

Turning a Journal's Files into a Serviceable Archive

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Perhaps next year marks a journal's 25th, 50th, or even 100th anniversary. Unfortunately, the resources needed for a publication celebrating the occasion may be buried in random boxes in the office basement or be missing entirely.

According to CSE archivist Jane Kenamore, of the archive consulting company Kenamore & Klinkow, most organizations don't think about starting an archive until faced with a major anniversary. That can make writing a journal history difficult, in that authors generally rely on archived issues and reports.

Edward Huth, editor emeritus of *Annals of Internal Medicine* and coauthor of two journal histories, stresses the importance of establishing a good archive before writing a history. "If anyone thinks they might want a history in the future, make sure these resources are being built up", he said.

The first step in building an archive is to gather all the available materials. Although often forgotten, photographs are especially important in an archive, Kenamore said, because they catch people's attention. Huth, too, emphasizes the value of archiving photographs. "You might not think anyone would care, but 50 years from now people might want to see what the editorial office looked like", he said. Here are some items to consider including in an archive:

- Photographs of people, offices, buildings.
- Back issues of the publication.
- Minutes of the editorial-board meetings.
- Letters and memos that reflect editorial or administrative decisions.
- Important papers presented at annual meetings.
- Programs of meetings and events.
- Annual reports.
- Membership directories.

Once all the materials have been collected, Kenamore recommends finding an archivist who can estimate how much the project will cost on the basis of the

amount of material and the desired level of organization. Kenamore, who has served on the council of the Society of American Archivists (SAA), said many archival consultants are members of SAA; they can be found through the organization's Web site at www.archivists.org.

It is possible for members of a publication staff to prepare and maintain an archive themselves. But after 27 years of experience in working with archives, Kenamore said she does not recommend that option. An archive that is not maintained by a professional will often destroy itself quickly, she said, "because no one is as picky as an archivist about maintaining order and easy access to information."

Managing an archive is hard to do by oneself, Kenamore said, because it has to be maintained with continuity. "Don't plan on doing it in your spare time, because you'll never have any", she said. Also, trained archivists have learned specific techniques for organization and preservation that can maximize the utility and quality of an archive.

For example, different types of records vary in their usefulness and in their preservability. "Digital records are great for reference because you have easy access", Kenamore said, but a compact disk is estimated to last only about 25 years, whereas some archived black-and-white photographs have been useful for more than 150 years. Similarly, videotapes generally last only 20 years, and color photographs may fade in the same amount of time.

There are ways to extend the life of those records, such as storing them at a constant low temperature, but they are still generally unstable. Archivists can offer advice about the best way to store and preserve specific types of digital and paper records.

Whether a journal archive is maintained by a professional archivist or by the journal staff, having historical records organized and ready for reference is the first step toward writing an accurate journal history. 