

The Organization and Status of Archival Training in the United States¹

By KARL L. TREVER

The National Archives

TEN years ago the newly-formed Society of American Archivists created a Committee on Training, instructing it "to consider the education and training appropriate for those desirous of entering the archival profession . . . and to promote projects for making such training available."² In November 1945 the Society joined the American Association for State and Local History in appointing representatives to a National Council on Specialized Scholarly Techniques, an organization dedicated to the task of facilitating the training of persons interested in entering archival or historical society work.³ These actions, when noted together, suggest the need for reviewing the development of training facilities during the past decade and for appraising their usefulness to the profession.

At the second annual meeting of the Society, the Committee on Training presented its "Preliminary Report."⁴ It expressed complete agreement with the European emphasis on the need for a historical, legal, and linguistic background in archival work and recommended that training in the United States should be provided for persons preparing for two classes of archival positions: (1) student candidates for archivist first class, i.e., those planning careers as directors or staff officers of major archival establishments, and who would be recruited from the level of training required for the doctor of philosophy in American history or political science; and (2) student candidates for archivist second class, i.e., those who aspired to directorships of minor establishments or to employment as lesser officials in larger agencies,

¹ Read at the Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists, October 25, 1946.

² Society of American Archivists, *Proceedings*, 1936-1937, p. 21. See also A. R. Newsome, "Objectives of the Society of American Archivists," in the same volume, p. 64. Members of the original committee were Samuel F. Bemis, chairman, Herbert F. Bolton, R. D. W. Connor, and Theodore C. Pease. Ralph Lutz was added to the group later.

³ AMERICAN ARCHIVIST, 9: 67 (Jan. 1946).

⁴ Samuel F. Bemis, The training of archivists in the United States. AMERICAN ARCHIVIST, 2: 154-161 (July 1939).

and who would be recruited from the level of training for the master of arts degree in the social sciences. These standards were given official sanction by Dr. Newsome in a presidential address when he asserted that, although all American archivists currently did not possess these qualifications, "the professional standards have been set, and . . . no respectable archival establishment can long disregard [them]."⁵

On May 29, 1940, Dr. Buck read a paper before the American Library Association on "Essentials in Training for Work With Public Archives and Historical Manuscripts."⁶ In that paper he analyzed the job of an archivist, outlined the body of knowledge that should be at his command, and described the beginnings of archival training in the United States, making particular reference to a program of training inaugurated in Washington in 1939 by the American University Graduate School in cooperation with the National Archives.⁷

Based in part on the thinking of the Committee on Training and reflecting the essentials outlined by Dr. Buck, the American University program originally provided advanced study in the social sciences, courses in the history and administration of archives, and an opportunity for practical experience in handling archival material through internships at the National Archives. The "center of gravity" of the program was and still is a two semester graduate course in the "History and Administration of Archives." Its first semester consists of a survey of archival developments in Europe, Latin America, and the British Empire, with a more detailed discussion of the past and present status of archival administration in the United States. The second semester is

⁵ A. R. Newsome, The archivist in American scholarship. *AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*, 2: 220 (Oct. 1939).

⁶ Solon J. Buck, Essentials in training for work with public archives and historical manuscripts. *Archives and Libraries*, 1940, p. 114-122. A revision was published in the *AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*, 4: 84-90 (Apr. 1941) under the title "The training of archivists."

⁷ About 1936 Harvard University made an effort to secure the services of Pierre Caron as guest lecturer in archives administration but, failing in this, a course on archives, primarily intended for students of history rather than students of archives administration, was given under the direction of C. E. Walton of the Harvard College Library. Correspondence between Austin P. Evans, of Columbia University, Solon J. Buck, and others concerning the possible establishment of a systematic training program for archivists began as early as 1935. The first experiment in this direction was made by the Columbia University Graduate School in 1938-39 when Dr. Buck was selected to conduct a two hour course entitled "Archives and Historical Manuscripts." Although Dr. Buck's course at Columbia could not be repeated for practical reasons, Margaret C. Norton, archivist of Illinois, taught a summer course on archives at the Library School of that institution in 1940. Miss Norton had made an effort in 1937-38 to establish a graduate course on archives as a cooperative project between either the University of Illinois or the University of Chicago and the Archives Division of the State Library, but the program did not materialize. In 1938-39 Dr. Buck inaugurated the American University course on the "History and Administration of Archives."

devoted to a study of the different phases of archival economy and the tested principles and techniques applicable to each of them. In its initial year, the course was attended by 20 persons, mostly members of the National Archives staff. Since that time more than 250 persons have received the professional training this course provides.⁸

By 1940 leading archivists had agreed that good archives administration was largely dependent upon good records administration and that therefore the study of current records management ought to be included in the education of an archivist. Consequently American University added to its program undergraduate courses on records administration with Helen L. Chatfield, Treasury Archivist, as instructor. In 1943 these courses were expanded into a planned curriculum with suitable academic recognition for those who completed it, namely, the degree of Associate in Administration. Courses in records administration acceptable for the degree include the "Organization and Procedure for Handling of Government Records," "Management of Government Records," the "Management of Special Types of Records," and the "Arrangement, Classification and Indexing of Government Records." Recently the University has established a new records administration course on the graduate level to tie this phase of the program in more closely with the graduate work in archives administration. About 200 students, mostly employees of Federal agencies, have been enrolled in records administration courses to date.

The most recent development in the American University program occurred in June 1945 when an intensive, short course in the "Preservation and Administration of Archives" was conducted in cooperation with the National Archives and the Maryland Hall of Records. In contrast to the two semester course on the "History and Administration of Archives," which is designed to serve graduate students and persons professionally engaged in archives work, the short course is intended to meet the needs of custodians of institutional archives and curators of manuscript collections who carry out the functions of an archivist in addition to other duties. Because special emphasis is placed on skills applicable to the problems of the small institution which cannot afford costly and complicated equipment, three days' instruction takes place at the Maryland Hall of Records where certain techniques of repair work and records description have been highly developed. In order that laboratory work can be properly supervised, the number of students permitted to enter the course is necessarily limited. In 1945 the course registered 4 church archivists, 2 curators of university manuscript

⁸ Annual announcements of courses in records and archives administration and of the intensive summer course for custodians of public, institutional, and business archives are issued by the American University and may be secured by addressing the registrar of that institution.

collections, 1 business archivist, 2 state archivists, 2 state library manuscript curators, 1 historical society, and 1 public library manuscript curator. Students came from North Carolina, Ohio, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Maryland and Canada.⁸

Let us turn now to other training activities sponsored by Federal agencies. In its own interest, the National Archives has furnished its employees with in-service training opportunities whenever possible.⁹ Because of heavy wartime turnover of personnel, a series of orientation training programs for new professional employees was conducted in 1942. A device indirectly furnishing training was adopted in 1943 with the establishment of the "Open Conference on Administration," now known as the "Seminar Conference on Archives Administration." Its programs are so conducted as to provide an opportunity for staff discussion of almost every problem that faces the modern American archivist. Conference proceedings are multilithed and distributed to the staff for future reference use.

For ten years the United States Department of Agriculture Graduate School has offered courses in records administration to Government employees. A seminar on filing schemes and classification manuals of Government agencies, instituted in 1936, led to the establishment of a course on "Federal Communications and Records" in 1940. This course, which took the more descriptive title of "Records Management and Procedures" in 1944, already has given training to more than 250 students.¹⁰

Another organization that indirectly serves as a training ground for Federal employees is the Interagency Records Administration Conference. Now in its sixth year and currently sponsored by the National Archives, it provides an opportunity for Government employees concerned with records administration to exchange ideas, discuss principles and standards, study systems of records management, and prepare materials for the training of records personnel. The Conference membership list now includes more than 300 names of persons from practically every Federal agency.¹¹

Finally, as a part of the general program of the Government of the United States for cooperation with other American republics, the National Archives has for the past two years offered an opportunity

⁸ Pre-war inservice training courses at the National Archives included seminars on Federal administrative history, materials for research in the National Archives, and report and correspondence writing.

¹⁰ U. S. Department of Agriculture Graduate School. *Announcement of course in records management procedure*, fall semester 1944.

¹¹ Transcriptions of remarks made at the general meetings of the Interagency Records Administration Conference may be secured by writing to the Conference Secretary, Joseph F. Vaughan, National Archives, Washington 25, D.C.

to eligible citizens of those countries to obtain training in the care and administration of government records. In-service training fellowships, carrying allowances of \$180 per month for personal expenses plus travel, are granted to successful applicants for a period of six months. In addition to study and work in the National Archives, provision is made for visits to some of the state archives, where problems are somewhat different from those that obtain in the national capital. Fellows from Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Cuba, and Peru have already been trained in this manner. Under the State Department budget for 1947 plans are being laid for the training of three additional archivists, and it is hoped that all Latin American republics will take advantage of these fellowships eventually. In addition to the foreign students receiving training under this program, the National Archives has provided similar training, but not at American expense, to seven employees of the Brazilian Government, a representative of the Imperial Record Department of India, a Canadian Guggenheim fellow, and to an American Library Association fellow from China. Indeed it is the policy of the National Archives to facilitate the archival studies of persons from state agencies, private institutions, and foreign countries who come to visit for periods ranging from several days to several weeks for observation, consultation, and practice.

Mention also should be made of several less extensive training activities outside Washington. In January 1945, the Archives Division of the Illinois State Library, cooperating with the State Civil Service Commission and the University Extension Division, conducted a course in "State Record Making" for "file clerks, stenographers, office managers and others who create and keep records."¹² Another program, organized for an entirely different type of personnel, is the "Training Institute for Local Historians" held at Albany in 1945 and 1946 under the leadership of the Division of Archives and History of the New York State Education Department. The purpose of this Institute is to show the local historian how he can serve his community effectively, and instruction is given in six different fields, including the collection and care of local records.¹³

Since 1942, Howard H. Peckham, now director of the Indiana Historical Bureau, has conducted a course on the "Care and Use of Manuscripts" at the summer session of the University of Michigan School of Library Service. This two credit course introduces prospective librarians to the principles of work with manuscripts and includes four lectures on the history and administration of archives in libraries and historical societies.¹⁴

¹² Course on "Creation of Records." *Illinois libraries*, 27: 231-237 (Apr. 1945).

¹³ Circular letter, Albert B. Corey, state historian, to local historians, April 20, 1946.

¹⁴ Rudolph Gjelsness to the writer, June 8, 1946.

Reference should also be made to a course on "Resources and Methods of the American Historical Society and Library" offered at Columbia University in 1942 by Alexander J. Wall, director of the New York Historical Society. It was designed to familiarize graduate students in American history with the practical operations of a leading historical society and to offer them "some training for future work in public archives and in state and local historical societies and museums."¹⁵

Finally, the New York and Columbia University graduate schools of business administration have recently announced the offering of "special internships in business archival training." Students registering for internships are expected to devote at least three months of full time daily work to gaining practical experience in designated depositories and business companies, particularly in the New York Historical Society and the Union Trust Company. Upon completing this course, in addition to a course in business history, students "will be recommended as trained business archivists."¹⁶

In appraisal of the training facilities just described, it is inevitable that the unique American University program should be the chief object of examination. Certainly persons who have received the instruction involved will agree that this program has played a most important role in American archival progress and that the work should be continued and expanded. During the past seven years its curriculum has offered to employees of the National Archives and other Washington agencies and institutions a convenient, post-appointment means of acquiring helpful background knowledge and specialized training that otherwise might never have been enjoyed. It has served the immediate purpose of helping these persons to obtain a knowledge of basic archival theory and to get acquainted with practices tested elsewhere. Beyond this, it has forged a link between the archival endeavors of the United States and other countries, and it has introduced a much needed historical perspective in archival work. It has brought to the fore the significance of administrative history in the education of the archivist and has pressed successfully for recognition of the fact that "the management of records, from the time of their creation up to and including the time they are accessible in an archival agency is essentially one process and one problem for the solution of which the archivist and the records administrator must cooperate." Finally, it has made records and archives personnel aware of the administrative and scholarly significance of their own work and has contributed to the maintenance of their professional pride and esprit de corps.¹⁷

¹⁵ AMERICAN ARCHIVIST, 4: 302 (Oct. 1941).

¹⁶ AMERICAN ARCHIVIST, 9: 385-386 (Oct. 1946).

¹⁷ The writer is indebted to Ernst Posner, dean of the Graduate School of American

Perhaps the best way to appraise the curriculum more specifically is to ask the question "What should we expect to get from an archival training program?" The answer, I think, is twofold: (1) we should expect it to draw into the profession the best possible recruits; and (2) we should expect it to provide the best possible training for practicing as well as potential archivists.

In regard to the first expectation, it will be recalled that the Committee on Training originally hoped that the establishment of training facilities would create a reservoir of properly trained men and women from which archival agencies could recruit their personnel. But disappointingly few "student candidates" have sought pre-appointment archival training. Indeed, persons already employed in archival, records, or historical work have constituted the majority of registrants in the courses referred to above. Professional courses are not yet prerequisite to the appointment of archivists of the "first" or of any other class and, in spite of the assertion that "no respectable archival establishment can long disregard them," the high standards of appointment envisioned by that Committee still have not been reached by many institutions. The relatively limited number of positions available, agency financial considerations, low salaries, the lack of glamor in routine archival tasks, plus the competition of other professions whose disciplines are somewhat more susceptible to formal instruction have conspired to nullify the hopes of the Committee with respect to the recruitment of archivists.

It has been suggested that students have not been attracted to archival training courses because the profession has not had the right kind of publicity—that most people even now do not know what archivists really do! A more likely reason is, however, that the American University program has remained an isolated venture. The Committee on Training obviously hoped that a number of graduate schools would undertake similar programs in cooperation with State and local agencies. Indeed, in his capacity as chairman of the Committee in 1942, Dr. Posner himself sought to work out practicable plans whereby some State archival agencies might serve as regional training centers in cooperation with appropriate university graduate schools. While the universities would provide the background courses, the archival agencies would offer specialized training in records and archives administration through members of their staffs. Class schedules, bibliographies, study materials, occasional guest lecturers, and the experience of the Washington program could be made available to these regional training

University, for access to his files pertaining to the history and administration of the records and archives courses offered by the University. Many of the ideas and phrases expressed here were taken from reports and memoranda in his files.

centers, and conferences of instructors during the annual meetings of the Society of American Archivists would lead to a uniformity of approach. It is still Dr. Posner's opinion that once organized, such regional centers not only would succeed in their main aim but also would soon find it desirable to arrange short training courses for county clerks, local historians, and "lay administrators" of archival materials, thus making an additional and effective contribution toward the general advancement of the archival profession in the United States. Indeed, he regards the setting up of such facilities as indispensable if pre-appointment training of archivists is to be achieved.

In this connection, a proposal of the Archivist of Maryland is of some interest. He suggests that several universities be encouraged to develop a course of studies leading to the B.A. or B.S. with major in archival administration and that an integral part of such a curriculum be internship in some cooperating archival establishment or historical society.¹⁸ Without engaging in controversy over the proper educational level for archival training, it is safe to say that such a program, operated perhaps on the Antioch College principle, would have the advantage of introducing potential archivists to the profession at a time in life when professional careers are being selected and when considerations of salary and rank are of comparatively minor importance. Another suggestion advanced for spreading the availability of archival training is that the major library schools of the country should be encouraged to recognize the existence of the subject of archival science and, as English library schools now do, make provision for teaching it as one of the courses leading to the library science degree.¹⁹

Internship was envisioned as a vital part of training from the beginning, for the Committee recognized that practice must be combined with theory if the last is to be correctly understood. Experience at the National Archives and elsewhere indicates, however, that relatively few students are financially able to avail themselves of internship opportunities. Therefore, if this phase of training is to be turned into a practical vehicle, it is clear that some provision must be made for obtaining grants or fellowships from some source if we are to attract deserving and gifted students to pre-appointment study.

In seeking the answer to the question of whether existing facilities provide the best training for functioning as well as potential archivists, your speaker secured opinions by mail from several prominent State archivists. They were unanimous in their appreciation of the contribution that the American University program had made to the develop-

¹⁸ Morris Radoff to the writer, Oct. 9, 1946.

¹⁹ Karl L. Trever, Local archives and the public library: a proposal for consideration by archivists and librarians. *Library journal*, 71: 304 (Mar. 1, 1946).

ment of an archival profession in America. They were equally of the opinion, however, that the program to date had largely overlooked one fundamental fact, i.e., that very few American archivists outside the National Archives are engaged in "purely archival work." Since most archivists are obliged to act, more often than not, as employees of the chief historical agency of the State, they suggested the urgent need of adding to the curriculum some sort of course on historical society work.

Another point of agreement among the archivists consulted was that the graduate course on the history and administration of archives would benefit somewhat by less emphasis on theoretical and historical materials, particularly if the time gained could be devoted to a consideration of the "more practical aspects of archival administration." Perhaps quotations from two letters will best express this viewpoint:

1. Our archival students need more information than they get about the physical characteristics of record materials, the history of paper making, the nature of paper, ink, and other materials, methods of binding and binding materials—all of this as background to repairing. . . . More time should be given to the actual techniques of making various reference tools, including instruction in filing as well as in analysis of needs in preliminary surveys. The student should be given more practical instruction in publication procedures and historical society editorial work, and a course in the use of printed Government documents would be useful.²⁰

2. Less attention should be given to European archival matters . . . and more attention given to the study of American business methods which result in the creation of records [and] by which quantities of future archives are being accumulated. . . . Too much attention is given to archival theory and too little time is spent in the actual study of technical phases. . . . For example, how many archivists know anything about paper chemistry, a subject with which they should be conversant in order to determine the proper treatment of various kinds of paper and also in selecting acid free containers for the preservation of their documents. Surprisingly few archivists know anything about fumigation and insect control methods or [about] the control of mildew, mold, and other hazards. More attention should be given to the types of filing equipment available and functional problems of that nature. Photography is becoming increasingly important in archival work and I doubt very much that the majority of archivists and those being trained for archivists know as much about this essential phase of archival activity as they should.²¹

These detailed comments should not unbalance our perspective, however, for as one of my archivist correspondents said of the American University course, after referring to the demands of the practical school, "Still, all in all, I am in favor of such courses because the content

²⁰ Margaret C. Norton to the writer, Oct. 11, 1946.

²¹ Leon de Valinger to the writer, Oct. 16, 1946.

of the subject is so great that any part of it which a student learns is so much to the good."²²

In conclusion, may your speaker venture an observation of his own? The enormously intensified wartime activities of Federal, State and local governments have resulted in the creation of the greatest mass records problem in history. It will call for the establishment of many new archival agencies and records management units and the expansion and rationalization of existing facilities. Many business firms, religious bodies, and learned institutions will likewise be faced with unprecedented record problems. Undoubtedly there will be a considerable demand for trained archival personnel in a wide variety of fields—even in the field of archives and records management for international organizations. The American archival profession was never fully able to meet the wartime demands made upon it for trained and experienced personnel for records and archives work at home and abroad. Shall it likewise be found unable to meet similar demands in the postwar period? The Society of American Archivists does not now have a Committee on Training, for it was abolished at the suggestion of its chairman in 1943 in favor of a Committee on Local Archives. One of the objectives of the Society as stressed by its first president, Dr. A. R. Newsome, is to "consider the standards and nature of the education and training needed [for archivists] and to promote projects for making such study and training available." Would it not be wise, therefore, in addition to maintaining its representation on the National Council of Specialized Scholarly Techniques, for the Society to re-establish the Committee on Training as its primary agent in seeking that objective?

²² Morris Radoff to the writer, Oct. 9, 1946.