Winter 2003

ADE 25th Anniversary Meeting, Chicago, Illinois, 14-16 November 2003, Annual Meeting Session Summaries

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Annual Meeting Session Summaries
Compiled by Editorial Staff

14 November 2003


The opening session was a vivid illustration of how different kinds of projects manage difficulties and uncertainties that stem from use of and reliance on electronic media in editorial procedures and the presentation of texts. The Margaret Sanger Papers, member of the Model Editions Partnership (MEP), is preparing an electronic text edition; the Peirce Edition Project is a critical edition, different from a diplomatic edition that, although mindful of MEP experiences, has developed its own format for its electronic edition. The Retirement Series of the Papers of Thomas Jefferson, the Papers of Abraham Lincoln, and the Eleanor Roosevelt Papers reported on their experiences with the MEP format, highlighting the advantages of a standard that offers reasonable adaptability and that is known among historical editors. At the same time, and in response to questions from the conference participants, the presenters were well aware of the continued need to deal with concerns and implications that, for example, stem from guidelines and rules for electronic editions, dependence on a particular interface, constant and fast-paced changes in hardware and software, the need for training and technological support, and the possibility of linking documents across projects.
Rethinking the Intersections of Race, Gender and Ethnicity: Chair, Elaine Forman Crane, Fordham University; “Douglass Liaisons: Female Correspondents of Frederick Douglass, 1842–1852,” Leigh Fought, Frederick Douglass Papers, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, “Reflecting America’s Rich Ethnic and Racial Composition,” Denton L. Watson, Papers of Clarence Mitchell Jr., SUNY College at Old Westbury

In this session the presenters illuminated special features of the figure on which their respective editorial projects focus. Leigh Fought singled out a particular group of letter writers among Frederick Douglass’s correspondents. Her interest in the women who wrote to Douglass is twofold. She wants to know more about them in their own rights and she also seeks to explore what the interchange between Douglass and his female correspondents tells about the famous abolitionist’s view of the role of women—in his own life and more generally in American society. Denton Watson’s presentation focused on a very different set of documents, most importantly the reports and memoranda of the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC), in order to examine how ethnicity in the 1940s reflected the political aspects of the struggle against racial oppression and discrimination. The FEPC sought presidential leadership in formulating a national non-discrimination policy towards citizens because loyalty was especially important for employment in the defense industry.

15 November 2003

ADE Breakfast

Tim Wittman’s talk about Chicago architecture was accompanied by slides to illustrate his points (difficult to see for some breakfasters because of several big pillars of the high-rise hotel building that obstructed their view—an inconvenience as well as a reminder of the critical importance of steel girder construction). Wittman traced the rapid development of Chicago through its construction innovations, especially in terms of responses to constraints in building materials and structural designs, contrasting East Coast practices and traditions with Midwestern inventions and style.
In this session the presenters generally cast the role of editor broadly, being careful in distinguishing between the historical figure and context and the literary persona and work. In the case of the journals of the abolitionist Caroline Healey Dall, which span three-quarters of a century, literary and historical aspects intersect, which means that the editor has to bring literary aesthetics and historical knowledge of time and place to bear. For the letters of Henry D. Thoreau the editor’s goal is to create as immediate and concrete a world as possible for the reader, thereby obviating any distinction between literary and historical concerns. The micro history that is reflected in the annotations is easier to recover for prominent people and events than for less well-known people and distinctly local and more ordinary events. In Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essays, the lines between literature and history are blurred, even unified, because his most anthologized writings tend to be read as literature even though they contain many topics. As a cultural critic and scholar in many fields Emerson commented on politics, philosophy, spirituality, events of the day, and other things. Emerson’s attraction to a diverse, multi-disciplinary audience presents the editor with a challenge in the annotations. In the comparison between Charles W. Chesnutt and Frank Norris, the editor of their letters, too, is concerned with annotation, but, from a literary perspective, his concern is more with the image the two men cast in their letters.

The Darwin Correspondence Project has solved problems of incorporating extra-textual materials with its textual materials by using digital imagery of three-dimensional objects such as plants and animals, a TEX program that the Cambridge University library photography staff developed. The problems that the Edison Papers face in documenting the visual and tactile knowledge critical for developments in technologies are formidable. For the over one thousand patents, the solution is a collaborative process that centers on the notebooks of the machine shop to create things for people to use. This procedure includes creating "overview" documents, illustrating materials from other notebooks, showing the process of patent application and registration, editorial headnotes, and three-dimensional images of experimental and production models. In the case of Einstein's scientific manuscripts, the editors labor under difficulties that stem from a widely dispersed collection of often undated original and variably copied materials that include calculations that are complicated and difficult to read and represent.


For the Harriet Jacobs Papers the successful transformation from a "sporadic" project into a new phase depended on three characteristics. First is the ongoing nature of the project—a blessing and a challenge—which means that already exist-
ing research files needed to be updated and that protocols for research assistants needed to be developed. Second is a strong outreach to colleagues, within the institution, in the profession, and in intersecting disciplines. The third component, optimism, is less tangible but no less important because without it the transition from old ways to new ways will flounder and eventually fail. Linda Fisher’s pursuit of a scholarly edition of the diary of Joseph J. Mersman has led to an expansion of the original project. As her research revealed, Mersman’s sister Agnes was a popular equestrian circus woman who married wild Bill Hickock—the kind of career that should draw the interest of a popular audience. In the reorganization of the project, the trade book on Agnes and the circus women will precede the documentary edition of her brother’s diary, providing the financial basis for completing the scholarly work. The Abby Kelley Foster Letters is an editorial project that is anchored in the local community (“dig where you stand,” in the words of Carolyn Howe). As a result this project that focuses on the abolition and women’s movements in Worcester needs to balance the expectations of local supporters, the reliance on volunteers to do much of the research, and the principles of scholarly editing.

**On the Left: Editing the Papers of Radicals:** Chair, Ann D. Gordon, Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Rutgers University; “A Tricky One: The Editor and Emma Goldman,” Barry Pateman, Emma Goldman Papers, University of California, Berkeley; “Is a Marx-Engels Historical Critical Edition Different from Other Ones?” Malcolm Sylvers, Università “Ca Foscari” di Venezia, Italy, and the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Germany; “Russell’s Political Papers,” Nicholas Griffin, Bertrand Russell Research Centre, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Barry Pateman described convincingly some of the challenges that editing the papers of Emma Goldman, an anarchist on the left, present. Starting from the

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premise that “the left,” a political and social construct, poses a problem for editors, whom he likened to “under-laborers in the garden of documentary editing because their work is arduous and lonely. In the documentary editors’ pursuit of the idea of total history (modeled on Ferdinand Braudel), they have to deal with Goldman’s powerful impact and the need to cut through the myths that stem from the different images that each generation fashioned of this great woman, whose persona that blended personal and political goals, flaws, contradictions, hopes, and dreams make her a subject worthy of study. Malcom Sylvers reported on the Marx and Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA), reminding fellow editors that this edition of essential nineteenth-century history is not a collection of papers of radicals but a long-established and well-anchored and supported international project with the traditional goal of making the writings of two classics available to an academic community whose interests span many fields. Sylvers gave an overview of the organizational structure of the edition and detailed some of the challenges that arise in coordinating such a complex endeavor. He used his experience as editor of the volume that deals with political journalism to illustrate some of the problems, especially the limitations the critical apparatus in German presents for wide application in today’s English-focused world. Nicholas Griffin’s portrayal of Bertrand Russell as a political activist called attention to his shorter political writings and Russell’s actions to intervene in particular cases in order to affect change. Both aspects of Russell’s engagement to change the world demand his editors to provide crucial introduction and context, not counting the difficulties that stem from the many documents that were drafted in his name.

16 November 2003


Mary Jo Kline, whose interest in the John Jay Papers has been long-standing, reported that renewed interest in the papers has resulted in a revitalization of the project. The electronic database, based on the folders in the Jay Papers project
file, provides visitors via the Internet with abstracts of documents that cover politics, law, diplomacy, and family matters, and is likely to lead to demands for a more comprehensive collection, including all documents in full text and with full searching capabilities. If the Jay Papers made first use of the electronic format out of necessity, the Papers of the War Department started out “digital.” The project is dependent on student labor, and the presentations by these students on how they deal with a unique record identification system; scan documents, perform document control, and link images and document-related information presented a vivid and encouraging insight into how unconventional components of an editorial project can be brought to fruition. By comparison, Martha Benner showcased a facet of a firmly anchored and well-established project and detailed not only the editors’ decisions about the digital presentation and searchability of Abraham Lincoln’s court cases, but also commented on the riches of this kind of source material for a large variety of research interests.