

ARCHIVAL PUBLICATIONS AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL:  
THE MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL ARCHIVES CONFERENCE, 1972-1997

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The 1970s saw the founding of several regional archival organizations partially in reaction to the belief that the Society of American Archivists was not adequately addressing the needs of less-experienced professionals, staff from small repositories, and archival issues below the national level. Six regional organizations—MARAC, the Midwest Archives Conference (MAC), the New England Archivists (NEA), the Northwest Archivists Inc. (NAI), the Society of California Archivists, and the Society of Southwest Archivists (SSA)—formed in 1972.<sup>2</sup> The publications programs of the regionals differ in breadth, depth, and scope, ranging from local interest newsletters, conference proceedings, and technical leaflets, to a scholarly journal. NEA, SSA, and NAI publish the quarterly newsletters *NEA Newsletter*, *Southwestern Archivist*, and *Easy Access*. MAC began publishing the journal *Midwestern Archivist* in 1976, changing its name to *Archival Issues* in 1992. The Society of California Archivists produces an occasional series, *Westwords*, an annual compilation of papers delivered at their meetings. At the state level, the ambitious Society of Georgia Archivists launched the scholarly journal, *Georgia Archive*, in fall 1972, renaming it *Provenance* in spring 1983 to reflect its regional coverage and national audience beyond Georgia.<sup>3</sup> MARAC, on the other hand, has published all but a scholarly journal, and at one point considered co-sponsoring *Georgia Archive*.

MARAC has a twenty-five year history of publishing beginning with the first issue of *The Mid-Atlantic Archivist* newsletter in October 1972 and including technical leaflets,

occasional publications, archival symposia, a directory of archivists in the mid-Atlantic region, and trifold brochures. The newsletter provides current news of interest to members: Steering Committee minutes, news from states and the National Archives, conference session abstracts, profiles of members' institutions, and job ads. Technical leaflets are a hands-on approach to specialized subjects focusing on the step-by-step process. Occasional publications take a more theoretical approach toward broad issues. Thematic conferences provide material for archival symposia. Brochures offer succinct guidelines on such topics as selecting an archivist, what makes a good finding aid, and archives as a career.

When thirty-three archivists met to form the first Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference in June 1972, they recognized the need for practical "how-to-do-it" guides to be available to archivists, librarians, and curators in repositories—from small to large—in the region.<sup>4</sup> At the first MARAC meeting in October 1972, attendees responded affirmatively on a questionnaire to the need for a newsletter as a first step. Production of the *mid-atlantic archivist (maa)* began in October 1972 as the "publishing arm" of MARAC and continues to this day. The newsletter grew from a four-page mimeograph to the current 20- to 32-page commercially printed version. In addition to a newsletter, attendees also foresaw the need for a directory of members, up-to-date lists of archival supplies and sources of technical information, and a guide to setting up an archives.<sup>5</sup> The Steering Committee compiled a list of projects including a list of depositories with accurate information and a subject index, a bibliography of guides from the MARAC area, and a journal similar to *Georgia Archive*. They determined these projects needed a temporary committee to oversee their production and decided to present a proposal to the

membership.<sup>6</sup> The Ad Hoc Publications Committee held its first meeting in March 1976—the beginning of an active publications program.<sup>7</sup>

The Ad Hoc Publications Committee sought to clarify its role “in opening avenues for publication by members” and suggested: publishing some of the conference session papers, encouraging articles on understudied areas, “fostering subject area bibliographies or surveys of archival developments in special fields of interest,” freeing space in the newsletter for more current news items, and publishing a series of occasional papers. To carry forward these ideas, the committee recommended the creation of an editorial advisory board.<sup>8</sup> The committee inserted a notice in the newsletter announcing its formation “to consider possibilities for a fuller range of publications to serve the membership, perhaps taking the form of occasional papers. The committee will also explore suggestions that it serve as a clearinghouse for the publication in existing journals of session papers from MARAC meetings, and that it attempt to stimulate publication by members of articles or surveys of particular subject fields.”<sup>9</sup> At its next meeting in July 1976, the committee made one long-lasting, important recommendation: the establishment of the Arline Custer Memorial Award, an annual monetary award for authors of articles and monographs to encourage publishable quality articles in established professional archival journals. An additional recommendation to compile and publish a research guide to archival collections in the mid-Atlantic region died in committee.<sup>10</sup>

The newsletter operated independently from the publications committee. After four years of expanding size and coverage, and the publication of a “Technical Notes” section, the newsletter needed restructuring. The Ad Hoc Publications Committee met with the newsletter staff and they all agreed to move away from the journal-type direction

to focus on feature articles of more current interest. The committee considered the idea of a journal publication but decided that with the lack of resources and MARAC's objectives, a regular journal was neither feasible nor necessary.<sup>11</sup> The Steering Committee adopted a resolution instructing the Ad Hoc Publications Committee to continue as an editorial advisory board to work toward the production of occasional publications. They also felt that the membership should be consulted before launching a full-blown publications program.<sup>12</sup> At the spring 1977 business meeting, the membership unanimously passed the resolution authorizing "the editorial advisory board to begin a series of occasional publications, and to adopt guidelines necessary to define editorial standards."<sup>13</sup>

The first project undertaken by the Editorial Advisory Board was compiling and preparing for separate publication Paul Mucci's "Technical Notes" articles on preservation that had appeared over a period of two and one-half years in the newsletter. MARAC printed 1,500 copies of *Paper and Leather Conservation: A Manual* in 1978 as Occasional Publication Number 1.<sup>14</sup> Despite the success of the Mucci manual, the Steering Committee decided to dissolve the Publications Committee in September 1979 because some members wished "to be relieved of their service. A new committee will be appointed when a mandate to publish again appears."<sup>15</sup> The following May the Steering Committee made the Editorial Advisory Board permanent and charged the chairperson with constituting a publications committee.<sup>16</sup> One of the first proposals considered was the possibility of MARAC subventing the journal, *Georgia Archive*. The Publications Committee recommended pursuing involvement with co-sponsorship of *Georgia Archive* and not to proceed with a MARAC occasional publications program since both the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the American Association for State and Local

History (AASLH) provided comprehensive coverage. When New England Archivists (NEA) decided against financing *Georgia Archive*, MARAC also declined the Society of Georgia Archivists' invitation. The Steering Committee alternately suggested a tenth anniversary volume of papers written by MARAC and NEA members but because of a lack of submissions they cancelled the volume.<sup>17</sup> The Committee then published *Guidelines for Archives and Manuscript Repositories* as Occasional Publication Number 2 in 1981.

In August 1981 the New York Caucus of MARAC proposed, and Steering Committee approved, a project to publish a series of technical leaflets as an insert for the newsletter, similar to those in AASLH's *History News*. The series titled, "MARAC's Dear Archivist...Practical Solutions to Archival Dilemmas," was "intended to provide brief, practical information about selected archival topics suitable especially for beginners in the profession." The technical leaflets would explain how to do something rather than concentrating on why it should be done. They would go beyond case studies of particular institutions and instead focus on principles or procedures applicable to a wide audience. As a pilot project, the New York Caucus produced four issues in 1982 beginning with Thomas E. Mills' *Appraisal of Social Welfare Case Files*, followed by Thomas Wilsted's *Computing the Total Cost of Archival Processing*, Bruce W. Dearstyne's *Planning for Archival Programs: An Introduction*, and Mary Boccaccio and David W. Carmicheal's *Processing Congressional Collections*.<sup>18</sup> These four were so popular that by September 1983 the series became a part of MARAC's publication program. The burst of publishing activity in 1982 and 1983 culminated in the appearance of Occasional Publication Number

3, Charlene Bickford's *The Coalition to Save Our Documentary Heritage* and a second printing of *Guidelines for Archives and Manuscript Repositories*.<sup>19</sup>

To continue the momentum from the first four technical leaflets, the committee brainstormed potential topics. From twenty-two ideas generated, the Technical Leaflets Series editor approached sixteen people in 1983 to write technical leaflets on a wide range of topics. Only one, *Involving Volunteers in Archives*, materialized, and by a different author than the one proposed.<sup>20</sup> The Committee would soon find that although they had a wealth of ideas for technical leaflets, convincing volunteer authors to write them proved difficult.

As a result of a task force report, MARAC reorganized in 1984 and Publications finally moved from ad hoc status to a standing committee. The new committee members drafted a memorandum outlining the functions and goals of the MARAC Publications Committee that it presented to Steering Committee at the summer meeting. The reorganization brought the *mid-atlantic archivist*, technical leaflets, and occasional publications under one editorial board and budget. The revamped committee functioned as the editorial board for all publications, with responsibility for planning, marketing, and sales.<sup>21</sup>

In July 1985 the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York proposed a joint publication with MARAC—the trifold brochure, *Selecting an Archivist*. The Steering Committee charged the Education and Outreach Committee with initiating distribution ideas, although technically the brochure belonged in the Publication Committee's jurisdiction. Intended to “provide information to organizations, corporations, and individuals seeking guidance in hiring a professional to develop and

maintain archival collections," the brochure was available for free by that December.<sup>22</sup> Three and one-half years later the brochure had sold only a few hundred copies at ten cents apiece. When the New England Archivists suggested revising the brochure, the Steering Committee rejected their proposal and instead gave them 1,000 copies to redistribute.<sup>23</sup> The Publications Committee spent most of 1986 revising and updating the first four technical leaflets rather than publishing new ones. Despite the dearth of submissions for the proposed tenth anniversary volume of papers, Steering Committee voted to seek the publication of a fifteenth anniversary archival issues reader.<sup>24</sup> Rather than publish full session papers as proceedings from each meeting, Steering Committee opted to have session abstracts printed in the *mid-atlantic archivist*.<sup>25</sup> And, the Finding Aids Committee proposed printing a trifold brochure, *Findings on Finding Aids*, that came out in early 1988.<sup>26</sup>

The Publications Committee proposed an ambitious publishing schedule of eight technical leaflets, occasional publications, and symposia between October 1988 and October 1990.<sup>27</sup> In a change of direction in MARAC's publications program, Steering Committee sanctioned a volume of conference papers. In addition to documenting a thematic program, the shift intended to improve the quality of papers delivered at the conferences and make a valuable contribution to the archival literature. They used the forthcoming constitutional issues volume as a prototype for future numbers.<sup>28</sup> The first irregularly-issued Archival Symposia, *Constitutional Issues and Archives*, published in October 1988, resulted from the fall 1987 conference in Charleston, West Virginia. The Publications Committee and the symposia editor anticipated publishing selected papers and, in planning the conference, the program committee urged participants to develop



papers along the theme, “Archives: The Living Constitution.” The resulting publication contains papers generally focusing on certain “constitutional” aspects of archives that are embodied in the work of archivists.<sup>29</sup> From the two year plan, only *Constitutional Issues and Archives* was published on schedule and only one other scheduled work appeared—three years late—Archival Symposia Number 3, *Automation in Archives*.

By November 1988 the first occasional publication, Paul Mucci’s *Paper and Leather Conservation: A Manual*, needed revising and Steering Committee voted to discontinue it.<sup>30</sup> The fifteenth anniversary volume never materialized but work began on a projected twentieth anniversary issue that was cancelled in February 1990.<sup>31</sup> In an August 1989 “Report on the MARAC Publications Program,” Publications Committee chair Greg Bradsher outlined a thoughtful and detailed position paper on the future of the publications program. He suggested avoiding direct competition with SAA and others by publishing “works that address gaps in the archival literature or significantly improve on existing works.” To identify the gaps, he recommended developing a questionnaire asking members what subjects they wanted covered by MARAC publications.<sup>32</sup> A subsequent 1990 membership survey included a section on publications/newsletter but it did not solicit suggestions for topics. The disheartening results showed that 46% of respondents had never bought a MARAC publication,<sup>33</sup> and sales of the first symposium volume (*Constitutional Issues and Archives*) were slow. Members rejected a proposal to increase dues in order to receive all publications. The low ranking in importance of session abstracts to readers of the *mid-atlantic archivist* raised questions about the future of symposia volumes as outgrowths of conference sessions. The Task Force on Long-Range Planning recommended that the Publications Committee re-evaluate its program and

obtain more qualitative information regarding publications through the use of focus groups and then develop an overall strategy and goals. The Task Force suggested publishing brief technical pieces as newsletter inserts (how the technical leaflet series originated) and coordinating with the Education Committee on developing publications for the basic workshop program.<sup>34</sup> Neither suggestion was followed.

In the meantime, technical leaflets numbers five and six, redesigned into a new format, were published in October 1990 (Shawn Aubitz and Gail F. Stern's *Developing Archival Exhibitions* and David W. Carmicheal's *Involving Volunteers in Archives*. The Steering Committee rejected proposals for distributing a free copy of every publication to each member, providing a free copy of the symposium volume to that meeting's registrants, and publishing the automation conference papers in the Haworth Press journal, *Primary Sources & Original Works*.<sup>35</sup> The 1991 Mission Statement included strategic and tactical objectives, action steps, and performance metrics for the Publications Committee. In addition to encouraging "broad member participation in continuing to provide a current and strong quarterly newsletter" the Mission Statement charged the Publications Committee "to continue to provide members with a series of brief technical leaflets on specific topics with current interest and in a cost-conscious manner" and "to continue to develop the Symposium Series of anthologies of papers and conference presentations by MARAC members as a means of increasing the availability of quality archival literature." The Committee should "conduct a thorough analysis and planning study for the marketing of MARAC publications," "develop a two-year agenda for future publications, regardless of format," continue "regular publication of at least three leaflets per year," and publish "at least one symposium volume per year."<sup>36</sup> This ambitious publishing program proved

unrealistic. By October all six of the proposed symposia volumes were behind schedule despite organizing two conferences as the bases for the volumes on preservation and automation. The symposia editors recommended canceling three overdue volumes (archival administration, preservation and management, and automation) and delaying the publication date of three others (reference and description, archives and records management, and personnel management). They raised a key question: "Will MARAC members support [a publications program] seriously by serving as editors and authors who will conscientiously adhere to a publishing schedule? If not, we should not continue the symposia series."<sup>37</sup> It seemed easier to revise and reprint existing publications, and the committee suggested another update of *Guidelines for Archives and Manuscript Repositories*.<sup>38</sup>

The Publications Committee tried valiantly to adhere to a publishing schedule and in 1992 brought out technical leaflets numbers seven and eight (Kenneth Schlessinger and Marvin F. Russell's *Identifying and Handling Classified Documents in Archives* and James Gregory Bradsher and Bruce I. Ambacher's *Archival Sampling: A Method of Appraisal*).<sup>39</sup> Frustrated at the continual delay, Steering Committee passed a proposal to withdraw funding "from any currently outstanding volumes in the symposia series not at the printer by the end of September 1993."<sup>40</sup> In April 1993 the Steering Committee decided that the symposia series would officially terminate on 30 September 1993. For any future volume to be undertaken the series must first be reauthorized by the Steering Committee.<sup>41</sup> The last symposia volume, *Automation in Archives*, edited by Donald F. Harrison from the fall 1990 conference in Alexandria, Virginia finally arrived, under budget, in November 1993. The Publications Committee reported two technical leaflets in

progress but only one reached the printing stage—*Photograph Preservation: Basic Methods of Safeguarding Your Collection* by Peter Mustardo and Laura Kennedy—in 1994.<sup>42</sup> The Outreach Committee printed another trifold brochure in 1993, *Questions & Answers About Careers in the Archival Profession*, and two in 1995, *Research in Archival Institutions* and *Teaching with Primary Documents* designed in electronic format for customization with a repository's own photographs.

Some of the problems with the publications program seemed to be a plethora of ideas for technical leaflets but an inverse proportion of willing authors, a philosophical schism between raising dues to cover distribution of free publications and warehousing hundreds of inexpensive but unsold publications, a fierce determination to keep the publishing rights to conference papers within MARAC but an inability to marshal the volunteer authors to submit their manuscripts, and the issue of copyright ownership—MARAC or author. Too often it appears that MARAC makes policy after the fact when a problem or issue arises rather than developing and publicizing guidelines in advance. When Richard Cox published selected papers from the spring 1992 Pittsburgh MARAC meeting in the *Journal of Education for Library and Information Services* without the approval of the Publications or Steering Committees and without a correct or sufficient acknowledgment of MARAC's role, the Steering Committee proposed but did not adopt a policy that gave MARAC "the right of first refusal to publish any collected group of session papers presented at a MARAC meeting within three years of the date of presentation."<sup>43</sup>

The MARAC Publications Committee recently considered a request from Bruce Ambacher to sponsor a basic archival textbook to be written by member experts within the

region based upon a perceived need for an inexpensive compilation of current practices and new topics. While investigating the marketability to and needs of archival educators, the committee received a message back from Gregory Hunter that he had just published such a textbook, *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives: A How-To-Do-It Manual* (Neal-Schumann, 1997). None of the other educators, both those for and against the proposed textbook, were aware of the new book. The lack of communication, reviews, and publicity for Hunter's book almost put MARAC in competition with one of its own members.

As long as MARAC continues to rely on altruistic volunteers for every aspect of its functioning, the publications program will face the difficulty of finding authors willing to donate their intellectual property on an externally imposed timetable with no incentives or consequences. Without a contract in which the author agrees to turn in an acceptable manuscript within a specified period of time, and an incentive such as a modest honorarium, the publications program will limp along in fits and starts begging members to write and waiting years to receive a manuscript. If MARAC can offer cash awards for finding aids and for books and articles written in professional archival journals, why cannot it offer an honorarium to authors of its own technical leaflets? With a new strategic plan in place, it is time for MARAC as an organization to take a long, hard look at its philosophy for the publications program and to rethink its approach. With competition from print journals *American Archivist*, *Provenance*, and *Archival Issues* and the on-line *First Monday*, a peer-reviewed journal on the internet, MARAC needs an innovative hook to lure archival authors to write technical leaflets and to contribute to the profession through their regional organization.

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- <sup>1</sup> Based on a paper presented at the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference semi-annual meeting Wilmington, Delaware, November 7, 1997.
- <sup>2</sup> Philip B. Eppard, "A Short History of New England Archivists," *New England Archivists* Web page <<http://www.lib.umb.edu/newengarch/about/NEA/NEAhist.html>>, from the *NEA Handbook and Directory, 1995-96*; Lauren Brown and Ann Turkos, "History of MARAC," MARAC Web page <<http://www.itd.umd.edu/MARAC/history.htm>>.
- <sup>3</sup> Joel Wurl, "Archival Issues: Past, Present, and Future," *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 304-308; Margery N. Sly, "Provenance: Regional Journal as Training Ground," *American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994): 300-302.
- <sup>4</sup> MARAC Steering Committee meeting minutes, 23 June 1972 (Series I), MARAC Archives, Special Collections Dept., McKeldin Library, University of Maryland, College Park, MD. (hereinafter cited as S.C. Minutes)
- <sup>5</sup> *The Mid-Atlantic Archivist* 1 (October 1972): 1-4; S.C. Minutes, 31 October 1972.
- <sup>6</sup> S.C. Minutes, 13 February and 12 September 1973, 6 February 1974.
- <sup>7</sup> MARAC Ad Hoc Publications Committee meeting minutes, 27 March 1976 (Series III). (hereinafter cited as Publications Committee minutes).
- <sup>8</sup> Publications Committee minutes, 27 March 1976.
- <sup>9</sup> "Release for MARAC Newsletter, [March 1976] (Series III).
- <sup>10</sup> Publications Committee proposal, 23 July 1976.
- <sup>11</sup> Publications Committee minutes, 25 March 1977; S.C. minutes, 16 September 1976 and 4 April 1977.
- <sup>12</sup> Publications Committee memo, 5 April 1977.
- <sup>13</sup> Business meeting minutes, 12 May 1977.
- <sup>14</sup> S.C. minutes, 2 August 1977, 28 April and 18 September 1978; Mary Boccaccio letter, 10 October 1979, to the editor [*American Archivist*] (Series III).
- <sup>15</sup> S.C. minutes, 22 September 1979.
- <sup>16</sup> S.C. minutes, 15 May 1980.

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- <sup>17</sup> S.C. minutes, 15 May 1980, 14 August and 22 October 1981, 20 May and 28 October 1982, 19 May 1983; "A Report of the MARAC Publications Committee" [7 May 1981].
- <sup>18</sup> S.C. minutes, 14 August 1981; "MARAC's Dear Archivist...Practical Solutions to Archival Dilemmas," 1 (Spring 1982): 1 (Series V, Publications); Gregory S. Hunter letter, 19 May 1986, to Martha Briggs, and attached MARAC Technical Leaflet Series Information for Authors (Series III, Technical Leaflet Series).
- <sup>19</sup> S.C. minutes, 12 September and 3 November 1983
- <sup>20</sup> "Report for the MARAC Steering Committee, MARAC Technical Leaflet Series," 26 October 1983, and "Technical Leaflet Ideas," [1983] (Series III).
- <sup>21</sup> S.C. minutes, 26 April and 30 August 1984; "Constitution and Bylaws," revised 1984.
- <sup>22</sup> S.C. minutes, 19 July and 3 October 1985; "New Brochure: *Selecting an Archivist*," press release, December 1985.
- <sup>23</sup> Leon J. Stout letter, 8 June 1989, to Dr. Eva Moseley (Series II, Chair's files).
- <sup>24</sup> S.C. minutes, 15 May 1986.
- <sup>25</sup> Publications Committee minutes, 10 March 1987.
- <sup>26</sup> S.C. minutes, 7 May 1987.
- <sup>27</sup> S.C. minutes, 28 April 1988.
- <sup>28</sup> S.C. Business Meeting minutes, 5 November 1988; Erika Thickman Miller and Cynthia Pease Miller letter, 18 October 1991, to Greg [Bradsher] (Series III).
- <sup>29</sup> Mary Boccaccio, ed. *Constitutional Issues and Archives*, Archival Symposia No. 1 (Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, 1988).
- <sup>30</sup> S.C. minutes, 3 November 1988.
- <sup>31</sup> Report of the Publications Committee to Steering Committee, 8 February 1989; S.C. minutes, 2 February 1990.
- <sup>32</sup> Greg Bradsher, Report on the MARAC Publications Program, August 1989 (Series I).
- <sup>33</sup> 1990 MARAC Membership Survey (Series I).

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<sup>34</sup> Recommendations of the Task Force on Long-Range Planning to the MARAC Steering Committee, 30 January 1991, pp. 3-4.

<sup>35</sup> S.C. minutes, 21 September 1989 and 1 November 1990.

<sup>36</sup> Mission Statement, distributed at the 10 July 1991 Steering Committee meeting.

<sup>37</sup> Erika Thickman Miller and Cynthia Pease Miller letter, 18 October 1991, to Greg [Bradsher] (Series III).

<sup>38</sup> S.C. minutes, 7 November 1991.

<sup>39</sup> Publications Committee report, 5 August 1992.

<sup>40</sup> S.C. minutes, 29 October 1992.

<sup>41</sup> Publications Committee minutes, 22 April 1993.

<sup>42</sup> S.C. minutes, 5 November 1993.

<sup>43</sup> S.C. minutes, 6 May 1993.



## ABSTRACT

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference began its publication program with a newsletter, *The Mid-Atlantic Archivist*, in 1972. It later expanded to include a symposia series, occasional papers, technical leaflets, a directory of archivists in the region, and trifold brochures. While the publications program has been ambitious throughout the organization's twenty-five year history, the printing output falls far short of the continually revised goals. Reliance on volunteer authors thwarts publishing schedules. The organization's new strategic plan calls for long-range publishing goals. Rethinking approaches to acquiring manuscripts may help the program advance into a pro-active stance.

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