

Comments from the Editor

A Visit to the Condé Nast Library and Archives

By David E. Sumner, Ball State University

Serendipity is the spice of life and, by definition, brings a surprise. When the Indianapolis Colts won one of their last-minute, come-from-behind victories last season, I felt as excited as the next fan. As an academic researcher, I feel almost as excited by unexpected research discoveries. Serendipitous discoveries for a researcher bring joy and a sense of accomplishment.

Such was the case in visiting the Condé Nast Archives in New York City during the March 2009 spring break. I am currently researching my next book, *The Magazine Century; American Magazines in the 20th Century*. I presented a paper based on this research at the Joint Journalism Historians Conference held March 14, 2009, in New York City. After it was accepted, I decided to do any research I could squeeze in during the visit. On the Condé Nast web site, I found a telephone number for a media relations person. I called and left a message explaining that I wanted to visit the company's archives, if it had one. I wasn't sure if it did. A few days later, I get a message from Shawn Waldron, the archivist for the company, inviting me to visit.

With a recent degree in library science and specialty in archival organization, Mr. Waldron was hired by the company in 2001 to create and organize its archives. Up until then, all of Condé Nast's papers were stored unorganized in several file cabinets. He later created a nine-page index to Nast's papers, which I have published in this issue's Essays and Reports department. During the visit, he took me to a fireproof vault at the company's headquarters where they are kept. He spent a couple of hours with me and made photocopies of any documents that I wanted.

Reading correspondence to and from Condé Nast during the 1930s and 1940s was fascinating. Some of it came from Henry Luce (founder of Time Inc.), Clare Booth Brokaw (managing editor of *Vanity Fair* and later-to-be wife of Henry Luce), Harold Ross (founder of *The New Yorker*), (Frank Croninshield, editor of *Vanity Fair*) and Franklin D. Roosevelt. A series of letters exchanged between Brokaw and Nast in 1934 revealed a growing rift between them and led to her resignation from the staff.

By the time my visit ended, I had spent eight hours at the Condé Nast library and archives. I felt thrilled and satisfied, similar to the feeling a player has after his team wins the big game. I am not sure how much of the material I found I can use in writing the book—some, but not a whole lot. The joy of discovery, however, is why I'm a scholar. Like virtue, learning is its own reward.