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Proposed Editing Manual: Background

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Proposed Editing Manual: Background

In his presidential address at the ADE meeting in Princeton in November 1979, Arthur Link suggested that the profession's most obvious need was for "an authoritative manual on documentary editing." As a first step, Lester Cappon, the incoming president, suggested the formation of a committee whose first objective would be to determine the practicability of ADE producing a manual, and whose next objective (assuming the first was decided in the affirmative) would be to prepare a set of preliminary guidelines to be discussed at the annual meeting in Williamsburg in October 1980. Richard Showman (Nathanael Greene Papers) agreed to chair the committee and with Lester Cappon chose fourteen members (see the current list elsewhere in this issue).

Prior to a committee meeting in Williamsburg almost a year later, the committee communicated by mail and phone. To begin discussions, Dr. Showman drew up and circulated a thirty-five-page outline of the kind of manual his project would have found useful at its inception. Realizing that "only the collective wisdom and experience of a number of editors could produce a useful manual," Dr. Showman hoped that his outline would elicit a variety of comments that would become the basis for a tentative set of guidelines to be discussed and further developed at a committee meeting in Williamsburg.

In the meantime, the NHPRC made \$1000 in private funds available to the committee to cover expenses. George Farr of the National Endowment for the Humanities, who was consulted on the possibility of NEH financing, recommended that the committee choose an author of the manual well before the annual meeting who could help with preparing a proposal to NEH. Since the ADE meeting would not occur until after NEH's normal deadline for applications, he approved a December deadline for ADE's proposal. During the summer three university presses—South Carolina, North Carolina, and Johns Hopkins—expressed strong interest in publishing the book.

In September Mary-Jo Kline, whose Aaron Burr Papers are to be completed in February 1981, was chosen by the committee as author of the prospective manual. She was invited to attend the committee meetings in Williamsburg, which occurred October 29 and 30 prior to the full ADE meeting. All members except Arthur Link, John Simon, and Thomas Tanselle attended. Secretary-Treasurer Ray Smock was invited to attend as a participant, while George Farr of the NEH and Roger Bruns and Mary Giunta of the NHPRC attended as observers.

Mary-Jo Kline had drawn up a tentative outline of a manual based on the committee's earlier comments as well as on her own editorial experience, and this document be-

came the basis of the committee's discussions on the nature and scope of the manual. The committee agreed unanimously with Mary-Jo that the manual would in no way be prescriptive. It would be rather descriptive of the broad experience of documentary editors, especially those in the United States, both literary and historical. Since the word "manual" has implications of authoritative how-to handbooks, most members thought a better designation desirable. Ray Smock suggested a title such as "Documentary Editing: Principles and Practices." Whether this is the eventual title of the book or not, it expresses the committee's recognition of the great variety of editorial projects and the committee's desire to stay away from any suggestion of laying down hard and fast rules or methodologies. The committee felt strongly that examples of documentary editing would be an important part of any such work.

At Williamsburg it was decided that there should be a small subcommittee that Mary-Jo Kline could consult and which would periodically review the progress of the work or help in solving unforeseen problems. The full committee would have an opportunity to approve the final manuscript before it goes to press, while the officers of ADE, including Nathan Reingold of the Publications Committee, and the subcommittee would be authorized to choose a publisher and to make suitable financial arrangements.

—KW

In November John Simon appointed a review subcommittee within the full committee to increase efficiency in the gathering of information and to improve communication with the author. Facing a December deadline for the NEH proposal, Mary-Jo Kline sent a draft to the subcommittee for revisions and suggestions and submitted the proposal to NEH. A decision is expected in late May.

The proposal asks for funds to cover salary support for the author; travel by her to a limited number of significant research sites for the collection of information; stationery, postage, telephone, and the typing of the final manuscript; and a meeting of the subcommittee to review the entire manuscript before submission to the whole committee and then to the ADE Council. More importantly, the proposal emphasizes ADE's interest in description rather than proscription, and the constant participation in and supervision of the work by the organization.

Mary-Jo Kline's introductory summary to the proposal speaks for itself on these points:

ADE proposes to prepare a guide to the principles and practices of documentary editing that have evolved in the United States in the last forty years. The traditions of both "historical" and "literary" editorial projects will be surveyed . . . It will be organized to serve the needs not only of editors but also of faculty and students in formal courses on documentary editing and of scholars and other readers who

form the audience for such editions.

ADE has created a review panel drawn from its membership's many fields of interest to ensure that the guide will draw on the expertise of a full range of documentary specialists.

The application outlines the procedures adopted by ADE to expedite the process of collaboration by which Dr. Kline will prepare the guide with the assistance of ADE and its members and to ensure that the ADE and its Executive Council will exercise full review over the manuscript.

The body of the proposal elaborates on all of these elements, describing the processes of research, writing, and review, and identifying the committee members. It only generally summarizes the contents of the guide itself, since that fuller, more specific detail will be generated by the research NEH is being asked to support. A list of chapter titles provided in the final section of the proposal constitutes an outline of the issues which the committee meeting at Williamsburg approved as the basis for the guide:

1. Collection of Materials
2. "Control" Procedures
3. Form of Publication
4. Selection of Materials for Editorial Attention
5. Transcription and Collation
6. Determination of the "established" or "copy" text for annotation
7. Annotation
8. Preparation of the Edition for Publication

The outline may not comprehend all the topics and concerns of individual editors and projects, but it is the general process, and not the outline, which NEH is being asked to support. At the appropriate time, ADE members will be called on to fill in and expand on that outline from their experience. We hope that time will arrive.

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