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A Summary

The ADE Annual Meeting Sessions

Chicago, Illinois

18–20 October 1991

Fakes and Forgeries

Chair: Michael E. Stevens, Center for Documentary History, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

In a paper entitled “Quill Pens and ‘Antiqued’ Paper: The Forgery of Eighteenth-Century Documents,” Dorothy A. Twohig (Papers of George Washington, University of Virginia) provided a survey of eighteenth-century forgers in France, England, and the United States. She also discussed Robert Spring (who during the 1850s and 1860s specialized in Washington documents), Alexander Howland “Antique” Smith (active from the 1870s to the 1890s), Joseph Cosey (who flourished in the 1920s), and Charles Weisberg.

Mark E. Neely, Jr. (Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana), in a paper entitled “New Frontiers in Forgery: Nineteenth-Century Case Studies” discussed the social and cultural (but not the forensic) history of forgery in the twentieth century. Wilma Frances Minor forged love letters between Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge, which the *Atlantic Monthly* published in 1928. Neely found that the detection of forgeries has become irrelevant to historical writing and, sadly, to documentary editing. A letter purporting to date from 1864 from James S. Wadsworth to Abraham Lincoln and published in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (1953–55), edited by Roy P. Basler et al., was subsequently demonstrated to be a forgery, yet the 1974 supplement to that edition makes no mention of that letter. Neely found that with manuscripts commanding high prices, real talent has entered the field of forgery. Mark Hoffman, the forger of early Mormon documents, had respectable social standing among the Utah Mormons that he swindled, plus significant historical knowledge. Neely also discussed the Texas broadside forgeries, created by Darman David and sold by John Jenkins.

In a paper entitled “Beyond the Evidence: Examinations of the Hitler Diaries,” James E. Lile (Federal Bureau of Investigation) observed, “Hitler sells.” There is a public fascination and insatiable demand for memorabilia and published material on Adolf Hitler, Nazism, and the Third Reich. It is estimated that in less than fifty years, more works have been published on these topics, fiction and nonfiction, than on any topic other than Christ and Christianity in the entire history



Mark E. Neely, Jr., James E. Lile, Michael E. Stevens, and Dorothy A. Twohig.

of mankind. An air of secrecy and intrigue lingers over stories about materials confiscated, officially and clandestinely, by the troops of invading and occupying armies of several nations as they swept into Nazi Germany. Mystery and a murkiness of origin have been sufficient provenance for the avid collector of Nazi memorabilia. In this atmosphere, the conditions are right for fraud, sometimes of monumental proportions.

From 1981 through 1983, a journeyman staff reporter for the popular German magazine *Stern* and a petty forger/con man with a modicum of artistic talent collaborated and sold *Stern* more than sixty volumes purporting to be the personally handwritten original diaries of Hitler. The diaries had “miraculously” survived the 1945 crash and burning of a plane carrying Hitler’s personal archives. The used car salesman’s adage—“It’s the story that sells the car, not the true worth of the vehicle”—held true. By 1984, *Stern* and its parent publishing company had been bilked of more than nine million Deutschmarks (almost four million U.S. dollars). The professional reputations of the editors, several noted historians, and several handwriting examiners were tarnished. The public was titillated by sensational international press accounts of the fallibility of authority figures.

In retrospect, the historians’ errors were influenced by the “story,” by the seemingly factual content of the diaries, and by the sheer volume of the material. The handwriting experts erred because the “genuine” doc-

uments provided for comparisons with a page from the diaries unwittingly included other forged documents from the same source as the diaries (the reporter and the forger) and included photocopies rather than original documents. Venal secrecy motives by the publisher delayed submission of the diaries to a forensic laboratory until after their “discovery” was announced to great fanfare. Too late. Subsequent forensic analyses of the diaries identified and exposed anachronisms in the chemical brighteners in the paper, the synthetic fibers in the bindings, and in the adhesives and inks, most of which were not produced until the post-1955 period.

The authentication of historical documents must be a comprehensive joint effort by historians conducting textual and content analyses, by forensic handwriting examiners with access to original materials and unimpeachable exemplars for comparisons, and must include forensic analyses of the documentary materials. Lile concluded, “A lemon can appear to be gold under weak light.”



Ann D. Gordon and Barbara B. Oberg.

The ACLS-NHPRC Historical Documents Study: Implications for Editors

Ann D. Gordon (Project Director, Historical Documents Study)

Barbara B. Oberg (Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Yale University).

To a full conference room of over sixty people, Ann D. Gordon, project director for the Historical Documents Study, gave a preliminary report on the results of the study. She spoke about the survey, administered by a professional survey firm, that was a part of the larger study and about the separate questionnaire that had been mailed to publications directors of historical societies (see her “A Future for Documentary Editions: The Historical Documents Study” in this issue of *Documentary Editing*). The primary message that all parts

of the study bring to documentary editors is that historical researchers do indeed value and use documentary editions in their research. There is both a general climate of interest in editions (evidenced too by the desire of publications directors to expand their lists of documentary publications if only they had more resources) and a specific demonstrated use of edited sources by researchers.

Members of the audience raised several questions about concrete numbers of users of NHPRC editions and about which aspects of editions were rated by users as most important. Since the organizations surveyed ranged from the professional historians who are members of the Organization of American Historians to the genealogists who pursue history as an avocation, the answers varied greatly by group. Overall, the study indicated that the index and accurate transcriptions were rated of highest importance, though none of the other elements (comprehensiveness, identification of persons and events, and historical background) were rated as unimportant. Some members of the audience feared that users were overlooking the original scholarship that is found in the annotation of the volumes. There was general enthusiasm (and relief) from the audience for the results of the study, and gratitude for the important role that Ann Gordon had played in the process.



Harriet Furst Simon, Jo Ann Boydston, William W. Abbot, and J. A. Leo Lemay.

The Editors’ Appreciation: George Washington and John Dewey

Chair: J. A. Leo Lemay, University of Delaware.

William W. Abbot (Papers of George Washington, University of Virginia) provided an insight into George Washington’s character gained from the experience of editing the papers of the first president. Abbot emphasized his early lack of provincialism and his continental or national outlook. Washington’s character was formed by military experience rather than plantation

society, educational institutions, or a political career. His papers of the 1750s “show how Washington sought a career outside what Virginia could offer and how he followed for a time a profession that had its own powerful symbols, standards, models, conventions, demands, and rewards, quite different from those of the provincial country gentry.”

Jo Ann Boydston (Center for Dewey Studies, Southern Illinois University) discussed John Dewey “as I have come to know him, both as a philosopher and a person, chiefly through his own words and the words of others who knew him well.” She recounted his early life as a university student and high school teacher in Vermont, a graduate student at Johns Hopkins, and his teaching career at Michigan, Chicago, and Columbia. She stressed his simplicity, directness, and unpretentiousness. Harriet Furst Simon (Center for Dewey Studies, Southern Illinois University) found that Dewey “has educated us in at least three major ways: He has provided an editorial education, an education through the subject matter of his writings, and, perhaps most significantly, an education through the way he conducted his life. This education has demanded our active participation and reflective thinking—attributes he discussed more than once.” Boydston’s and Simon’s papers will be published in full in a forthcoming issue of *Documentary Editing*.



John Rowe, Ralph Austin, Roger Beck, Eren Giray, and John Hunwick.

Editing African Historical Sources

Chair: Roger B. Beck, Eastern Illinois University.

Roger Beck provided a general background on the Arabic and European sources of African history. In a paper entitled “The So-called ‘Kano Chronicle’: Its Composition and Form and Its Place in the Historiography of Kano,” John Hunwick (Northwestern University) noted that early British colonial rulers—notably Lady Lugard—had referred to a Kano chronicle. A translation of a purported Kano chronicle, covering up

to 1893, appeared in 1908. Earlier copies have not been found, though there may have been an earlier chronicle covering to 1807. Murray Last thinks the chronicle was started in the mid-seventeenth century. Hunwick argued that it is a late nineteenth-century compilation of oral traditions. In it, an anonymous Moslem chronicler listed the Kano rulers. Hunwick posited a single, local author. The chronicle demonstrates an evolving historical tradition and develops from simple king lists to more complex discussions of events.

Eren Giray (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), in a paper entitled “Insights into the Transcription, Translation, and Word Processing of Jula Oral Narratives from Bobo-Dioulasso (Burkina Faso),” described the project which entails preparing camera-ready copy for a new series, African Historical Sources, to be published by Michigan State University Press. The volume is a selection of Jula oral narratives collected in West Africa. It includes eighteen texts in the Jula language with their English translation, selected from a corpus of two hundred oral narratives comprising a number of different forms of folk tradition. The present selection concentrates on folktales, presenting them with annotation of the linguistic, social, and historical context. Giray briefly discussed some of the difficulties she encountered, starting with the selection, transcription, translation, and entering of the raw data on computer disk. Some of these problems involve language and translation, but others are symptomatic of a lack of standard orthography for Jula/Bamana and involve the pioneering work of devising special fonts for diacritics.

In a paper entitled “War, Religion, and Revolution in Buganda: Translations of Nineteenth-Century African Memoirs,” John Rowe (Northwestern University) discussed the papers of Sir Apolo Kagwa, which were written in the Luganda language and covered thirty-seven years of politics. Kagwa wrote the first modern history of Uganda, published in 1901. Arab traders had brought written language in the form of the Koran to Uganda during the 1840s; Christian missionaries introduced the Bible in the 1870s. Since the king ordered his people to learn to read during the 1880s, a literate generation existed before the British established colonial rule. The king imposed literacy tests and fomented a cultural revolution. By 1914 several newspapers and many books were published in Uganda, indicating widespread literacy in the Luganda language. Yet the national university did not preserve or collect these early books and newspapers. The major social and cultural changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created a desire among the Ugandan people to preserve something of their previous identity and a need for historical writing, which Kagwa sought to provide.