

**Society of American Archivists
Council Meeting
February 2 – 4, 2010
Washington, D.C.**

**Discussion Item: Scholarship to the Modern Archives Institute
(Prepared by Teresa Brinati)**

BACKGROUND

In November 2009, the treasurer of the Colonial Dames of America, Chapter III, Washington, D.C., indicated in a telephone call initiated by SAA that CDA will no longer support the eponymous \$1,200 scholarship to the National Archives and Records Administration's Modern Archives Institute (MAI).

Established in 1974, the CDA scholarship has been part of the SAA awards program for 35 years. Some 75 archivists have benefited from receiving it, most of whom have sent thank you notes to CDA following their attendance at the institute. (This is a practice that the SAA staff has encouraged.) From 1975 through 2001, two scholarships were awarded each year: one for the winter institute and one for the summer institute. As many as three scholarships were awarded annually between 2002 and 2007 with the addition of CDA's Donna Cutts Award. In 2008, the chair of the CDA Scholarship Committee notified SAA that it could no longer support the Donna Cutts Award and would be providing SAA support for only two annual scholarships.

For many years the procedure for the transfer of scholarship monies was as follows: CDA advanced the funds to SAA on an annual basis and SAA issued a check payable to the award recipient, who then was responsible for enrolling in MAI, paying the tuition (now around \$800), and applying the balance to travel or lodging.

That procedure worked smoothly until spring 2008, when one recipient cashed the \$1,200 and used the money for personal purposes rather than its stated purpose. The recipient did not enroll and did not attend the summer institute. The MAI director notified SAA approximately two weeks before the institute to let us know something was amiss because the CDA award recipient had not yet registered for the institute, as was custom, and MAI was now stuck with an empty seat.

SAA immediately attempted to contact the recipient using the information listed on the nomination form, but discovered that the phone number was out of service. The recipient's references, including her former employer, were contacted and we learned that the recipient had quit her job and (allegedly) moved to California. We were able to obtain a cell phone number from one of the references. SAA staff spoke with the recipient once at the cell phone number provided and she said that the money would be returned to SAA by the first week in June. We provided the recipient with a FedEx account number for use in sending her check. When the

check was not received by that date, we made repeated attempts to contact the recipient, but to no avail. The cell phone number eventually was disconnected. Despite these and other efforts by SAA staff, the scholarship monies have not been returned.

We then had to explain this unfortunate turn of events to CDA. The chair of the Scholarship Committee was sympathetic. The CDA treasurer was not, and considered the incident an irresponsible action by SAA. We immediately changed our procedure for disbursement of the scholarship funds. MAI was to be paid tuition directly, and the recipient was to submit receipts for the balance of the scholarship for expenses related to travel or lodging. SAA “reimbursed” CDA for the loss by fronting the monies for one of the scholarships in 2009.

In addition, CDA requested that they have an opportunity to review the nominations. They did so for the summer 2009 institute, although the selection was up to SAA.

With the winter 2010 MAI on the horizon, SAA attempted to contact the chair of the CDA Scholarship Committee last November regarding the review process for the nominations. The number on file was disconnected, so we contacted the main CDA office and were given the phone number for their treasurer. During a phone call, the treasurer declared that CDA would no longer be writing any checks to SAA because of the fugitive recipient in 2008. Given the treasurer’s vehemence, making any case with her appeared fruitless. We requested that she pass our phone number along to the CDA president. She did so, and that night there was a message on SAA’s voicemail from the CDA president, who left a work and home number at which to reach her. Although we returned the president’s call immediately and have left three voice messages across succeeding weeks, we did not receive a return call.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Assuming that the Colonial Dames of America no longer intends to fund scholarships to the National Archives and Records Administration’s Modern Archives Institute (the two-week institute typically is held in February and June), should SAA take on responsibility for funding one or two scholarships?
2. If yes, at what amount and from what funds – operations or the SAA Special Funds (e.g., the Norton Fund)?
3. If not, what steps should SAA take to “let go” of this 35-year tradition?