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## A New Generation of Editors

Lester J. Cappon  
*The Newberry Library*

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### A NEW GENERATION OF EDITORS

By Lester J. Cappon  
Newberry Library

The historical editor merits professional status. What are his prospects?

During the early years of the reactivated National Historical Publications Commission after 1950, its financial support of documentary editorial projects was limited by conservative appropriations from Congress until the Ford Foundation's generous grant in 1964. When these funds were running low, the Act of Congress of 1974 enlarged the Commission's function to include preservation and description of public archives and manuscript collections and increased the level of appropriation from \$2 million to \$4 million annually. This legislation guaranteed further proliferation of projects supported by the renamed National Historical Publications and Records Commission. By 1967 some fifty projects were engaged in editing for letterpress editions alone.

As the number of projects increased, more editors were needed; and young historians were gradually attracted toward editing, to some degree impelled by the crisis in the educational marketplace. Editors of the 1950s and '60s had "learned to do by doing," applying their knowledge of historical methods to the task. By and large, they were seasoned historians who responded to the challenge of comprehensive editing and its potential contribution to scholarship. By the 1970s the multiplication of projects raised serious questions about the supply of editors and the training of neophytes. An interesting correlation during the quarter-century 1950-1975 can be traced between the archivist, untrained except by experience, and the historical editor, in the lack of professional recognition of both by their fellow historians who, ironically enough, are dependent upon the archivist's and the editor's processing and elucidation of the documents.

Early attempts at formal training of archivists were sporadic, arising from local initiative rather than from concerted action. The best established course on archival administration became that given at American University in conjunction with the National Archives. But archivists, having formed a separate profession, have sought (as yet in vain) to achieve an effective certification program (through the Society of American Archivists) that would be comparable to a degree in library science and which would assure professional status and confirm standards of achievement.

For historical editors the annual Institute for Editing of Historical Documents, offered since 1972 by the NHPRC in cooperation with a university or a historical agency, has provided formal instruction along with practical experience with original documents. Meanwhile the Commission has made available a limited number of one-year fellowships for

on-the-job training in selected projects. In recent years the SAA has given the Hamer Award to outstanding junior editors. Princeton University now offers a three-year program in historical editing for graduate students in history, including an internship with the Woodrow Wilson Papers. And in Historical Editing for Undergraduates (Worcester, Mass., 1977), Ross W. Beales, Jr., and Randall K. Burkett have described an experimental seminar at the College of the Holy Cross.

The fledgling historical editor, in contrast to the archivist, is not involved in another profession. He remains a historian, expecting to win recognition by fellow historians. Fulfillment of this expectation presents an opportunity to the new Association for Documentary Editing.

The 1940s, which witnessed the launching of the Jefferson Papers and unwittingly the advent of a new era of historical editing, also was the period when the new generation of editors now coming on stage was born. Some of the older generation have died; others have retired; still others continue at work (Is historical editing conducive to longevity?), along with the "middle generation" in command today. Up to a point, achievement can be measured by number of volumes published and their editorial-documentary substance. It is an impressive achievement of a quarter-century plus.

Accompanying this achievement, however, are numerous unsolved problems confronting the new generation of editors and the ADE. It is worth noting that some of these problems will remain open questions, not to be solved once for all time. Instead, they will continue to test the individual editor's judgment and his historical perspective as he "makes haste slowly" toward his goal.

#### FREDERICK ANDERSON DIES

We regret to report the death in January of Frederick Anderson, editor of the Mark Twain Papers at the University of California, Berkeley. Anderson, who maintained the Mark Twain project offices at the Bancroft Library in Berkeley, was one of the first literary editors to join the ADE.

#### SHOULD THE ADE TAKE OVER THE HAMER AWARDS?

Since the inception of the Philip M. Hamer Award to an outstanding junior editor the prize has been offered annually by the Society of American Archivists. Dr. Hamer was for many years a co-editor of the Henry Laurens Papers and was the first executive director of the National Historical Publications Commission in the National Archives. The award is now made through a nominating process conducted by a committee formed by the SAA. Members who favor exploratory discussions of a possible takeover with the SAA should let President Link know their views prior to the April steering committee meeting in New Orleans.