

Mirror, Mirror

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For eighty-six years, this journal has held a mirror to the world of archives and archivists, its authors writing the ongoing analysis of our professional ethics, theories, and craft. The stated purpose of the journal is “to reflect thinking about theoretical and practical developments in the archival profession, particularly in North America; about the relationships between archivists and the creators and users of archives; and about cultural, social, legal, and technological developments that affect the nature of recorded information and the need to create and maintain it.”¹ Over the years, we have, as a profession, formed our theory, honed our practice, explored our ethics, and discussed our purpose. The archival literature is, in many ways, as organic as Terry Eastwood has described the characteristics of archival records themselves.² The literature is natural and interrelated; it is cumulative, and each piece speaks to and through the writings of others. As professionals, we are informed and shaped by our literature. Eastwood notes that “theory becomes more than contemplation of the nature of archives when it presents ideas about the role or purpose archival documents play in social relations.”³ We have explored this purpose in numerous articles and books since Eastwood wrote this in 1994, especially in the late 1990s and early 2000s. And now, we are once again at a point in our professional analysis where we are turning our collective gaze inward and asking ourselves who we are as a group and how we are contributing to the preservation of the historic record, social memory, and cultural heritage. What are our responsibilities, and what barriers are we facing? It is exactly this element of reflection that comes to mind when I think about this issue of the journal.

This issue's publication of the All Archivists Survey of A*CENSUS II shows us a snapshot of who we are now, nearly twenty years after the publication of the first A*CENSUS. A*CENSUS II builds on the 2004 survey and informs our current consideration of the place of archives and archivists in society.

A*CENSUS II also gives us a framework in which to read the other articles in this issue. Courtney Chartier's Presidential Address encourages us to actively question the systems in which we work. Michelle Sweetser and colleagues do just this via another survey—the College and University Archives Landscape Survey—which explores the challenges inherent in the structure of these systems. Partnered with A*CENSUS II data, this is powerful reading. Alex Poole and Ashley Todd-Diaz explore the basis for our professional structures, considering the history of archival education and the relationship between educators and practitioners. These observations are again informed by the demographics of the A*CENSUS II data. The dynamics of this relationship are also highlighted by Eira Tansey's consideration of the archival literature and its focus on the published work of academia as opposed to works authored by government archivists. Finally, Sarah Jones and Ryan DiPaolo contribute a view of a workplace and workflow changed by COVID-19. This issue is rooted in our collective history, as well as in our current dynamic. There is tension in this issue, and with it comes promise.

The reflective focus of this issue is extraordinary, and it mirrors a shift in the perception of our profession, by ourselves as well as by those whom we serve. As I noted in the last issue of this journal, we create our own literature. It is up to us where we take it, and that depends on our theoretical outlook, the focus of our work and research, and our urge to share those things with our colleagues. The Fall/Winter 2023 issue of *American Archivist* will publish the A*CENSUS II Archives Administrators Survey Report—a new perspective on the profession. And for the Spring/Summer 2024 issue, *American Archivist* is inviting authors to work with the A*CENSUS II data and analyze different aspects to explore how we have changed in the last twenty years and to anticipate how we continue responding to societal change. This is precisely where I see the promise. I look forward to continuing to engage with authors submitting to this journal, encouraging viewpoints from all areas of our profession and seeing where the literature takes us as participative, thoughtful, and generous stewards of our profession.

NOTES

¹ See the *American Archivist* homepage at <http://americanarchivist.org>.

² This is one of my favorite articles and I teach it with regularity: Terry Eastwood, "What Is Archival Theory and Why Is It Important?" *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994): 122–30, <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/11991>.

³ Eastwood, 129.