to carry out archives and records management functions and responsibilities on a government-wide basis.
2. *Institutional identity*: the institutional character of the agency as the repository of the permanently valuable records of the government to provide sufficient autonomy for its protection against political interference including tenure for the agency head, civil service protection for its personnel, and control of agency facilities, equipment and resources.
3. *Organizational placement*: placement within the government that prevents the submersion of the agency beneath competing interests; eliminates blurring of the functions with other professional agencies and disciplines; protects against interference with agency program responsibilities under the color of coordination authority; and eliminates hampering supervision and control by those having little or no professional knowledge of its program responsibilities and operations.
4. *Program authority*: sufficient authority for the agency to define records problems and needs of the State, to prescribe appropriate programs, and to effectively administer the programs.

5. *Exclusive responsibility*: exclusive program responsibilities that do not diffuse the primary responsibility of the agency for government records.
6. *Appropriation and expenditure*: funding by direct appropriation to the agency by the Legislature with authority to budget and expend such funds.
7. *Internal policy*: exclusive agency determination of the internal policies and professional needs of the agency.
8. *Regulations and standards*: power to prescribe and enforce rules, regulations and standards relating to government records administration.

SILSBY — TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS

“We can all acknowledge that government is the most important institution in any society: that its power to control and regulate citizens, to compel their obedience within its boundaries, and to protect and care for them, renders it in its sovereign power unequalled by any alternative organization within society. Government is the one institution that in one way or another, at one time or another, touches the lives of every single individual within its jurisdiction. It not only affects the lives of all citizens, but inherent in that contact between government and citizen is a complex interdependence of rights and obligations, of mutual responsibility and accountability. While its outward form and characteristics may change, government itself exists in perpetuity. The records of this most fundamental of human institutions therefore partake of a fundamentality of their own in respect to it. Such records must be maintained, managed, preserved, and when appropriate, disposed of according to principles that recognize their unique status.

“We have no difficulty in respecting this unique status when we are applying such pure methodology of our profession as ordering, arranging and describing government records, or when we establish disposition schedules that take into account legal statutes of limitations or restriction. But the self-image that we have accepted of ourselves, especially as archival agencies, is one that has tended to dissuade the very special role that we ought to enjoy with respect to the government and the citizens we serve.

“If government records have indeed the fundamental character that has been described, then it follows that the agencies that administer professional programs for the records must themselves have a placement and a status within government that has a central relationship with its operations. Successful records management programs in the various States have tended to enjoy such a placement within the structure of the overall governments they serve; but too frequently, State archival programs have been separated and segregated away from any responsible relationship with the rest of government, and have been relegated to preserving and administering as historical relics those records which are thought to have no further intrinsic value as *government* records. The results of this are pernicious: underfunded, understaffed, underequipped operations that are subjected to the priorities of some other professional undertaking — the library, the museum — or of some highly political or ruthlessly pragmatic bureau. It has resulted in the alienation or loss of records; it has prevented the substantive growth and development of the profession; and it has brought many of us to the marginal edge of survival. These results have come about with out tacit consent. Because our training and our interests bring us very close to the historians, the librarians, the manuscript curators and the like, we find it very difficult to distinguish our exclusive responsibilities from theirs, or indeed, to see that there is any difference at all. But there is a difference, and it is not a matter of preference, choice or emphasis. If we administer government records, then we have obligations that are not shared by the seemingly related disciplines and professions.

“The guidelines that are here presented for adoption by The National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators are designed to make these unique distinc-

tions very clear. They do not conflict with nor do they deserve the interdisciplinary considerations that inure to the many informational uses to which government records may be put. They do attempt to focus our attention and our commitment towards an identity and positive role that can only strengthen our profession, our institutions, and the quality of our service to both the government and the people.”

Gordon Dodds
Archives of Ontario

Mennonite Archives in Canada

The Mennonite people have frequently migrated in their history. They are a people who hold radical views which often roused hostility and persecution, leading to migration. It has always been important to such people to explain to themselves, to their children, and to others, the nature of their faith, and the experiences and sufferings endured because of that faith. A reliable record of past experiences, both difficulties and successes, is therefore deemed to be of great value. The collection and preservation of archival materials naturally follows.

Many of the very early Mennonite archives were, perhaps inevitably, parochial and religious in nature. In their successive migrations, however, the Mennonites were often successful in bartering their economic services, usually as pioneer settlers in newly opened or conquered territories, for religious concessions. It was then necessary to keep letters and documents which outlined clearly and reliably the land entitlements, military exemptions, local church autonomy and educational provisions which were arranged with solicitous rulers in need of hard-working pioneers. Such records reflected and documented the basically defensive attitude of a harassed minority.

Other concerns were soon added to this defensive strategy as people became better established. Like the Old Testament Israelites, many Mennonites believed their history was an expression or manifestation of God's will. Their peculiar and radical ideas, and the manner in which the faithful tried to apply them, had to be recorded and the record preserved if their own descendants and others were to gain any benefit from those experiences.

The Mennonite people, like most radical groups without strong central leadership, are a severely fragmented and splintered denomination. Fourteen more or less independent Mennonite branches or factions exist in Canada, each trying in its own way to preserve something of its heritage. Small collections of Mennonite archival materials can be found in numerous places. The major Mennonite archival collections, however, have been gathered at three Mennonite colleges, with two others taking some initiative in gathering regional materials. The three major archival institutions are at Conrad Grebel College, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario; Mennonite Brethren Bible College, Winnipeg, Manitoba; and Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg. Rosthern Junior College, Rosthern, Saskatchewan, is collecting Saskatchewan and Alberta materials while Columbia Bible Institute, Clearbrook, British Columbia, collects materials relating to that province.

The Conrad Grebel College archives are the official repository for records of the Mennonite Church, sometimes referred to as Old Mennonites. Records of the Mennonite Brethren Conference are deposited at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, while those of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada as well as the records of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, and of the Mennonite Central Committee, Canada, are held at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College. The Mennonite Central Committee, Canada, is an inter-Mennonite relief agency operating a world-wide relief and assistance program.