

ARCHIVISTS FOR CHANGE'

Howard Zinn gave a fine talk at the 1970 SAA annual meeting on the American archivist and radical reform. His main theme was that "professionalism is a powerful form of social control." A few SAA members later found themselves talking about the ways in which the Society needed to apply its professionalism in more positive ways, recognizing the social outcome of many of our activities. We plan to carry forward this discussion at the SAA conference in San Francisco next month. If you are interested in an evening of discussion (and eating), won't you join us on Tuesday, October 12th at 7:30 p.m?

We plan to begin the discussion with an evaluation of the report of the SAA Committee on the 70's which will be presented at the general membership meeting the next morning. (With luck we will all receive copies of this report before then.) We hope the discussion Tuesday evening will bring forth some questions and comments which we can make at the general meeting.

We may also want to discuss the Society's administration and organization, the recruitment of minority archivists, the problems of women in the profession, the inadequacies of archival training, the accessibility of archives, and the participation of new and young members in the Society. Our purpose would be to democratize the Society, present alternative positions, initiate new programs, and relate our work to the social change that we are all working for in our communities.

The meeting will take place at the apartment of L

1959 Buchanan (near Pine), about two miles from the Sheraton-Palace Hotel. Take the #1, 2, or 3 bus from Market and Sansome and get off at several blocks west of Van Ness). walk north (uphill) two blocks. San Francisco is one of the few American cities with a good public transportation system. A light supper will be served. Tel. no.

Please send the names and addresses of other SAA members who would be interested in joining us. Notify L
San Francisco 94115

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ACT, ARCHIVISTS FOR CHANGE, ALTERNATIVE CAUCUS, FRIENDS OF THE SAA, whatever

Newsletter, Vol. I, No. 1, November 1971.

The first meeting of ACT was held on the Tuesday evening of the SAA conference last month in San Francisco. As planned the main topic of discussion was the Committee of 70', interim report, a summary of which had been distributed to the membership the preceding week. Unplanned was the pressure the group felt to support the committee's report and, in fact, the committee's very existence.

Shortly before the San Francisco meeting, the incoming president (now president) opposed the report and attempted to prevent the circulation of it. He also allegedly (do I have to say that?) threatened to terminate the committee or to change its membership so that the final report would not reflect the same suggestions made in the interim report. For those of us who saw in this committee, and its report the best possibility for change within the Society, the only thing to do was to organize a strong favorable response for the Wednesday morning general membership meeting. Therefore, our meeting was mainly one of planning remarks to be made the next morning:

- E strong support of the committee and its report
- M: importance of a committee to revise our code of ethics and the need for more minority representation on council and the committees
- D need for wider representation on committees including no one person on more than one committee, committee assignments for no more than three years, and possible complete new structuring of the committees.

This action was followed up at the Friday meeting with E - 's motion to continue the Committee of 70~and to have its final report presented to the membership next year. Consequently at the Friday afternoon Council meeting, it was agreed to continue the co~ttee as composed with a final meeting in January with the present officers attending.

The other topic of interest at the ACT meeting was the vacant one-year Council seat. After evaluating our purposes, we decided that it would be advantageous to wait until next year's election when we could nominate 4-year members. At that time our group should be considering possible candidates including E' , M, D, S, and others Committee of 70's members

not now on Council should also be considered. The necessity of translating our proposed changes into constitutional amendments and by-laws requires that people favorable to our changes be on Council. We must be prepared to make nominations from the floor if necessary. And to be successful in this, we must plan ahead.

This Newsletter is one of the other activities that ACT decided to begin. It is to be a forum for ideas, informally pieced together by L. It will be sent to the sixteen people who attended the ACT meeting in San Francisco, and to the seventeen others who have expressed interest. One dollar donations for postage and publication should be sent with your suggestions concerning SAA to L~ San Francisco, Ca. 94115.

Other things to do IMMEDIATELY:

1. Write or phone all suggestions on the Committee of 70's report to the chairman, Philip P. Mason, Archives, 144 General Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan 48202. Should the Council be reorganized? What should the election procedure be? Should there be a firmer stand on the recruitment of minorities? Etc.
2. Write letters of support of the Committee of 70's to President Charles Lee, South Carolina Archives Dept., Columbia, S.C. 29201. Also to the new editor of the AA who has agreed to begin a letters-to-the-editor column (a grand forum for us), Edward Weldon, The National Archives, Washington, D.C. 20408.

The other ideas we had hoped ACT would consider include recruitment of minority archivists, problems of women in the profession (M: with suggestions from Diane Dorsey has written a proposal on this, parts of which I'll include in the next Newsletter), inadequacies of archival training (E - believes SAA needs to establish standards for certification), accessibility of government records (D: once suggested that SAA act independently of the historical profession in recommending new terms for accessibility), and the participation of new and young members in the profession. On this last, few of the young members spoke at the ACT meeting and the rest of us would like to know why. S said she was too ignorant of the internal workings of SAA to even suggest changes. Yet it is felt that the younger members must come up with new ideas which the older members of our group can help implement with their knowledge of SAA. Anyone who wants to work on these topics or others. write L'

Consideration by the appropriate committees of ways of stimulating the collection of the papers~ of~ women leaders in various fields, of focusing attention on the role of women in important historical movements, and of developing regional archives of women's contributions to society.

The Standard of Equal Opportunity for the Profession might include:

The right to be hired at the same salary and to advance at the same rate, given equal qualifications;

The right to be considered for the same level administrative positions;

An equal right to serve on governing boards;

The abrogation of nepotism rules so that members of the same family may have an equal right to be hired, with the limitation that one may not sit in review on the other;

Inclusion of part-time positions, when this will not decrease available or needed services in the institution, with part-time employees given all the rights and benefits of full-time employees, pro-rated when applicable;

. No handicap in hiring to parents of young children;

The right to maternity leave, without loss of seniority and accrued benefits, placing the woman on a par, at least, with the man granted military leave.

Including this resolution and bill of rights should not change our priorities or distract from our goals concerning the Committee of 70's report and our intent to elect to the Council some people favoring our ideas. This resolution was written for and by members of ACT and we will decide together if it should be presented, where, when, how, etc. Resolutions on other topics, suggestions for plans of action, thoughts of forming some ACT committees, and all comments are welcomed and will receive circulation in this Newsletter.

In San Francisco the out-going Secretary, F. Gerald Ham, received a standing ovation, partly due to his comments including in the Secretary's report. Excerpts follow: Seemingly, our profession lacks an awareness of current social problems. Conspicuously missing from your replies (to the SAA questionnaire) was any suggestion that archivists live a life that is totally integrated with the world about them. No one suggested that we take cognizance of the dramatic social changes of the past decade. No one suggested that we combat discrimination in service to and employment of individuals from all minority groups whether the distinguishing characteristic of that minority be ethnic, sexual, religious, political, or of any other kind. No one suggested that we give special attention to the recruitment and training of members of minority groups; no one acknowledged their important role of the archivist in pre-serving and promoting the public's right of access to the records of their public servants or conversely that we bear some responsibility to protect individual citizens from any invasion of their privacy; and no one suggested that we should cooperate with such organizations as the ALA, whose council has taken a strong stand in these matters, to improve the society in which we live and work.

For all its short-comings, many of you stated that the SAA responds to the needs of its members better than many other larger and more bureaucratic professional organizations; you also expressed appreciation for the professional and technical assistance the Society does offer. But the SAA still has much unfinished business. The work of the Committee of 70's is yet to be completed. The final report should serve as the basis for far-reaching and even radical changes in the Society's whole range of activities and priorities. However, the Committee's proposed blueprint can only be effective if it is translated into action by the Council and by the membership. Without implementation, the report will be interred in the Society's archives along side of an ill-fated report of a similar committee set up in 1950.

MEMBERSHIP: ACT is composed of SAA. members who are committed in varying dsgrees to these points as outlined by - :

- 1) democratinnng S~, including supporting some of the Committee of 70's recommendations
- 2) incre.~sing rank and file involvement in governing SAA
- 3) encouraging the recruitment and advancement or minority people within the archival profession
- 4) improving the status of women within the archival profession.

Those desiring the ACT Newsletter should send a dollar or more to either Do or I who will edit alternate issues. ACT is about \$18 in the hole even before sending out this issue, so additional donations are requested. A complete set of Vol. I is available for \$5 from Lynn Donovan and includes the 13-page issue passed out in Columbus.

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HISTORY AND PURPOSE: The name ACT originated with Howard Zinn's 1970 SAA speech when he spoke o~ the need for ACTIVIST .ARCHIVISTS. About the same time L and Mi talked of forming a group of SAA members to be called Archivists for Change. When' this group had its organizing meeting at the SM San Francisco conference in 1971 E suggested it be called Friends of the SAA. Somehow though, through five issues of the Newsletter in 1971-72 and many conversations the name ACT stuck. And ACT was definitely what we were called in Columbus at the 36th annual meeting or SAA. ACT met daily there, usually in the late afternoon, to discuss how to best bring about the reforms we desired. All the meetings were open to any SAA member as the time and place were well noted on the bulletin board. As a result many different people came to one or two meetings, and once we had over 30 people crowded in a hotel room.

COLUMBUS: For those who did not attend this year's SAA annual meeting, here is an account of ACT's activities:

MONDAY: At our first meeting, the eve before the conference began, ACT tried to decide which Com of 70's recommendations we most wanted to have enacted. Fortunately many of the issues ACT favored had received Council's approval meaning there would be almost automatic passing of these issues: only individual members have the right to vote, the mail ballot, and running more than one person for each office and Council seat. Council did not approve the main recommendation of the Com of 70's which was the establishment of a full-time executive secretary. (See AA, ~~Spring~~*1972) It noted that SAA did not have the money now to assure the continuation of this position. Rather than turn down the recommendation point-blank, ACT decided to ask President-elect Wilfred Smith to appoint a committee to investigate foundation money, etc. By-law changes recommended by the Com of 70's included an enlarged and elected Nominating Committee. Council agreed to enlarge the committee but felt that only three members should be elected by the membership, leaving the remaining two seats to the two out-going Council members. After a lengthy discussion, ACT decided that

SAA membership would probably agree with Council that some continuity was necessary. ACT did decide however, to argue ~or the inclusion of the

*July/Oct.

FACTS 'IO DIGEST:

In December the Archivist of the United States, under pressure from the GSA, testified against S1421, a bill to create an independent NARS. Later the NARS Council met and resolved to support the independence bill, acting under the leadership of historian Richard Leopold. The bill takes a back burner, however, to the larger question of the federal budget.

Also .in December the Senate voted 79.,4 to establish a new commission on federal efficiency. appropriating \$10,000,000 for a three year study to be conducted by 18 members (a third-each appointed by the President, by the Senate majority Leader, and by the House Speaker). Modelled after the Hoover Commissions of .the 1940s and 50s, this bill must still pass the House and the President.

At the 1981 meeting of the SAA executive director, Council, committee chairpersons, and PAG leaders, the PAG leaders .again asked Council to define the. parameters of the PAGS, to guide the PAG leaders in how far the PAGs will be allowed" to go. At present PAG leaders know that the PAGs exist only for discussion; all action requests from the PAGs must be approved by Council, which will set up an ad hoc task force to conduct the action and report back to Council. The National Information Systems Task Force is a model of this sort of action. The PAG leaders also asked for "regular channels of communication through the SAA Newsletter with all members of the SAA, a request Council is taking under advisement. While the overall_SAA editorial policies are being revised. ACT and the Women's Caucus, as unofficial SAA bodies, are not soon likely to have access to SAA publications for more than general announcements like new officers, meeting places and times, etc.

THE ARCHIVAL PROFESSION" AND ACT'

At the 1970 SAA meeting historian Howard Zinn presented his thoughts on the role of the American archivist in continuing to improve American society. Although reform and radicalism were the hallmarks of the early 70s and the 1980s may be dominated by the needs of the Reagans for better and more tablecloths at the White House, Zinn's paper stated some generalizations that transcend changing times. He stated that "professionalism is a powerful form of social control. " Sparked by his challenge to consider the total social impact of our activities as archivists, M , P. and L organized ACT's first meeting on 12 October 1971 in San Francisco.

Act began "with an evaluation of the report of the SAA Committee of the 70s." It also investigated "the Society's administration and organization, the recruitment of minority archivists, the problems of women in the profession, the inadequacies of archival training, the accessibility of archives, and the participation of new and young members in the Society. Our purpose would be to democratize the Society, present alternative positions, initiate new programs, and relate our work .to the social change that we are.all.working for in our communities." (See "Archivists for -Change, Sept 1971, and the Act Newsletter, vol. III, no. 3, Sept 1974.)

In the last decade the SAA has changed greatly. Read through this partial list of changes, culled from past issues of the Act Newsletter, and consider our progress as a professional organization.

I. We have a paid executive director and staff; no longer is the organization dependent on the volunteer labor of a person already fully employed. The organization has become more visible, efficient, and service-oriented under paid, full-time leadership.

2 SAA membership has boomed, so that early members of ACT now enjoy the status of elder members of the organization. (Personally I feel ridiculous at age 36 with that status.)

3. The SAA constitution has been-revised to make the organization more responsive to its members and representative of their interests. The committee structure was at first changed to allow more and new members to participate. Then the committees were partially gutted to create PAGS that would handle socializing, general discussion, and the development of ad hoc task forces to attend to specific actions. Among the few remaining standing committees is the Committee on 'the Status of Women in the Profession (SOWC).

4. The SOWC drafted the now institutionalized biennial survey of SAA members which generates statistical information on the status of many types of SAA members, allowing us to monitor progress in certain areas. The survey does not yet, however, generate information on the number of minority members of the profession.

5. Perhaps soon the SAA will present a program for action on the recruitment and advancement of minority members. At present there isn't even reliable data on how many minority persons have chosen archives as a career.

6. Within the SAA there is widespread discussion of ways to standardize the educational level of beginning professional archivists and to insure that we all have a minimal level of professional competency at some time in our careers. .

7. The SAA has adopted a Code of Ethics for the profession.

8. Regional archival organizations have blossomed, and the SAA has worked cooperatively with them.

9. The ACT' Newsletter', has changed from a forum of lively discussion among ACT members to a sounding board for the newsletter editor. The ACT Caucus continues its boisterous annual discussion of ways to make the SAA establishment more responsive to our perception of the real needs and interests of American archivists.' ACTI' preceded the SAA in joining the Coalition to Save our Documentary Heritage and working for the liberation of NARS.

10. SAA dues continue to rise, without an honest public discussion of the real financial value of professional dues vis-i-vis the service to be expected from a professional organization, both theoretically and actually. While we complain that costs of membership are rising, what are we getting for our money? Does membership in SAA cost as much as membership in comparable organizations like ALA (no) or the: National Trust (no)?

11. The profession has profited from' numerous grants, primarily from NEH and the NHPRC, which allowed progress in "meat and potatoes" processing at individual institutions as well as multi-institutional surveys and more thoughtful analysis and codification of our ' professional standards.

12. NEH and the NHPRC will no longer be able to support this profession in the style to which we wanted to become accustomed, so we must either retrench or find alternative sources of funding.

13. PAG leaders are crying out for some guidance from Council which has left them dangling in the ,wind. The most successful PAGs are those Whose leaders can give herculean amounts of energy to running the group .without much voluntary help from the PAG' s n-membership.

14. NARS is still not an independent federal agency.

15. The SAA Council still needs to publicly define where we as a profession are going. .'What is the title of the archival road map? 'Which highways are we taking where?

Archivists for Change

16. Many ACT members have served prominently in SAA and in the regionals.

To date, ACT has provided a certain amount of leadership in the changes that this organization has undergone in the last decade, but there are still embarrassing questions to be asked and radical steps to be taken to improve this organization and the profession. Using the imagery of Vonnegut borrowed by Jerry Ham, ACI' has stood on the cutting edge, but what is the edge cutting?

It appears that American archivists are marching on the long road to complete professional status, where doctors and lawyers long ago made themselves comfortable. By observing these traditional professions, we can discern the roadmarks of professionalism and decide if we want to reach them.:', We already have our own code of ethics, a professional organization at the national level, an intellectual justification of the social value of our professional , work, awards for members who achieve the highest ideals of the profession and we are developing an abstract, independent body of knowledge. We have our own jargon and media of communications.

We do, however, have many miles to go before we sleep. Traditionally professions have several vital characteristics which archivery still lacks and for which ACT can agitate.

1. We need to develop further our body of theoretical knowledge and standard practice.
2. We must develop #1 above to the extent that the archives curriculum can stand alone among the graduate bodies of discipline.
3. We need this complete curriculum to control access to our profession and to the social status attained by initiation into our tight group.
4. NARS needs to stand as a neutral, independent government agency in the U.S., bearing testimony to the fact that the U.S. government recognizes the ability of our profession to regulate itself with absolute integrity for the public good.
5. In recruiting new members we must rigorously identify the people most likely to succeed in this profession. These people require the best possible training in a core curriculum to enter the profession, and then they have a right to continuous professional education throughout their careers. Each member must receive educational and other opportunities that will enable him or her .to fulfill their full potential for contribution to the SAA. in our society.
6. The independent status of the archival profession must receive wide public recognition, so that only practitioners approved by our national organization are allowed to practice. Concomitantly, people must recognize the right of our profession to disqualify members whose work falls Consistently below the" standards..
7. The Fellows who receive the highest accolades of our profession must reflect the total demography of our society. Otherwise there is no incentive for all professional archivists to work to their full potential.
8. We as a group and as individuals must always act in the best interests of the" society in which we operate. Traditionally the professions have failed when they ignored the burning social issues of the day such as equal access to medical care regardless of economic status, equal rights under the law, the right of the government to legislate prohibition etc. We cannot ignore contemporary social reality. We archivists today must take a conscious stand on such issues as equal rights for women and for members of minorities as well as the freedom of citizens to information and of privacy.

In short, if we archivists will become a professional group with all the rights and privileges