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The Art of Editorial Decision Making: Review of
Editing Historical Documents: A Handbook of Practice
(Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1997).
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The Art of Editorial Decision Making

BETH LUEY

Michael E. Stevens and Steven B. Burg, *Editing Historical Documents: A Handbook of Practice* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 1997). Published in cooperation with the American Association of State and Local History, the Association for Documentary Editing, and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. 264 pp. ISBN 0-7619-8960-9 (paper)/ 0-7619-8959-5 (cloth).

In a paper presented at the 1998 annual meeting of the Association for Documentary Editing and published in this issue of *Documentary Editing*, Michael Stevens discussed advances in the craft, professionalism, and legacy of the field over the past twenty years. The book that he and Steven Burg have written is an example of the interconnections among these advances. For a craft to improve, its practitioners must become more professional and reflective about their practices. For professionalism to develop, a body of knowledge and some degree of consensus about the practice of a craft must be established. And for a profession to have a continuing legacy, practitioners must have both a commitment to teach future generations and the tools necessary for the task. The existence of *Editing Historical Documents* suggests that documentary editing is in a very healthy state of development.

For more than twenty years, editors have debated various approaches to selection, transcription, annotation, and other issues. These debates have been conducted in conversations (both heated and casual), in learned journals, at ADE meetings, and in official and unofficial sessions at the summer editing institute. A single approach to any of these activities is neither possible nor desirable, but these discussions have led to a fair degree of consensus on the questions an editor needs to ask, the importance of considering audience and other practical

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matters, and the range of possible answers. Mary-Jo Kline's *Guide to Documentary Editing*, now in its second edition, has provided excellent historical and descriptive discussions of all of these matters; *Editing Historical Documents* adds concrete examples that make the subject easier to learn in the classroom and in independent study. It is a valuable tool for independent scholars with small editing projects, archivists, and students as well as

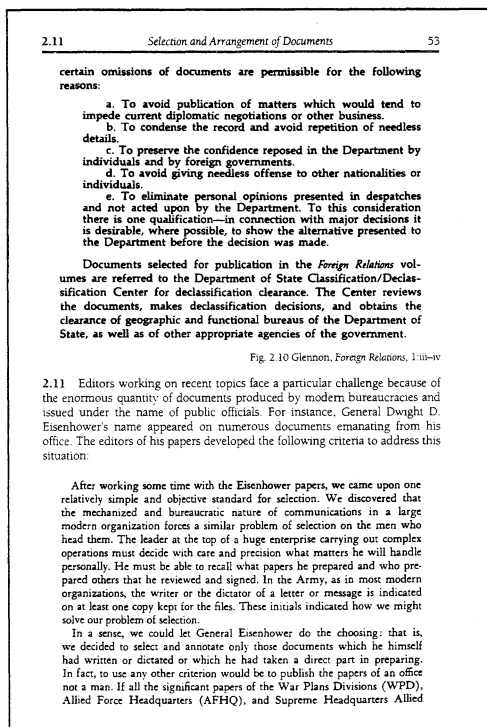
52	EDITING HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS	2.9
<p>2.9 Editors may omit documents that are within their project's scope because of concerns for copyright, confidentiality, or personal privacy. They must determine if the documents to be published are protected by copyright and, if so, obtain the permission of the copyright holder. The editors of the <i>Collected Papers of Albert Einstein</i> sought to include the full text of all significant letters written by Einstein and the full text of many letters written to him. In some cases, however, the editors could not obtain permission to publish particular documents; therefore, they presented abstracts of materials they could not legally publish:</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">All available letters written by Einstein will be published in this edition. Letters addressed to more than one recipient are printed only once, and all known addressees are noted. Letters to Einstein are handled more selectively, however. All significant letters to him, for which we are able to obtain permission to publish, are printed in whole or in excerpt. In case such permission cannot be obtained, a summary is provided. Authors and dates of known letters not published here are listed in the chronological sequence, and the letters are summarized where necessary.</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: small;">Fig. 2.9 Stachel, Einstein, 1xxx</p>		
<p>2.10 Government classification systems, closed records, and censorship may limit the ability of editors to publish documents. For example, the editors of <i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i> consider the effects of the publication of government documents on current diplomatic affairs and national security when they select documents:</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">The publication <i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i> constitutes the official record of the foreign policy of the United States. The volumes in the series include, subject to necessary security considerations, all documents needed to give a comprehensive record of the major foreign policy decisions of the United States together with appropriate materials concerning the facts that contributed to the formulation of policies. Documents in the files of the Department of State are supplemented by papers from other government agencies involved in the formulation of foreign policy.</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">The basic documentary diplomatic record printed in the volumes of the series <i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i> is edited by the Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State. The editing is guided by the principles of historical objectivity and in accordance with the following official guidance first promulgated by Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg on March 26, 1925:</p> <p style="padding-left: 2em;">There may be no alteration of the text, no deletions without indicating where in the text the deletion is made, and no omission of facts which were of major importance in reaching a decision. Nothing may be omitted for the purpose of concealing or glossing over what might be regarded by some as a defect of policy. However,</p>		

professional documentary editors and academics thinking about launching an editorial project.

Editing Historical Documents does something so obviously necessary—and does it in such a straightforward, matter-of-fact way—that one cannot help wondering why no one thought of it before. The answer is probably that underneath the rather deceptive simplicity of the book lies a mountain of

difficult work. Nevertheless, for the newcomer to the field, this book presents immense complexity as manageable choices and uncovers the rational bases for good decision making.

The authors have covered almost every question that confronts the editor, including some that do not always reach the level of consciousness. They begin, for example, by discussing how to define one's subject and the scope of one's project, including as possibilities an individual, part of an individual's career, an individual's career as an illustration of a broader historical topic, the papers of two or more individuals (including both collaborators and family members), a combination of an individual and an institution, the leaders of an institution, the institution itself, and a theme or topic. Here, and throughout the book, each possibility is illustrated with an excerpt from the editor's own explanation of the decisions made.



The design of Stevens and Burg's book highlights the individuality of documentary editions. Reprinted with permission of AltaMira Press.

As each choice is discussed, the advantages and disadvantages are clearly set out. In discussing the form of publication, the authors manage in a little less than a page to summarize the relative advan-

tages of publication in a periodical, pamphlet, single volume, multivolume set, microform, computer disk, CD-ROM, and the World Wide Web.

The examples are always well chosen and sometimes border on the inspired. In the chapter on annotation, the authors note that "geographical descriptions that were evident to the author or recipient of a document may be meaningless to the readers of a documentary edition without editorial assistance." Their example, drawn from the *Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, is a passage that reads "WD. And self, walk'd as far as the draw Bridge this evening—The name of Drawbridge is continued, tho there has not been one there since my memory." The accompanying note explains: "By 1740 a stone bridge had replaced a drawbridge erected in the early 1690s to extend Front Street over Dock Creek. During the course of the eighteenth century the creek was filled in and paved to form Dock Street" (164–65).

In some cases, the examples answer questions not discussed directly in the text. Although the book explains alternative solutions to problems, it does not provide definitive guidance on *when* certain decisions should be made. Indeed, it would be difficult to pin this down. After all, certain principles of selection may be established before a search is begun, while others emerge only after the editor has a clear idea of the volume and nature of the material available. Yet the examples recount the ways editors actually make such decisions. The long excerpt from the introduction to the Eisenhower papers tells how the editors "came upon one relatively simple and objective standard for selection," which "let General Eisenhower do the choosing: that is we decided to select and annotate only those documents which he himself had written or dictated or which he had taken a direct part in preparing." They discuss how this decision emerged from their growing understanding of bureaucratic communication and provide details about how it worked in practice (53–54). The real-life experience of making, altering, and refining decisions to accommodate both documents and readers comes alive.

The use of editors' own words is an outstanding feature of *Editing Historical Documents*. By drawing on nearly one hundred and fifty editions for examples, it provides the authority of collective wisdom and practice that no single voice can claim. One might even say that it recreates in print the kinds of conversations that editors carry on among

themselves, making it an easy read for students and beginning editors.

I was initially puzzled by the use of facsimiles of edited texts, because it makes for some typographically unattractive pages. But I was quickly won over, for this device allows the examples to retain their individuality: the Madison papers do not look like the Adams papers or the Wilson papers. The various typefaces contribute to the authenticity and tangibility of the examples. (On this point, it might have been useful to provide an index to editions quoted so that readers could look at a variety of citations to see how some decisions influence others. To do this thoroughly, however, the readers would still have to consult the edition itself.)

Editing Historical Documents is thorough and

well organized, with chapters covering reasons for editing documents and the audiences for editions, selection and arrangement, transcription and proof-reading, annotation, indexes and other access tools, and front and back matter. In a few instances, I thought that something had been omitted only to find that the authors had simply placed it somewhat later than I would have. In the chapter on selection, for example, I noted the absence of a discussion of which copy of a letter should be used. In fact, this topic is handled very ably, but appeared in the chapter on transcription. Similarly, I looked for a list of standard abbreviations for provenance notes in chapter 6; it is provided in chapter 7.

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NHPRC Summer Editing Institute

Contingent on funding, the twenty-seventh annual Institute for the Editing of Historical Documents will be held 21–26 June 1999, in Madison, Wisconsin. Jointly sponsored by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and the University of Wisconsin, the Institute will provide detailed theoretical and practical instruction in documentary editing and publication.

The Institutes have been extraordinarily productive, providing training to more than 450 participants to date. Of these, 68 are heading or have headed important documentary publication projects and many others have worked as full-time historical editors. Institute graduates also include college and university faculty, editors of state historical publications and staff editors of other publications, archivists, manuscript librarians, government historians, and graduate students from many universities. The 15–18 interns meet every morning and most afternoons for lectures and presentations by experienced editors. Three resident advisors will be available for consultation during the term of the Institute.

The 1999 faculty and their topics are:

Michael Stevens (State Historical Society of Wisconsin), introduction to documentary editing; Richard L. Leffler (Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution), transcription; Ann Gordon (The Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony), document selection, promoting an edition, and fundraising; Robert Rosenberg (The Papers of Thomas A. Edison), annotation, and electronic editions; John P. Kaminski (Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution), indexing; Nancy C. Essig (University Press of Virginia), publishing an edition. Ann Gordon, John Kaminski, and Robert Rosenberg will serve as the resident advisors.

There will be no charge for tuition. Single accommodations for the interns are provided at no cost in the Wisconsin Center Guest House on the University of Wisconsin campus. The Guest House is run much like a hotel, and is two blocks from the State Historical Society, where the daily meetings are held.

Application to the Institute is competitive, with numerous applicants every year from all over the country. Further information and application forms are available from the NHPRC, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408; phone: (202) 501-5610; e-mail: nhprc@arch1.nara.gov. The application deadline is 15 March 1999.

Anniversary Booklet and ADE Directory

The committee charged with commemorating ADE's anniversary has published *The Association for Documentary Editing: The First Twenty Years, 1978-1998*. The booklet was distributed to those attending the meeting in St. Louis and is available to members. If you would like a copy, please send your request and \$2.00 to cover postage and handling to Susan H. Perdue, ADE Secretary, Papers of John Marshall, P.O. Box 8781, Williamsburg, VA 23188.

At the annual meeting, the Council voted to publish the ADE membership directory every two years instead of annually. The directory for 1999/2000 will be available January 1 and will be mailed to members. Members who would like a copy of the 1998 directory should write to Susan Perdue or e-mail her at shperd@facstaff.wm.edu.

Kevin Hayes Wins Distinguished Service Award

The Association for Documentary Editing presented its 1998 Distinguished Service Award to Kevin J. Hayes of the University of Central Oklahoma, in recognition of his dedicated service to the Association as its bibliography editor.

For six years, Kevin Hayes has solicited and selected hundreds of editions for inclusion in *Documentary Editing's* quarterly bibliography. He has brought to our attention the diversity of the field by describing works of local and national interest, of literature, history, and bibliography, prepared by large editorial teams and by individuals. In so doing he has provided a service not only to members of the Association but also to librarians and general readers. We thank him for his years of hard and conscientious work that benefitted us all.

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In a few places, explanations are overly brief or lacking. For example, in discussing why editors do not try to reproduce typefaces when working from printed texts, Stevens and Burg provide statements from the *Ratification of the Constitution* project and the Benjamin Franklin papers (135-36). Neither of these statements gives a reason: they simply state that they do not try to reproduce typefaces. The reasons are perhaps too obvious to state: it would be expensive, it would still not be an accurate representation, it would take up too much space, and it would look ugly. But a beginning editor, bent on authenticity, would benefit from an explanation.

I was left with only two questions that Stevens and Burg did not tackle. The first is a relatively minor one with an easy answer: where should illustrations be placed? The reasons for grouping them as separate signatures or placing them within the text are easy to spell out, and it is to the editor's advantage to understand the technical issues underlying this decision when discussing it with a publisher.

The second question is more vexing: in the case of large projects, who should be listed as an editor on the title page, and in what order should participating editors be listed? Each project has its own principles; librarians have their preferences; and individual personalities play a large role in these decisions. Scientific researchers, who routinely work collaboratively, have been grappling with this issue for decades without reaching agreement. But, given the objective and fairminded voice that the authors have brought to other contentious issues, I am sure that they could present the alternatives in a way that would assist editors in making these decisions, or even in revisiting them. Perhaps the next edition will take this on.

In addition to the excellence of its examples and the clarity of its organization, Stevens and Burg's book is remarkable for its voice. It is clear, rational, calm, and sensible. As I read it, I felt that I was in a quiet room with a well-informed, thoughtful teacher who wanted to give me all the information I needed to make my own wise decisions. Without question, *Editing Historical Documents* deserves a place on the shelf of every current or aspiring documentary editor, teacher of documentary editing, and student.