

ARCHIVAL SOLIDARITY

XIV BRAZILIAN CONGRESS ON ARCHIVAL SCIENCE
2006 April 25

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When archivists talk about records, we say, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

We mean that the information you get by reading all the records of a file or fonds gives you a much better and more complete picture of the activity that generated the record than reading any single document. We even go so far as to say there is an “archival bond” between the documents in a file that helps us to understand their meaning.

Those concepts could just as easily and just as appropriately be applied to professional organizations. We archivists are stronger as we work together: our whole voice as a profession is stronger than our individual voices. Archivists in association can say things and do things that no archivist could do alone; moreover, as a former Acting Archivist of the United States, I can tell you that there are times that a government archivist cannot say things but a professional association can. Furthermore, as we work together in professional associations, we create professional bonds, not unlike the archival bonds we know in our records. These reassure us that we are not describing alone or making difficult access decisions alone or struggling with ethical issues alone.

Today I want to talk about four ways in which professional archival associations support each other and the profession at large: setting standards, providing professional credentials, providing training opportunities, and publishing professional literature. You will notice that in this list there is nothing about money. I will talk about money and about direct work

programs at the conclusion, but I don't want to get your hopes up that there is a pot of money in some professional association just waiting to be used. Not so.

Before I begin on the four topics, let me talk briefly about the world of international archival organizations. For most of us, this is a world of strange acronyms and funny names. Let me first describe the most inclusive of the international archival organizations—the International Council on Archives—and then I will talk briefly about some of the specialty groups and groups from allied professions.

I. International Archival Organizations

ICA. The International Council on Archives was established in 1948, principally to assist European archives to recover from the immense damage and destruction of World War II. Headquartered in Paris, it initially was an organization of national archives only, and even today the national archives are the principal sources for funds for the organization. Over the decades, professional associations became members, as did non-national archives and individuals. Today its stated mission is “to promote the management and use of records and archives and the preservation of the archival heritage of humanity around the world, through the sharing of experiences, research and ideas on professional archival and records management matters and on the management and organization of archival institutions.”

ICA organizes the world into regional branches, each with a chair and secretary and board. Latin America's regional body is the Asociacion latinoamericana de archivos or ALA.

ICA also has sections made up of members sharing a common professional interest; one of these is the Section of Records Management and Archival Professional Associations, acronym

SPA, to which every professional archival association in the world is encouraged to belong. (I should point out here that in order to be a member of an ICA regional body or section one has to first be a member of ICA itself.) Within SPA is a sub-group called “Archival Solidarity,” formed in 2000 with the aim of promoting cooperation to “facilitate and inspire international development projects to benefit archives and archivists”—essentially a communication effort.

The highest decision-making body in ICA is the Annual General Meeting of its members. Between the annual meetings an Executive Board manages the ICA. The Board consists of the chairs of the regions and the sections, plus an elected president and vice-presidents and treasurer. A subgroup of the Board, called the Management Commission, manages decisions between Board meetings. ICA has a tiny paid staff of four people in the Paris office, and it relies on the voluntary contributions of its members (both in time and funds) to carry out programs and projects.

ICA holds a worldwide general congress every four years; the next one is in 2008 at Kuala Lumpur. In the three years between the congresses it holds a roundtable, known by its acronym CITRA, for national archivists and heads of sections. Each roundtable is organized around a theme; the 2006 roundtable will be in Curacao, November 20-26, on “Sharing One’s Memory through Globalization.”

ICA is the official representative of the archival profession to UNESCO. With three other organizations it founded the International Committee of the Blue Shield in 1996 to work to protect cultural heritage threatened by wars and natural disasters. ICA is also a member of the

Co-ordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations and other coordinating bodies in the field of heritage and culture. See www.ica.org.

FIAF. Founded in Paris in 1938, FIAF (International Federation of Film Archives) is an association of archives specializing in motion pictures. The full members are archival institutions whose “principal object” is preserving and providing access to film. See www.fiafnet.org.

FIAT. When FIAF began no one, of course, thought of television. By 1977, the world of broadcasting archives was growing, and the International Federation of Television Archives (FIAT) was founded. Its purpose is “to provide a means for co-operation amongst broadcast and national audiovisual archives and libraries concerned with the collection, preservation and exploitation of moving image and recorded sound materials and associated documentation.” Full members of FIAT are all institutions relating to radio and TV or national archives that hold radio and TV archives. See www.fiatifta.org.

IASA. The International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives dates from 1969. Like FIAT and FIAT, it is principally an organization of institutions; in this case the emphasis is on archives that preserve recorded sound from any source. See www.iasa-web.org.

AMIA. While the institutions of the world of audiovisual archives had a range of professional organizations, individual archivists dealing with those formats did not. Meeting informally since the 1960s, a group of audiovisual archivists in 1990 adopted the name Association of Moving Image Archivists and in 1991 voted to “formalize as an individual-based professional

association—the only one of its kind in the moving image archival field.” See

www.amianet.org.

Archiveros sin Fronteras (AsF). The newest international membership organization in the archival world is AsF, known in Spanish as Archiveros sin Fronteras and in English as Archivists without Borders. Established in Barcelona in 1998, its membership includes both individuals and organizations and it encourages groups in various countries to organize sections of AsF. Currently there are sections in Argentina and France, and sections are in discussion in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay, according to the AsF website as of 2006 April 16. Its general purpose is to conserve documentary patrimony that is in imminent danger of loss or destruction through voluntary cooperative action. Here in Brazil it has worked with the personal archives of the Bishop of Sao Felix de Araguaia (Pere Casaldaliga). See www.arxivers.org.

ARMA International. ARMA International was founded in 1955 as the American Records Management Association, acronym ARMA. Subsequently it opened membership to the international community and changed its name to reflect its expansion. Membership is individual not institutional, and ARMA encourages groups of ARMA members in a single geographic area to form local chapters. ARMA International now has about 10,000 members, with about 5% of them outside the US and Canada in more than 30 countries, and it is increasingly promoting international membership. ARMA contracts with the Institute of Certified Records Managers to provide its credentialing service (the Certified Records Manager, or CRM designation) for individuals. See www.arma.org.

IFLA. Founded in 1927, the International Federation of Library Associations is principally that: an association of associations. In that way it is more like the ICA's Section of Professional Associations than like the ICA itself. IFLA does include institutional members and individuals can be "personal affiliates." See www.ifla.org.

Now let us turn to the four general types of international development support that the professional organizations provide.

II. Professional Development and International Archival Organizations

Setting standards. As we discuss standards, it is worth remembering how very far we as an archival profession have come in the last fifteen years. Taking the list of functions generally agreed to be part of the archival horizon, we have, in order of activity:

Records management

Appraisal and scheduling

Accessioning

Arrangement and description

Access review

Reference service

(I have omitted preservation because that is almost entirely a separate professional specialty that archivists may manage but do not perform.) In addition to these major functions, archivists also:

Implement and sometimes develop archival laws

Abide by a professional code of ethics

Today we have international standards for records management, arrangement and description, and ethical practice. We also have a number of formal international statements of best practice, such as that on the elements of an archival law or that on international archival claims.

In my opinion, the greatest contribution that the International Council on Archives has made in its sixty-year history is the production of the two international standards on description and the international code of ethics. Subsequently, the description standards have been translated into many languages and are in use all over the world. For ICA I developed an application guideline for the basic description standard that can be used when describing records that have significant information for the exercise of human rights.

Similarly, FIAF published the standard cataloging rules of film archives and IASA published the rules for describing sound recordings. ARMA, along with ICA, provided key support during the development of the international standard for records management, ISO 15489, and ICA worked on the standard for library and archives storage, ISO 11799.

These are professional tools, made by archivists, that empower archivists.

Offering professional credentials. Twenty some years ago the archivists in the United States and Canada were in a furious debate over what was the appropriate education for an archivist: What should an archivist know? How should that knowledge be acquired? How did a potential employer know that someone knew enough to be called an archivist? The debate circled around whether to accredit programs of archival education in universities or whether--in some way--to credential individuals. After a long period of searching, the leadership of the

profession settled on the idea of developing an examination that, if completed successfully, would allow the person to call himself or herself a Certified Archivist.

The process of creating the examination was complex. The first, and most important, step was to identify the domains of practice, that is, those “commonly accepted duties and responsibilities that professional archivists perform in the course of their work.” For each of these domains of practice, the tasks involved were delineated and then the knowledge and skills that were needed to perform a given task were identified. Only then were the examination questions developed. The identification of these domains of practice helped the archival profession in America better define itself and continues to influence the development of the profession.

Today a separate organization, called the Academy of Certified Archivists, manages the certification process. It uses a professional testing firm to help ensure that the certification exam is and remains valid. While the Academy certainly didn’t start out to be an international body, and while the test remains based on North American (US and Canada) archival practices, to our surprise we have had a number of foreign archivists take and pass the test. The test has even been given once in Hong Kong. Because it is a multiple choice test, the test taker does not have to be able to either write or speak English, but he or she has to read English.

As I mentioned above, the records management profession also has an exam and credential.

The international Code of Ethics adopted by the ICA and a Code of Professional Responsibility adopted by ARMA International reinforce these credentials.

A number of national professional archival associations have national certification processes (the Society of Archivists in England, for example). Archivists in Europe are holding a conference in mid-May on the theme of professional competencies, including certification. This may result in a pan-European credentialing process, which is of particular interest in Europe because the archivists within the European Union have the right to move from one nation to another to take archival posts.

Providing training opportunities. This is one of the oldest means of professional cooperation that exists. National archives, of course, sponsor training courses, but so do professional associations. Some are held in conjunction with conferences, while others are held as separate events. Most of the professional associations have websites, where information about upcoming conferences is posted.

ICA bodies regularly meet in the countries of the members of that body, and sometimes the country hosting the meeting will ask the group to hold a seminar for the archivists in the host country. The ICA legal committee, for example, met in Ukraine and in Macao and conducted seminars both times. Sometimes countries hosting the annual meeting of the ICA Roundtable (CITRA) will have a training session for regional people either right before or right after the conference.

Finally, some regional groups of ICA have sponsored very formal training programs.

EASTICA (the East Asia Regional Branch of ICA), for example, has held two archival training courses in conjunction with the University of Hong Kong, each course lasting three weeks. In addition, EASTICA cooperated with one of its members, Macao, to bring records

management training to personnel in the government of Macao—not for the archivists, but for people from ministries and departments.

How does one find such training opportunities? Unfortunately there is no single source for training worldwide. The UNESCO Archives Portal is one place, and the ICA website is another. But a complete list of the offerings of the Society of American Archivists, for example, is found on neither of those hosts but is on the SAA's own website. The UNESCO Portal is perhaps the best worldwide link to the websites of national archives and national professional associations. See http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=5761&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.

Publishing professional literature. Along with training, this is where the associations excel. They all have newsletters, many publish journals, some publish manuals and books. Many of these are now available online.

I will conclude by talking a little about professional associations as sources of labor and funds.

III. International Archival Associations as Resources for Labor and Funds

In 2002 and 2003, the Archival Solidarity committee of ICA/SPA sent a questionnaire to archives around the world, asking for information on current international outreach activities. The working group received information on 120 projects. Respondents in 23 countries reported that they offered international development assistance. The majority (47) of the international archival development projects were funded by NGOS (non-governmental

organizations), governments funded 35 projects, archival associations funded 18, and the remainder were funded by foundations, the European Community, non-archival associations, and matching funds by the recipient government (some projects received funding from more than one source). The following international groups also reported providing assistance to archival programs:

Archivists without Borders (AsF)

Association internationale des archives francophones (AIAF)

Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM)

European Community/Council of Europe

International Federation of Archives of Film (FIAF)

ICA and its regional branches

International Records Management Trust

UNESCO

Turning from donors to recipients, the survey also showed that archives in 67 countries received assistance, along with a few regional bodies such as the Organization of East Caribbean States. The assistance projects were organized primarily by national or other government archives (33); a mix of NGOs, universities, and other institutions organized 39; archival associations 22 and non-archival associations 11; and only 9 were organized by international organizations and 2 by individuals.

The types of projects also fell into a number of categories. Nearly half, however—59 of the 120 total—were characterized as “government record keeping and accountability” projects. Education, training and professional development (including donations of professional literature) accounted for 25. Eleven projects each were for preservation management or

description and access projects. The rest, all under ten projects each, were reported as projects for acquisition, archival facilities, archival policy and law, building and construction, computer applications and digitization, oral histories, and “research.”

The survey results closely follow the general patterns of international donor partnerships. Professional organizations and associations as donor partners normally provide volunteer labor, technical expertise, legitimacy, and a dissemination network, but not financial resources or in-kind goods. The donor partners that provide financial resources are usually national and local governments, bilateral agencies and international organizations, private enterprises and businesses, and sometimes families or individuals.

The Archival Solidarity project hopes to promote international development activities for archives and archivists by acting as an information clearinghouse and helping archives find matching partners and funding. It is clear that funding for projects and archival development must come from many diverse sources, but it is equally clear that the ICA will not be a principal source of funds for archival development.

Why not ICA? First of all, ICA itself has very limited financial resources. Its current constitution includes a Fund for International Archival Development, acronym FIDA, the general purpose of which is to support the development of archives in all countries. Its funding sources are “a grant from ICA to be determined annually by the Executive Board” and “donations from third parties provided these do not compromise the autonomy of ICA.”

A group was asked to develop the guidelines for FIDA, which were presented to the Executive Board at its meeting last autumn, but the Board has not yet acted on them. In short, right now there is no mechanism for ICA funding for projects.

One of the things we need most in the archival world is a central source of information on what kinds of projects might be supported by which governments or institutions—a giant archival development matching service. This is a difficult task, and one that the ICA/SPA Archival Solidarity group would like to undertake, but it in itself requires dedicated resources that are not easy to obtain.

One of the real difficulties with finding international support for archival projects is that many of them must be proposed by governments to the international funders. Sadly, most governments put requests for archival support low on their priority list for international assistance. I have personally informed archivists that a funder was willing to provide assistance to them if their government would ask for it, only to have no request come forward. I would later find out that the government would not permit the request to be made because it wanted any foreign currency to be dedicated to some other project. Requests from one professional association to another may be an easier way to obtain support.

In conclusion, we all want archives to take wing, to develop and progress. My image is that of a flock of geese flying in a giant V. Biologists tell us that as each goose flaps its wings, it creates uplift for the bird following. By flying in a V formation, the whole flock greatly increases its flying range over one bird flying alone. Furthermore, the geese trade off which one is in front of the V because that is the bird that gets no lift from the rest. And, finally, geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those in front to keep up their speed.

If we as archivists, organized into associations, emulate the geese:

*We will share a common direction and a sense of community to get where we want to go because we are traveling with each other's thrust.

*We will trade off who is in the lead, sharing projects and initiatives.

*And we will honk from behind, not to complain but to encourage those archivists and archival institutions that are at the point of the V.