

My focus is to comment on the history of the organization and how MARAC went from a small organization founded by a small group of archivists to one of the leaders in the archival community. My first encounter with the concept of starting a regional archival professional organization occurred at the annual summer Archives-Library Institute sponsored by the Ohio Historical Society and headquartered in their magnificent new headquarters (at the time) in Columbus along with several days at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland. By the summer of 1972 I had a graduate degree in history and a position at the New Jersey Historical Society, but no formal archival training and no venue to meet other archivists. The first opportunity was the Institute, a now defunct, but then very good program with classes on appraisal, arrangement and description, and all of the issues with which we grappled including preservation, security, single item cataloging of literary manuscripts, etc. Best of all was the venue in which to meet other young professional archivists at similar stages in their careers including several from the Mid-Atlantic region. As the program came to a close, a big question was "how to we get more training and stay in contact and network with others who are in the same situation?" Our instructors informed us that the Society of American Archivists was the only venue for professional training and advancement and encouraged us to attend the next meeting which was coincidentally meeting that October in Columbus. However, looking into it revealed that the expense of attending a long conference and lack of workshops and basic sessions together with discouragement from our own administrations (there was a perception that although anyone could attend, only higher level archivists could be active in SAA and would derive any benefit from membership) kept me and many of the people who I met that summer from attending. I soon learned from one of the

attendees of the Ohio Historical Society Institute (Michael Plunkett who had recently begun his career in the manuscripts division of the Alderman Library at the University of Virginia) that there were at least a couple dozen likeminded young archivists together with a dozen older professionals who were thinking the same way in the Mid-Atlantic region alone, as well as an equal number in many of the other regions of the country.

Other than the National Archives sponsored program, the Ohio Institute described earlier, and perhaps one or two others, there were no proscribed archival training programs in 1972. Many of us gravitated to the field due to a lack of teaching positions in higher education. The newly exploding fields of social history, women's history, working class history and related areas and the resulting interest in scholars and laypeople in exploring primary sources led to plenty of federal and state funding and newly created archivist positions some even with faculty status. Newly hired archivists came from several academic backgrounds with one thing in common---no expertise in the field, and worse, no training in the field whatsoever---only much energy and devotion to it for the most part. It was clear that if we were to become educated and collaborate with our colleagues (both novices and those who were more experienced), we would have to create the mechanisms to do so ourselves. With no computers, no Internet, no e-mail, no conference calling capability, or any other way to communicate easily, we could only do this face-to-face. With all this in mind, MARAC was launched in the summer of 1972 and held its first meeting in Wilmington, DE that October. MARAC has given me the opportunity to travel within my region, meet people, to visit other repositories in action together with a practical as well as theoretical archival education and to develop leadership skills that were easily transferable to my professional and personal life. MARAC has

also provided a creative outlet to develop writing skills through its newsletter, technical leaflets, and occasional publications. All this was available at the lowest possible cost, and the involvement of a large percentage of the membership in leadership activities. There was little if any elitism and I have cherished memories of friendships that will be with me always.

An organizational meeting attended by 33 people (five from the University of Virginia alone) was held in the summer of 1972 at College Park, Md. The note which invited and encouraged people to attend the session said "we see a need to provide a practical, action oriented group within a reasonable traveling distance for those who have not had the opportunity to become active nationally, as well as for those who are members of SAA....we are particularly interested in enlisting junior staff members and mid-level employees of manuscript repositories and archives, as well as those who work in public libraries, state and local historical societies, documentary publication projects, and the like. We see the programs, the policies, and the governance for this group arising from the members' needs and their willingness to participate". The minutes of that first session record that "there is a people gap...nobody knows who anybody else is, and who is working in the area. Very few people who have information seem to be able to get it to the people who want it. There is also a people to program gap". A list of possible topics was then distributed and included: pest control, in-house microfilming, purchasing manuscripts, security, conservation, cataloging, field work, competition verses cooperation, the archivist and the historian, elitism in manuscript collecting, developing standards of terminology, statistics keeping and finding aids, literary rights, exhibits, urban archives, ethnic archives, women's archives, and subject verses geographical collecting. Nearly all these topics found their way into the early programs. With the National Archives

in our midst, there was a fear that its staff would “take over” MARAC, a fear that thankfully never materialized.

A good number, but not all members of the Society of American Archivists embraced the concept of regional organizations who might become rivals to the national association. On the other hand, SAA was seen as being very hierarchical. It was difficult to join its committees and there was at least a perception that both young people and women were essentially ignored. What travel funding there was in the archival repositories went to the top professionals, leaving the rest of us at home. An active SAA member and leader encouraged the group to become a branch of the SAA and pay its dues to the national organization rather than becoming an independent association. He deemed SAA the professional group and the regionals the amateurs. That advice was rejected. Others favored some sort of confederation rather than regional chapters and MARAC was born! To show that there were no hard feelings, SAA loaned \$100 seed money to each regional group, which MARAC returned in 1973. An SAA symposium on regionals was held that year in Chicago and emphasized cooperation and good will as key to the relationship. The minutes described the session as one of “clearing the air”. “All groups agreed that there should be professional regional groups as well as a national group and that programs and cooperation in the area of collections needs further investigation and development”. MARAC even went so far to promote a “give your boss a MARAC membership for Christmas” campaign with an application form prominently displayed in the December 1972 issue of the Mid-Atlantic Archivist.

Memories of the first conference held in small classrooms of a convent in Wilmington with the Sisters serving us our meals start with getting the first and only speeding ticket in my life

on the drive down (I must have really been anxious to attend my first professional meeting), the incredibly practical sessions that would help me immediately at work (including the now famous lard can humidification demonstration that was repeated often in those early MARAC meetings), and meeting people who became lifelong friends and colleagues. There was excitement, comradery, and a commitment to serve in the air! The conference ended bizarrely on Saturday afternoon with Richard Nixon's brother Ed campaigning for him in the lobby of the Hotel DuPont where we were staying---so I got in some political debating as well.

At our business meeting we voted in a constitution that identified MARAC as a "member-oriented professional organization established to promote the professional welfare of its members, cooperate with and exchange information among individuals interested in the preservation and use of archival research and methodology, provide a forum for matters of common cause, become a clearinghouse for and active participant in joint ventures and cooperative projects, and cooperate with other organizations having similar objectives". A few years later in 1977, a line was added "to encourage professional involvement of persons actively engaged in the preservation and use of all types of historical research materials.

150 people attended that first meeting and by the beginning of 1973, there were 14 regional archival professional associations, big and small throughout the nation. Of those 150 attending the first conference, 100 returned a questionnaire and 22 identified themselves as SAA members. There was tremendous institutional support for MARAC for mailings, conferences, meeting sites, etc. and an incredible spirit of involvement and volunteerism. As a result the conference registration fee was a whopping \$2, lunches were \$2 and membership dues were \$3.

Incredibly, prices in that neighborhood held for many years, and hotel rooms were always less than \$15 each (in some cases much less) when sharing a double room. Numerous committees for governance and action were formed leading me to write in a note to Mary Elizabeth Ruwell that for an unorganized group, we're getting very organized! The program for that first conference in 1972 consisted of: conservation and physical security, handling of maps, prints, and drawings, standardization of finding aids, how-to publications and how to get them, professional training and qualifications, training the historian to do research in manuscript sources, photocopying and legal custodial problems, how to best assist the researcher, practical matters in cataloging, handling of photographs, building a college archives, potential value of computer technology, literary rights, in-house restoration, publicizing your collection, creating an exhibition, philosophy of cataloging, in-house microfilming, support of the archivist as a professional, and standardization of terminology.

146 people attended the second conference which took place in Baltimore in Spring 1973 and again featured a \$2 registration fee, without the Sisters to cook for us, lunch went up to \$5 and the hotel ran each person who shared a double room \$13. New sessions included urban archives, problems of small historical societies, public records, working in a special collections, legal problems of the profession, competition verses cooperation in collecting, processing for beginners, criteria for access, motion picture archives, building an ethnic collection, the bicentennial of the American Revolution which was soon to take place, handling of printed items, administering an oral history collection, and preparation of guides to manuscript collections.

The fall 1973 conference was held in Philadelphia. New sessions included recruitment and selection, personnel and

workplace situations, affirmative action and equal opportunity, what to do before the architect comes, the role of advisory governing bodies, Black history, protection verses user service, Jewish history, retention and disposition of institutional records, educational programs, sources for genealogical research, and Eastern and Southern European national groups in America.

The spring 1974 conference was held in Charlottesville. New sessions included how historical preservationists can help archivists, obtaining public and private funding, reporting collections to NUCMC led by the legendary Arline Custer herself, insuring collections, archiving Virginia folklore, publication techniques, opportunities for individual archivists, use of manuscripts in undergraduate teaching, basic reference collections for archivists, and the use of archives by the documentary editor. MARAC was already in a state of self-examination and thinking of the future and included a session "Whither MARAC".

The fall 1974 conference in Newark, NJ featured the very first session on machine-readable records. It also marked the first of several times that in order to procure the lowest possible housing, meeting room, and meal costs, local arrangements chairs signed contracts with hotels that had not yet been built (or as in the case of the historic, majestic Marlborough-Blenheim in Atlantic City 3 years later, were about to be torn down) or the use of dormitories in Pittsburgh in spring 1981. Other new sessions in fall 1974 included bureaucratic restraints on individual development or Can you stay close to the records and still advance in the profession, should there be a distinction between professional and non-professional, and organizing a statewide manuscript conference to help the state caucuses which were beginning to organize. Those who attended the midnight tour of Newark and then the 2 am

dinners at various Portuguese restaurants in the Ironbound section of the city will likely never forget it.

2 Over the years, I was exposed to such helpful sessions such as 19th century accounting methods. I heard the records manager of IBM tell us about the archival implications of the paperless office as early as fall 1979, and attended countless sessions on documentation strategies for various kinds of social history records which were of great benefit to me and many others.

An historic moment in MARAC's development was the joint meeting with SAA in the fall of 1975. A pact with the national organization was negotiated that allowed MARAC members who were not members of SAA to attend SAA sessions for the MARAC registration fee (\$3) and vice versa (a better deal for MARAC folks). Basically SAA met from September 30 through October 2nd and MARAC took over with its sessions on October 3rd and 4th. SAA was exposed directly to MARAC's workshop style practical sessions which greatly impacted its own future offerings at national conventions. MARAC members were exposed to SAA and numerous attendees joined that year. This also marked the first MARAC joint meeting of several to follow in those early years including one with the Society of Ohio Archivists in Wheeling WV in fall 1977, with the New England Archivists in Albany, NY in fall 1979, and with the Lake Ontario Archives Conference in Spring 1984. By the fall 1981 New York meeting at the newly constructed Vista International Hotel in the World Trade Center (also contracted well before it was built) MARAC membership had reached 600. The program boasted that this (the World Trade Center) was "the closest that some of us will ever get to heaven"!

MARAC kept in constant touch with its membership in the early years through publications with an ongoing quarterly

newsletter that has never missed an issue, technical leaflets (appraising social welfare case files, computing the cost of processing, planning for archival programs, processing Congressional collections, developing archival exhibits, involving volunteers in archives, identifying and handling classified documents, archival sampling: a method of appraisal and means of retention, photograph preservation, and understanding the record-keeping practices of scientists) and symposia volumes (constitutional issues in archives, the Coalition to Save our Documentary Heritage: an important lesson in archival advocacy, and automation in archives which underwent several printings).

Things clearly got more complicated as times went on. For example, by 1990, the Semi-Annual Meeting Handbook which we passed from one local arrangements committee to the next had grown to a whopping 60 pages. Today, we have a management firm collecting our dues and keeping membership records rather than volunteers. However, MARAC is still known for its member oriented programs and activities and a place where all archivists feel comfortable regardless of their time in and status in the profession. There are still outstanding basic sessions and workshops, but now theoretical and documentation and technology sessions are offered as well. Moreover SAA itself has become much more hospitable if not less expensive. Today its programs and workshops are hardly distinguishable from MARAC's and the other regionals. Whereas in 1972 a director of an academic library's special collections would be the only staff member attending SAA, in 2008, I stay home and use our precious travel dollars to allow other members of the staff to gain exposure to the national association. There will always be a place for MARAC and the other regionals and I for one, will always be forever grateful for the unparalleled educational and professional leadership

opportunities it has provided me and the lifelong professional relationships and friendships that have resulted.

~