COPAR: "A survey of current efforts".
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Thirty years ago, it was rather difficult to find information on or about architectural records. A group of concerned citizens formed the Cooperative Preservation of Architectural Records (COPAR) not only to remedy this, but also to raise awareness of the importance of collecting and preserving these important documents. Today, it’s easy to find evidence of past efforts, such as surveys and management publications, however it’s difficult to find current information about the organization of COPAR, and its recent efforts.

This report offers a quick assessment of where COPAR is today. It includes: 1) a review of the presence of COPAR on the web, 2) a survey of COPAR awareness, and 3) interviews with the various local committees formed under COPAR.

**Review of the presence of COPAR on the web (as of January 2003)**

**METHODOLOGY**
The term “COPAR” and the phrase “Cooperative Preservation of Architectural Records” were searched using a variety of web browsers to analyze COPAR’s presence on the web.

**FINDINGS**
After several sessions of searching, sixteen hits proved relevant. Only a few sites, however, were directly related to the organization of COPAR. These included sites for COPAR committees in Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Texas. The Library of Congress’ internal search engine revealed only a mention of COPAR as a related program within the Center for Architecture, Design and Engineering’s page. Interestingly, COPAR was also mentioned as an element of criteria in their Collection Policy statement for Fine and
Applied Arts: non-book materials. Lastly, there was a hit on the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration’s page listing MassCOPAR as a grant recipient.

The National Register’s Bulletin on Architectural Records, as well as a historical society’s website cited the COPAR organization as a resource for historic preservation. Two newsletter articles (SAA Visual Materials, and Center for Study of Architecture/Archeology, Bryn Mawr) and an initial meeting of COPAR-VA reported COPAR activity.

Lastly, the majority of hits were references to COPAR publications (University pathfinders, conference bibliographies, bookstore holdings), along with professional association minutes and reports (ARLIS/NA, Boston Society of Architects, etc.).

ANALYSIS
COPAR offers very little up-to-date information on the web. There is no national site or listserv to serve and guide COPAR regional committees or offer reference assistance. COPAR, as an organization, has not taken full advantage of what the web and Internet have to offer. Basic committee web sites could easily rejuvenate awareness, especially with new generations of web-savvy researchers.

Two web sites provide services similar to COPAR. The UNESCO Archives Portal, specifically, Architectural Archives (http://www.unesco.org/webworld/portal_archives/pages/Archives/) offers a list of architectural repositories internationally (28 links for the U.S. alone). The Carnegie Mellon University Architecture Archives’ listing (http://www.library.cmu.edu/Research/ArchArch/netsites.html) also offers a smaller slightly different version of the UNESCO site.
Survey of COPAR awareness

Are librarians, archivists, architects, curators, historians and others concerned with the preservation of architectural records familiar with COPAR? Do they utilize COPAR? What sources beyond COPAR do they use? A survey regarding COPAR awareness was distributed to these target groups.

METHODOLOGY

Listservs of associations whose members might have an interest in architecture and its accompanying documentation were tapped. This survey pool included: the Association of Architecture School Librarians (AASL), Art Libraries Society of North America, Society of American Archivists (SAA), Society of American Archivists, Architectural Records Roundtable (SAA ARR)\(^1\), Visual Resources Association (VRA), International Confederation of Architectural Museums (ICAM), National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO), National Register coordinators, Society for Commercial Archeology (SCA), and the Recent Past Preservation Network (RPPN).

Unfortunately, there wasn’t an opportunity to survey members of the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), American Institute of Architects (AIA), Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) and the Conservation OnLine (CoOL) listservs. Ideally, it would have also been beneficial to survey the participants from the conference *Architectural Records: Preserving and managing the documentation of our built environment*, held in Philadelphia, PA in 2000, as well as those architectural archives listed on the UNESCO Archives Portal, but it would have taken a great effort to look up email addresses for each of these individuals and/or the repositories’ representatives in the time allotted for this initial research.

\(^1\) Presumably, this would be the same pool as SAA, however one does not have to be a member of SAA to be a member of this roundtable.
The survey was developed to be short and to-the-point regarding awareness of COPAR. Questions regarding local committee membership and sources of information were also included in the survey. This resulted in a three-question survey (see Appendix 1).

FINDINGS

Re: respondents

55 individuals from 23 states responded. The top responding states were Massachusetts, Texas and California. The top three survey groups that had the highest number of respondents were ARLIS/NA tied with SAA ARR, followed by SAA, and NCSHPO. Within each listserv, the groups that had the highest membership response rate were SAA ARR at 23.2%, ICAM/NA at 16.6% and NCSHPO at 12.5%. Although developed as a short survey, respondents were generous with unsolicited comments. A selection follows each question below.

Re: questions

Q. 1 Are you aware of COPAR (Cooperative Preservation of Architectural Records)?

- 75% answered “yes”
- 25% answered “no”

Unsolicited comments fell into two categories:

1) HOW they learned about COPAR: publications, library school, association meetings, through local COPAR committee
2) SURPRISE and/or INQUISITIVENESS: “Thought it was dead or at least moribund.” “Glad it's kicking.” “What specifically is the scope of the COPAR collection effort and how does it function at present?” “What has it actually accomplished?” “I wasn’t aware of the National; thought Massachusetts had its own stand-alone group, MassCOPAR.” “I'm aware of COPAR but haven't kept up with it.” “I've heard of it before, but am not familiar with all aspects of it.”

Q. 2 Are you a member of a state COPAR committee? If so, which one?

- 11% “yes” (4 from MassCOPAR, 1 from PA COPAR, and 1 from TxCOPAR)
- 89% “no”

Unsolicited comments included INQUISITIVENESS and/or INTEREST:
1) Inquiry into whether they had a local committee and/or interest in becoming involved or joining: MA, CA, VA, TX, AL
2) Inquisitive, but no mention of continued interest: NH, IL, MN, CA
3) Uncertainty if their committee is still around: VA, CT, CA, UT
4) Claim that there wasn’t a committee in their state, although there was: PA
5) Interests in starting up a committee: OR and RI

Q 3. If not via COPAR, how do you find information on managing architectural records or finding architectural records?

Most respondents did not separate their answers to the combined question. Answers are listed by percentage of occurrence:

- 40% Publications (SAA, COPAR, International Council on Archives Architectural Records Section (ICA), bibliographies, archival topics, newsletters, guides, various other associations)
- 31% Networking (colleagues, scholars, architects, librarians, archivists, property owners, National Park Service, patrons, dealers and galleries)
- 31% Associations (SAA, SAA ARR, AASL, ARLIS/NA, ICAM/NA, SAH)
- 24% Web (browser searches, association sites, Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project, archival repository sites)
- 15% Archives (architectural, national, state)
- 15% Universities
- 13% Workshops (SAA, Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts in Philadelphia in May 2000, AMIGOS, Northeast Document Conservation Center)
- 13% Listservs (Archives, ARLIS-L, NCSHPO, SAH)
- 11% Bibliographic utilities (RLIN, OCLC, SIRIS)
- Under 10% COPAR committees (even though the question stated “besides COPAR”); public records, electronic databases (Archives USA, Archival Resources, library catalogues, HABS/HAER); State Historical Commissions and Preservation Offices; private foundations and firms.

Unsolicited comments included a variety of issues:

- “I want to stress that it is primarily via state COPARs that I have learned about managing and preserving architectural records and that I am able to identify for our users repositories of architectural records.”
- “[We find information] through meager reference sources available on local architects.”
- “I have contacted COPAR in a quest for certain records but had little success. Seems their database may not be up-to-date and I don't know how inclusive it is.”
- “SAA has done/published enough work in this area over the years to help the non-archivist figure things out.”
- “We use of course the local COPAR guide to records in Boston to answer most of our questions. Otherwise it's a crapshoot. Archives USA, the RLG AMC file,
Worldcat, searching library catalogs where you have a sense of where the records might be... Access is very uneven but we do the best we can.”

- “Locally, we have established a network or referrals when dealing with architectural questions. There are two repositories with an emphasis on architecture/architects and there are 3 local organizations which are also interested in architectural history. We've learned what resources one another maintains and how to refer researchers.”
- “We typically contact the repository by phone or email (or inquiring individuals similarly contact us) since finding aids are typically in-house or not sufficiently complete to provide an adequate answer.”

ANALYSIS
Admittedly, the survey pool was heavily skewed to those who work in libraries and archives. This could be rectified by broadening the pool. The pool, however, represents a particularly important and traditional purveyor of information. They come to the table information literate- able to locate, filter and disseminate information. Unfortunately, there were several unsuccessful attempts to post the survey on the Society of Architectural Historian’s listserv. This was disappointing as the SAH was an early and strong partner for COPAR. Their members are also serious users of architectural records-beneficiaries of COPAR’s services. Lastly, the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO) and National Register coordinators revealed themselves as a sleeper group- both in their high number of responses as well as the percentage of their membership responding. This group should not be overlooked as a partner in future COPAR efforts.

With this in mind, the majority of those polled (75%) were aware of COPAR. A lack of current awareness was not surprising since the COPAR Newsletter stopped being produced in the late 1990s. Nearly one forth of the respondents expressed a continued interest in COPAR via unsolicited comments. This proves optimistic for future membership drives.

Even with such a high level of awareness, only 11% were members of COPAR committees. Many stated, however, that there wasn’t a committee available in their state and some even expressed an interest in forming their own state’s committees.
Regarding alternate sources of information for management and holdings information, the categories that emerged actually created a matrix of resources, instead of a few single strong venues. For instance, publications were the top source listed at 40%, yet most were produced by professional associations (listed at 31%). 24% cited the worldwide web, however the web also serves as a gateway for Archives (15%), Universities (15%), bibliographic utilities (11%), and associations (31%). Listservs, at 13% are generally those of associations and serve as another mode of networking, which came in strongly at 31%. A COPAR clearinghouse on the web could easily offer a list of these resources.

**Interviews with COPAR COMMITTEE contacts in the United States**

What are the local committees up to these days? How do they view themselves? Has the mission of COPAR changed, or just the method of achieving its original goals?

**METHODOLOGY**

This particular assessment proved to be the most difficult. Identifying committees and gathering up contact names took more effort than expected, as people had moved, changed jobs, and passed away. Thirteen committees were identified after reviewing COPAR files, the COPAR Newsletter, the web, and networking. Much of the information found was out of date. COPAR peers assisted in developing a common list of questions to ask in the interviews (Appendix 2). All committees are represented with the exception of Utah (the contact was out of the country) and North Carolina (contact passed away). An attempt was made to interview the current committee representative or multiple contacts if possible. During this process, it was discovered that Mississippi is also investigating formally forming a committee.

**FINDINGS**

Many contacts immediately veered from the focus of present day COPAR activities and instead offered a history of the committee. This is most likely due to the low level of project activity in the majority of the committees. Also many of the COPAR services,
specifically sharing holdings information, guiding acquisitions, and sharing expertise, are already incorporated into the contact’s professional duties and were therefore hard to parse out as COPAR specific.

Re: the committee contacts

- Three committees are currently lacking a formal representative contact person (AK, NC, and DC).
- By profession, over half of the contacts work in an archive or library, the remaining are professors, a museum professional, an architect, a consultant and a historian working for the state.
- Over two thirds consider themselves founding members.
- Over two thirds receive support (monetary, time off, supplies, etc.) from their employer; or were self-employed. This tended to be because COPAR activities are already incorporated into the missions of their institutions.

Re: the committees

- Founding dates range from 1973-2002. One quarter were formed in the 1980s and one quarter in the 1990s.
- Almost half consider themselves active in one way or another, one quarter dormant, and one “defunct”.

The following is a digest of the questions and their answers:

Re: what instigated the formation of the committee

- Continuous reference questions
- Survey work
- Processing a collection
- National COPAR efforts
- Unknown

Re: membership, meetings and communications:

- Most claimed no real active membership, just “supporters” that attend special programs
- Committees consist primarily of a small core group of active people (MA and MD meet irregularly)
Communication is via email distribution lists, word of mouth and the web (MA and TX). MI and NYC had newsletters at one time (the NYC newsletter became the national COPAR Newsletter). CT once sent out annual summaries.

Re: activities and services

- Survey work is the largest activity attempted (except AK and DC). Surveys were published in hard copy in CA, MA, MI, NYC, and PA. VA is exhibition driven with findings published in their catalogs. CT built a database that is currently looking for a permanent server. TX is building a small database based upon findings during public service work and membership applications. MD and PA are currently building databases. PA’s is the only database currently available to the public on the web and is called the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project (http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org). New Orleans’ attempt at a survey recently failed (couldn’t get enough focused support or funding).
- Committees tended to find answers to holdings queries first via surveys and then through networking.
- All other services include: workshops, exhibitions, guiding acquisitions to appropriate repositories, lectures and building web reference service. Again, most of this activity stems out of the contact’s professional job duties.

Re: formal affiliations with other sympathetic groups, associations, or institutions

- Most affiliations were informal and held only due to the fact that the contact was a member of both groups
- Most formal affiliations were project related- specifically with survey work
- In a few cases these affiliations actually adopted the spirit of COPAR (if not the name) and took over its basic duties: MD is handled through the Maryland Architectural Foundation and PA through the collaborative work of the Athenaeum and the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project. There are also many other architectural surveys that include holdings information which have never been affiliated with COPAR.

Re: future plans

- Assign a contact person and bring on more active participants
- Mount survey data on the web, update the old survey data, conduct a survey, add landscape records to their survey, make sure that their current survey efforts survive and expand
- Develop a formal website, enhance current website
- Outreach beyond metropolitan areas
- Increase awareness through professional associations and exhibits
- Most claimed that any future plans were a pipe dream without additional support of time and money
- Future is uncertain but would brighten considerably with guidance and support from the national COPAR
Comments/advice:

- Work on the committee has built lasting relations and knowledge based upon the expertise of others. This is the glue that has held their committee together over the years (AK, MA).
- Get the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects involved as well as other sympathetic associations (CA, New Orleans).
- Don’t forget to recognize landscape records, architectural photographers and others affiliated with the building trades.
- Survey work is a good investment both locally and elsewhere because architects moved around so much. Push for a single national database so that there aren’t overlaps in efforts. Make sure you document destroyed collections of records. Surveys have helped to raise awareness and, in turn, place records into appropriate repositories. This is especially true for records of the design process.
- The more you work in your committee, the more questions you will have. There will ALWAYS be issues for COPAR to work on, especially with new means of producing architectural records (of all types and formats).
- The committee did much better with national COPAR’s guidance and support. The COPAR Newsletter was a good means to share ideas. This could easily be superseded by a listserv. Having a national COPAR gives the committees clout especially when they are pursuing support from affiliated associations, businesses, and their own institutions.
- The saturation level of institutions interested in architecture has increased activity and often productivity of the committee (MassCOPAR). COPAR is like a car without gas, it won’t roll without a person to push it (New O). Try to find a way to reduce the dependency of the success of a committee on a single person’s efforts. Perhaps make the “contact” an institution rather than an individual to ensure that the COPAR committee will continue if someone leaves.
- Electronic and online communications will make it easier to accomplish COPAR’s basic goals. However, there is still a need for the foot soldiers to gather and prepare the data. Individual institutions have done a lot, as it is understandably self-serving, yet COPAR can still act as a clearinghouse by coordinating and compiling sites of reference.
- All in all, it can be hard work but well worth doing. Do not fear the big projects—the magnitude of unprocessed and uncatalogued material could easily scare one into inaction.

ANALYSIS

Many contacts originally perceived that their committee was either defunct or dormant because they were not actively conducting a large project or membership meetings. When asked if they were still providing basic COPAR services, they changed their minds realizing that they were indeed still active on that level. Local COPAR committees are
still very valuable in this respect because many holdings have not been formally documented. Where they have been documented, the surveys need to be revised and enhanced. There is still a high reliance on networking for information.

Most committees were small, comprised of a few dedicated people or often sustained by one dedicated person. There is a tendency that when a contact left, the committee became defunct. It is suggested that an institution rather than an individual person represent the committee, unless the committee has an active or large membership where this responsibility can be easily passed on. When the force left, the committee became defunct. The most active committees were in areas where there are strong memberships of institutions with interests in architecture (such as MassCOPAR, and PA). Most agreed that interests and activity could be invoked by an infusion of guidance and support from a national COPAR.

**Overall Analysis: Skepticism and the sleeping giant**

COPAR has increased awareness of architectural records. There are now numerous publications and programs available on management and preservation issues. This success is also reflected in the increased number of collections now found in archival repositories.

COPAR still fulfills its basic mission of identifying and sharing holdings information. This is especially apparent on the local level where much has not been documented or processed. The information stream is still informal and reliant on networking. Although most regional committees are not working on large-scale projects, they are still answering reference questions and providing access to information that is not yet published.

COPAR holds a bright future in new technologies. The COPAR Newsletter can be replaced with a COPAR listserv and web site. Holdings information can be tracked by a database similar to the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings survey. Links can be offered to archival finding aids now mounted on the web. A website could serve as
guidance and support for the local committees for issues such as starting a committee, conducting a survey, finding partners in professional associations, creating alliances, and identifying granting sources.

So where is COPAR thirty years later? The general consensus from those surveyed is that it is still a viable and welcome organization- “I thought it had died; good to hear it's still around”. Those who were already aware of COPAR still value it- “I feel COPAR is valuable and I should be more aware of its current status and/or activity”. Those who were not aware of COPAR express interest in learning more- “Sounds as if COPAR could do some proselytizing at meetings of archival organizations! I for one would be fascinated to learn about its work.”

Despite having just formed a regional COPAR committee in the state of Texas, I entered this research skeptical about the future of the national COPAR effort. In fact, I was afraid that the results of this study might have found COPAR defunct. On the contrary, the results noted in this report illustrate that COPAR continues to serve its original purpose and with a little effort, could continue to be a driving force for the preservation of architectural records.
APPENDIX 1 COPAR Awareness Survey

Dear colleague:
Disregard if you have no interest in preserving your architectural heritage through preserving architectural records. Please excuse any cross postings. Feel free to forward.

*** 3-question, 5-minute survey - DEADLINE MARCH 9, 2003 **

COPAR (Cooperative Preservation of Architectural Records) was formed in 1973 as an effort to preserve architectural records by sharing management expertise and to survey and share existing holdings.

I am conducting research for a report that will be presented at the Art Libraries Society/North America (ARLIS/NA) 2003 Annual Conference in a session entitled "Thirty Years After: COPAR and Other Endeavors Toward Preserving Architectural Records." This session will review the history of COPAR and the status of national and regional efforts to document architectural records.

The following 3-question survey addresses COPAR awareness. The resulting report will be posted on the TxCOPAR website at:
http://www.lib.utexas.edu/apl/aaa/txcopar.html

Please take a moment to respond:

1) Are you aware of COPAR (Cooperative Preservation of Architectural Records)?

2) Are you a member of a state COPAR committee? If so, which one?

3) If not via COPAR, how do you find information on managing architectural records or finding architectural records?

Send your replies to dodd.beth@mail.utexas.edu

If you are interested in these and other issues regarding architectural records, please consider joining the Architectural Records Roundtable of the Society of American Archivists (SAA). You do not have to be a member of SAA to join and it's free! For more information, please contact me.

Beth Dodd
APPENDIX 2  COPAR Committee Contacts Questionnaire

1a) update official contact data
1b) are you a founding member?
1c) Do you receive institutional support?
1d) When was your COPAR founded? When did it become defunct?
1e) What instigated the formation?
1f) If defunct, what dates was your COPAR active?

2) Does the committee have a web address?

3) What is the means of communication within the membership? (ex. listserv, phone, newsletter, etc.)

4) Has there been a formal survey of your state/region and if so, when?

5) What format is the survey data recorded in? (ex. forms, cards, published catalog, database, etc.)

6) How do you share holdings information with the public?

7) Does the committee hold regular membership meetings?

8) Does the committee attempt outreach efforts to further its mission? (ex. educational presentations to other groups, lobbying private or commercial owners of architectural records to preserve their holdings, share expertise and holdings, etc.)

9) Has or does the committee produce publications?

10) Does the committee have any formal affiliations? (ex. local AIA, local chapter of SAH, local historical society, state government, state archive, etc.)

11) Would you consider your committee active or inactive?

12) Future plans?

13) Comments/advice to share?