

# Defense of Archives Against Human Foes

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THREE years ago the Library of Congress issued a bibliography entitled *Safeguarding our Cultural Heritage . . . in Time of War*. This suggested, as an appropriate title for this paper, "Safeguarding our Cultural Heritage . . . in Time of Peace," because I was not asked to discourse on the harm done to records by human enemies when they are national enemies and when their havoc is incidental to military action. Neither is it concerned with the baleful influences of such natural or unnatural peacetime enemies as fires, floods, insects, mice, sunlight, dampness, dryness, heat, cold, dirt, dust, bacteria, acidic pollution in the air, and low grade paper. Its concern is with the direct destruction or abuse of documents (whether knowingly or innocently performed) by human beings. There have been far more papers intentionally sacrificed on the altar of Vulcan than have been accidentally burned, and many papers said to have been sacrificed on the altar of Mars were harmed by soldiers not acting in the line of duty.

I am using "archives" in the broadest sense of the word, as it is applied in reference to all of the historical papers in the Adams Manuscript Trust or in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. It has seemed apt in treating the enemies of archives to use the idea of warfare and to divide this paper into two parts and in allegorical manner to discuss, first, the enemies a document or body of documents might encounter before reaching the safety and protection of a citadel. This fortress, of course, would be a repository, whether one of the two great national repositories (the Library of Congress and the National Archives), some other public institution, a State or local archives (or historical society, library, or museum), a university or college library, or an independently endowed library, such as the Huntington. The staffs of such institutions would be the guards under orders to defend their holdings. The second

<sup>1</sup> This paper, in a shorter form, was read at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists at Nashville, Tennessee, on October 11, 1955. The author is assistant chief of the Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress. Comments of two members of the panel that discussed Mr. Land's paper follow this article.

part of the paper then would deal with the measures taken and stratagems devised for the defense of archives against the various types of sieges and assaults made upon them by their human foes. In considering their human foes, I was even inclined to attribute to documents characteristics of living beings. (Are they not said to "live" and to "speak" to us? Were they not called "living organisms" by Mr. Radoff in his presidential address?) I realized, however, that I was here straining to create an illusion and had to admit that a poor defenseless document could not tell a human friend from a human foe and that the survival of the "fittest" was surely a matter on the lap of callously fickle gods.

Having abandoned this idea, I still planned to handle the subject in two parts: documents in private though perhaps corporate hands and documents in repositories. It was with considerable reluctance that I came to discard this plan also. I regret this, too, for your sakes because the deleted portion of my paper was by far the most, if not the only, dramatic part. In preparation to write it, I began to absorb the lore of manuscript enemies from Biblical times to the present and I found numerous and harrowing illustrations of their methods and their devastations. I meant to regale you with these and only refrained from doing so when I realized, almost too late, that this was not the subject assigned me. I was asked to speak about defending archives, not to describe their human enemies. You must know their foes in order to protect them. Having fully dissected the enemies of papers privately held, however, what can you say about defending them, short of getting them into a repository? It seems futile to characterize the various types of enemies, if the only means to protect documents in private ownership appears, over and over again, to be to educate those who, by happenstance, may have them even momentarily in their keeping. The pedagogic requirements, to be effective, are hopelessly insuperable because of the wide disparity in the characteristics of these enemies ranging from religious zealots to unconscionable forgers, from brilliant scholars to ignorant housemaids, from collectors with delicate sensibilities to second-hand furniture dealers with indelicate sensibilities, from efficiency experts to inefficient file clerks, from royalty and the families of Presidents to butchers, bakers and candlestick makers, and from censors to grangerizers. In truth, the danger points are so numerous that there is no assurance that papers in private hands will be preserved, even for the owner or his heirs, unless they are placed in a repository equipped with proper facilities and staff. Even then, we know they may not be out of harm's way

and the problems of their protection from that point on are enough to occupy us today. Indeed, even in this area, there are aspects of the subject on which I shall not discourse. It might be well to epitomize these to forestall a possible criticism that I have unintentionally overlooked them.

To return for a moment to the allegory of war, we know of the fifth columnists and of the feelings of jealousy and distrust frequently experienced among allies. Repositories then may be called allies and, if jealousy and distrust do not exist among them, competition and rivalry certainly do. This reminds me of an article published 18 years ago in a library journal that yet enrages many in the library profession. The very title of this provocative piece by the late Randolph G. Adams, director of the William L. Clements Library, suggests the high words he used in chastising his fellows: "Librarians as Enemies of Books."<sup>2</sup> Some of the barbs that Adams directed at librarians could be aimed with equal force at archivists and curators. I say this not to stir up controversy or to create bad blood. Without weighing the relative merits among varying custodial policies, procedures, and practices, but considering the friends of archives to be those who insure their physical safety and make them readily accessible to all qualified searchers, I wish briefly to suggest some areas in which curators might be enemies of archives:

1. Curators should give good counsel. When prospective donors of collections confer with repository officials it provides an occasion: to abstain from accepting material which should be directed to a more appropriate repository; to advise against the dispersal of a collection among repositories and to decline accepting part of a collection when it is known that the major portion already has been placed in another repository; to caution against the reckless weeding of the collection; to secure freedom of access for all serious investigators or to recommend only a reasonable period of restricted access with a definite terminal date for materials of a very personal nature or of possible embarrassment to living persons, and to urge that permissions of access be not then arbitrarily denied or not limited solely to a favored user; and to secure a dedication to the public of such literary rights as the donor possesses in the collection. If curators give bad counsel on these matters, should they not be called enemies of archives?

2. Curators should maintain proper safeguards. An erratic acquisition rate, which in many repositories cannot be controlled, may mean the accumulation of vast quantities of unorganized materials ripe for pilfering without risk of detection. If curators permit readers to use or staff members to have access to such materials without special precautions to safeguard them, are they not foes of archives?

<sup>2</sup> Randolph G. Adams, "Librarians as Enemies of Books," in *Library Quarterly*, 7: 317-331 (July 1937).

3. Curators should not split up collections. Those who, without reference to provenance, heedlessly split up collections or create miscellany collections or add materials to wholly different collections can cause endless trouble for their successors in office and misunderstanding and misinterpretation for an unending line of investigators. One authority has expressed the view that the worst human enemies of archives are those who ignore the basic doctrine of *respect des fonds*.<sup>3</sup>

4. Curators should exercise great caution in weeding, pulping, and making collections difficult of access. There are some who would quibble at any new development, but many would proscribe as enemies of archives those who advocate that records be preserved by microfilming them and then destroying the bulky originals; or those who ruthlessly purge records, deciding in haste (but for all time and eternity), what is of value to the historian here and hereafter; or those who determine on the basis of service requests to rusticate or sequester classes of records.

5. Curators should appreciate the value, meaning, and use of collections. To use a phrase of Adams, repository administrators might be ascending "into the heaven of efficiency," having had all feeling and sentiment trained out of them. The size and complexity of repositories have meant that administration has become a full-time and all-demanding occupation. The inevitable result is that some in authority — especially those never having served an apprenticeship as investigators and not always understanding the consequences of what they are doing — are so largely concerned with budgets, enlarged staff and personnel matters, facilities for public service, air-conditioning, statistical analysis, or processing activities that love of, and enthusiasm for, manuscripts have been crowded out of their temperaments. Can those who still feel that enthusiasm — collectors and specialists, whose intimate knowledge and appreciation of the value of documents have been gained by their application to scholarly pursuits — be blamed for calling such officials enemies of manuscripts?

6. Curators must be impartial. Should we be surprised when a disappointed scholar, denied access to or full use of material, censures as an enemy of archives the curator who withholds it for exclusive exploitation by himself, by a colleague, or by some favorite?

These questions suggest the areas in which the relative merits of repositories or curators might be debated. Another similar matter of concern is whether greater benefit will be derived from the concentration of important collections in Washington or from their decentralization throughout the United States. In this connection it seems ironic that the principal promoter of the establishment of the National Archives, John Franklin Jameson, stood firmly for concentration. In regard to the Harding papers, he commented in 1929:

<sup>3</sup> Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., to Robert H. Land, Sept. 9, 1955, in correspondence file, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.



There is no doubt something attractive about the notion of placing the statesman's papers in a building especially erected to commemorate him, but as a matter of fact experience shows that papers thus placed are used only sparingly. It is thought that they can be conveniently used for his biography, but even for that purpose their location is less advantageous, for the biographer of a president needs constant use of the papers of other public men, his contemporaries and of a great collection of books.<sup>4</sup>

About the Hoover papers, in 1933, he wrote from the Library of Congress:

As things are now, the serious student is almost obliged to come to Washington, and to the millions of manuscripts for American history in this repository, and this will still more be the case when the new National Archive Building is completed and its contents are available to their use. To have the papers of a president stored elsewhere is to cause them to be little used by the future writers of history, in comparison with their use if they are preserved here, along with the papers of other presidents and other contemporaries in public life.<sup>5</sup>

It is, however, even more ironic that a document of greatest prestige at the National Archives, the Declaration of Independence, indicts George III for having "called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures."

Since I am not attempting to draw distinctions among repositories, you may think that I have now worked myself completely out of giving a paper, that there is little left to speak of. Yet there remain matters for an impartial treatment of the defense of papers already in a repository, papers which it has decided to retain, which it has repaired, which it has organized for use, and for which it has compiled finding aids. Who are the enemies of such records; how does the repository protect them? Unlike the document itself, the archivist, who may not be able to distinguish friend from foe, is still not without defenses. The human enemies are either members of the staff or persons from outside. The size and complexity of the staff and the clientele served are determining factors in establishing safeguards. For endowed institutions that have a staff made up of especially trained authorities and a small clerical and maintenance force and that limit service to a select number of well qualified scholars of known identity, it is possible to enforce only a few formal rules and yet observe strict security measures. Their holdings are exactly cataloged so as to provide ready identification and quick

<sup>4</sup> Correspondence file, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

means of discovering losses or abuse. It is easy for them to take frequent inventories and to serve material singly or in small units. For many public repositories, however, the situation is quite different. Their staffs include a variety of grades, with much of the work of accessioning, arranging, boxing, and shelving of records in the hands of nonprofessional employees and with many clerical and maintenance assistants. Their holdings are maintained in large groups difficult to inventory and are served to readers in boxes or folders so that it is hard to detect missing or damaged items. The clientele of public repositories is more numerous, and it includes persons who arrive unannounced, with no experience in handling original records but with legitimate reasons to consult them. The manner and degree of protecting these large collections and of supervising their users can vary greatly.

There is a striking characteristic common to both staff members and outside investigators. Persons impressed with the importance of the work on which they are at the time engaged and hurriedly bent upon achieving the best possible results in the shortest space of time and with the greatest saving of energy are frequently careless in their handling of manuscripts. If a document is of immediate use to them, whether it be for an exhibit, a photocopy, or a quotation, they apparently think it can serve no more noble purpose and are oblivious to any concern over its subsequent fate. This is the only way of accounting for the inexplicable handling of manuscripts by persons of whom you would expect sympathetic compliance with all regulations for preserving them.

As indicated, those on the staff who appear to be most susceptible to such an inimical trait are photocopyists and arrangers of exhibits. Special safeguards are necessary to protect material in their hands, and a careful collation should be made of material returned after their use. (I mention this hesitantly because it may be taken to reflect on staff members at my own institution, whom instead I can compliment for meticulous adherence to our standards. Again, as in all of this section, I speak without personal reflection.) There are also staff members or board members who are, or who consider themselves to be, privileged characters and demand that favors be granted in behalf of themselves or those whom they wish to impress. They are incapable of realizing that rules and regulations were meant to apply to them or to their friends. You must parry their requests, limit materials placed in their hands, and insist that the official in highest authority assume responsibility for making exceptions for these people of self-appointed importance. There is a

difference between them and the official who knows when it is in order to request or to make an exception to a rule and when exigencies demand prompt decisions.

Repositories may also have in their employ those too rapid workers, careless of detail, inaccurate, and tending to an attitude towards papers wherein familiarity breeds contempt. Some seem never to have made the record note required or returned a document as or when or where they should. Others mean well but lack judgment or may have blind spots or rank prejudices. It is requisite to hold these employees to a high standard of performance, always to correct and call attention to their errors, and to exercise close supervision and review of their work. You do not have to encourage the incompetent to remain on your staff and you can permit them to resign to accept more promising offers or more congenial positions. People do change, or at least they begin to exhibit traits not discernible at the time when they made application for archival work and showed bright promise and a real affection for manuscripts. Or do they, in handling inanimate objects, seek release from their anger with animate objects? Some have been known to move speedily from an institution guarding records into an institution guarding persons, but with them it will require the advice of a psychiatrist to stipulate preventive measures.

Lastly, the staff member most inexcusably an enemy of archives is the one who came meaning to steal or the one with a weak character for whom temptation proved too great. I shall cite a sad case at the Library of Congress that made the headlines in 1897. Early the year before, Louis McKenzie Turner, a music clerk in charge of the Music Division, and Philip McElhone, a copyright clerk, began breaking into the private office of the Librarian of Congress, then in the Capitol, after hours and on Sundays to steal manuscripts. The lock on the door was a very poor affair, easily manipulated with any old key when applying a little pressure. The Librarian on first discovering the thefts, largely from the Peter Force collection, did not know whom to suspect among his 42 employees, any one of whom could have got to the papers. The two thieves over a period of several months went repeatedly to the office and abstracted hundreds of valuable documents of the colonial and revolutionary periods — mainly Washingtoniana, including his orderly book of the Braddock expedition and his diary for 1787, a number of Benedict Arnold and John Hancock letters, and letters of Thomas Paine, Nathaniel Shaw, Benjamin Franklin, Ethan Allan, Thomas Jefferson, John Jay, John Adams, Lafayette, Robert Morris, Israel

Putnam, and others. These they sold to dealers and collectors in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington. The Secret Service recovered all of the stolen documents through the aid of Turner, who turned state's evidence, and the cooperation of the purchasers. McElhone was brought to trial and convicted in May 1897. The statement made by Turner described a brazen collaboration in thievery and his habits of betting and gambling.<sup>6</sup> This experience taught us to doubt our fellow man, particularly if he shows evidence of playing the races or living beyond his means. It indicates also that "all out" efforts must be made promptly to recover misplaced materials, to discover the cause of error in replacing or damaging documents, and to make each such instance a lesson for future guidance. It is bad to be suspicious of an employee's honesty in handling documents; it is far worse not to have your doubts resolved.

We have noted that the same tendencies in staff members and in our clientele make persons enemies of archives. If by the nicest definition, a scholar could not be an enemy of archives, then our reading rooms receive those who come in the guise of scholars, but who must be something less than true. Have not all of us been shocked by the shameful manner in which authors of repute have marked documents, folded them, disarranged them, and treated fragile material as insensitively as you would wrapping paper? Have not absent-minded professors made you doubt they ever had a present mind? Would not some actually have filched documents, but for the fact they could not then serve their purposes of documentation? I personally seem to have given mortal offense to a professor not long ago, when I told him I hoped that he would in future be more lenient with his students who failed to follow his directions. Having dutifully agreed to preserve the existing order of the papers he was using, he was, in working with a box with folders of loose papers in perfect order, placing at the end of each folder the documents he selected to serve his purpose. When he finished reading the entire contents of a folder, he would stop and at one time take all his notes from this residue cache. Upon completing his note taking, he promptly closed the folder, leaving its contents in the disorder he had created. He had not realized that this practice, so convenient to him, would be considered an infringement of our rule against altering the existing order of papers or that it rendered a disservice to other searchers and to our staff.

If a scholar, by hook or by crook, becomes so privileged a person

<sup>6</sup> Library of Congress archives, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

as to secure the right of sole access to a collection until he has published a certain book or has completed his use of the collection, he will invariably delay until the last possible moment permitting its use by others; but it never occurs to him that he is a foe of archives.

Some repositories must serve documents to innocent, inexperienced, and dull-witted persons. While they mean no harm, their lack of research ability and appreciation for manuscripts can be dangerous. Then there are the crackpots, zealots, and perverts, who may be grouped together because their harm to documents is of a similar pattern. With plausibility they establish a need to consult manuscripts. Then, all the while sustained by a sense of justice, satisfaction, or righteous indignation, they craftily proceed to remove and secrete for themselves documents that support their cause, mission, or conviction or that delight their disordered minds; or they proceed to damage or destroy that which offends them. Such people, however, are more often caught in the act of stealing or damaging material than another more cunning enemy of archives — the thief who comes with criminal intent. The defenses against both are the same: close supervision over readers, early detection of losses or mutilations, and intelligent detective work; but for the latter enemy there is required cooperation from dealers and collectors. The thief may also be one and the same with yet another type of archival enemy — the forger; and he, with book thieves, represents “the aristocracy of the literary underworld,” the brainiest of all criminal types, who combines adroit craftsmanship with astute erudition.<sup>7</sup>

Thieves have operated, not always with immunity, against some of the most carefully guarded repositories in the world. From these they have stolen rare manuscripts no matter how exactly the documents were foliated or how conscientiously and immediately collated they were both before and after use. Thieves have presented themselves equipped with aliases and false credentials and with accessories and accomplices. What are our defenses against them? An incidental, even fortuitous one, is that our rarest treasures are so thoroughly known and identified that no thief could sell them. They would be worth something to him only if he sold them for what they actually are and as such they are too easily recognized to be marketable. There was an instance, apparently, when a valuable manuscript was boldly carried off for ransom. In 1932, Sir Walter Scott’s manuscript of “Guy Mannering” was lent to Co-

<sup>7</sup> John Cobler, “Trailing the Book Crooks,” in *Saturday Evening Post*, 215:101 (Mar. 13, 1943).

lumbia University for exhibit by its owner, J. P. Morgan. There were a few visitors in the room where it was displayed and two supervisors were in attendance when, in a moment, it was removed by forcing the lock of the glass case that held it. Before the mystery was solved, the owner recovered it, but by what means he never explained.<sup>8</sup> Exhibits attract thieves because cases often are easy to open and if they are indifferently guarded a thief can spirit away a valuable document without exposing his features to anyone's close scrutiny. Although the Walt Whitman commonplace book stolen in March of 1955 from an exhibit in the Detroit Public Library has been returned, we do not know what motivated the theft.

Pieces less well-known can be protected from thieves and reclaimed, if found, by having indelible indicia of ownership stamped upon them so that their removal would destroy the commercial value of the documents. Documents are further protected by doubts that a thief may entertain about the speed with which the losses will be discovered and about what information the repository has at hand or can assemble on the missing pieces. Can it describe its losses accurately? Can readers identify them as the property of the repository? Are there photocopies of them to prove their ownership?

Funds permitting, steps that might be taken by repositories to protect their holdings are:

1. Organizing and indexing collections to reduce the wear and tear on documents. Scholars then could call for only the items they need to examine.
2. Providing service photocopies of rare and fragile documents and those involved in controversies. A photocopy will serve as a perfect inventory, identification, and insurance that information will be protected if the original manuscript is lost.
3. Warning readers of the penalties for theft or damage to public property; supervising all use of archives by investigators, enforcing the observance of reasonable rules for safeguarding them, and developing procedures for handling persons apprehended in breaking these rules.
4. Admitting losses — even to the embarrassment of the repository with the public, prospective donors, or board members or other governing bodies — taking steps to recover documents by notifying police authorities and dealers if robbery is suspected. An illustration of this is the 1954 publication of a descriptive brochure of pieces missing from the Walt Whitman collection at the Library of Congress.<sup>9</sup>
5. Examining carefully material of questionable provenance and exercising care in labeling forgeries.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Library of Congress, *Ten Notebooks and a Cardboard Butterfly Missing From the Walt Whitman Papers* (Washington, 1954).



6. Prosecuting thieves, thus describing them and their methods for the benefit of other repositories.

7. Maintaining records of all investigators and all materials served to each of them.

Some repositories have been reluctant to take obvious steps to supervise readers, to ask them to submit their parcels for examination before departing, and to correct them (particularly if they are well-known persons) in their mishandling of documents. Declining to subject distinguished investigators to possible discomfiture, they are forced to excuse others. It has long been the practice at the Library of Congress to supervise all searchers in its Manuscripts Division reading room and to inspect all cases and parcels taken by anyone from the Library buildings. A staff member also has interviewed each reader before permitting him to use manuscripts and has asked him to read and sign an agreement to abide by the rules and regulations governing their use. In the fall of 1953, a person using an alias and a fictitious identification credential came with a plausible request to consult materials and this was granted. A dealer, who had purchased a stolen item from him, began to investigate it only to learn that it was credited to the Library's collection. When this dealer got in touch with us we learned for the first time of our loss of a dozen documents from the Andrew Ellicott papers. All of these were recovered by the FBI, but thus far the thief has escaped detection.

Although the Division had earlier requested the assignment of a guard, one was not provided until after this unfortunate episode. Now an armed guard from the Library's guard force is stationed on a raised dais in our reading room whenever it is open to the public. We have revised our rules to include his inspection of materials taken from the room. He initials each reader's card in the presence of the reader. Except for keeping a daily record of the time present and the designated table space occupied by each investigator, this guard is under instructions to devote his entire attention to supervising readers, the entrance door to the Division, and the door to the stacks, where no one but staff members may go without an escort. He has definite instructions as to what to do when he observes an infraction of our rules.

We have felt no need to apologize for the guard or for our rules; most of our previous investigators have accepted both in good grace (though with some chiding); and new readers seem to consider them natural. Our rules are based upon the 7 rules recommended in the report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Manuscripts



set up in 1948 by the American Historical Association and approved by the Association of Research Libraries in 1951.<sup>10</sup> All but one of these rules is included in 5 of our 12 rules. We included no prohibition on readers' smoking because no smoking is permitted in the part of the building where manuscripts are served, but we adopted the following rules from the committee's recommendations:

1. Use no ink except in fountain pens and exercise caution in the use of fountain pens.
2. Refrain from marking manuscripts and writing notes on top of manuscripts.
3. Preserve the existing order of manuscripts in their volumes or containers and report to reading room attendant manuscripts apparently misplaced.
4. Exercise care in preventing damage to manuscripts and extreme care in handling fragile material.
5. Obtain, before publication of, or from, manuscripts in the Library of Congress knowledge of the libel law and of literary property rights at common law.

The seven rules that we ourselves devised are:

1. Sign the register daily.
2. Handle manuscripts only at the assigned table space.
3. Open only one volume or container of manuscripts at a time except with special permission.
4. Submit to the guard for inspection any briefcase, typewriter case, or any other parcel, book, or notebook before taking it from the room.
5. Bring into the room only the minimum number of such items mentioned in 4 above as are necessary for the effective use of manuscripts.
6. Return all manuscripts to the issue desk before leaving the room for the day or for an extended period, and request the reservation of material to be used again soon. (Note: A reader who plans to leave the room and return within an hour may, under certain conditions, leave manuscripts at his table).
7. Comply scrupulously with conditions on access to restricted materials.

Of course these rules will not preclude damage, disarrangement, and losses, but they will minimize their likelihood. Every reader is seen for identification purposes by at least three members of the Library staff: the person who interviews him and checks his reader's card to determine his identity and his qualifications and need for consulting original sources, the guard, and the issue desk assistant. Each reader signs his name on at least three permanent

<sup>10</sup> "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Manuscripts Set Up by the American Historical Association in December 1948," in *American Archivist*, 14: 229-240 (July 1951); "Report of the Committee on the Use of Manuscripts by Visiting Scholars Set Up by the Association of Research Libraries," in *College and Research Libraries*, 13: 58-60 (Jan. 1952).

records: the reader's card, the register, and the call slip for materials. On the reader's card and the register, he is required to give us considerable information about himself.

If investigators have resented our guard, though only two have actively so expressed themselves, donors have not. His presence has assured them that a gift to us will be protected. It has given us a greater feeling of security than we enjoyed at the time of our last known theft.

Maybe at this point you, like me, will feel that we have wallowed long enough in the seamy side of archival matters. My having talked so long of their foes may make you wonder if there are left any friends of archives. Of course there are, but I was asked to talk only about the enemies. Doing so has not distorted my outlook on life. I know, and I am glad to reassure any who need reassurance, that there are more friends than enemies and that most of the latter are speedily converted when they come to realize the ill effect of their malpractices. It is a propitious sign that the number of those employed in repositories as staff members and as investigators is increasing. These we can reach and these we can educate. There is hope for the future.

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#### COMMENTS BY LUCILE KANE

No curator of manuscripts could listen to the words of Mr. Land without a sharpened realization of the dangers that hover whenever a collection is opened to public use. When we place manuscripts before a scholar, who through them will add new dimensions to the understanding we all seek in history, we are fulfilling one of the highest obligations of our profession. The documents are for the moment entrusted to him and, fortunately for us, most scholars respond generously to the privilege. The experienced scholar knows that behind the simple statement, "Here are the manuscripts you requested," is a series of circumstances — the confidence of the family which gave them, the skill of those who processed them, and the support of those who pay the bills for maintaining the collections.

In a measure it is a sad subject that we discuss today, for its very presence on the program is public admission that not all scholars feel a responsibility for the materials they are privileged to use, that some of them sin through ignorance, and that some of these have no desire to have their ignorance dispelled — and that not all people who come to us are scholars. In considering his duties to

the scholar and to the materials, there can be no doubt in deciding to which the curator owes the greater responsibility. It is, of course, to the materials entrusted to his care.

We are all in harmony, I believe, about the principles of security controls. Thus I turn quickly from theory to the practices of the Minnesota Historical Society. At the society, the major deterrents to less than perfect security are budgetary limitations that deny us the luxury of a guard and a physical arrangement of the department that would put the burden of reading-room supervision on one person. Many of our practices, however, do work for security. Here they are in brief.

Every person who uses our manuscripts signs a register daily, a record that includes his name, his home address, and the titles of the papers he plans to consult. In the list of rules that is handed him, he reads that he may not use ink, that he may not take a brief case or other container into the reading room, and that he must return manuscripts to the reading-room attendant when he is through with them. Students new to us are asked if they have used manuscripts before. If this is their first research experience, we caution them about removing documents from folders, marking passages for copying, and using paper clips to hold pages back. When the searcher opens the file box, he sees before him a printed warning of fine and imprisonment, under Minnesota law, for mistreating documents.

On rare occasions a scholar who plans to work in the collection for a year or so is granted the privilege of using one of the studies next to the reading room, out of the immediate view of the reading-room attendant. Such a scholar must be recommended to us in such terms that doubt is reduced to a minimum. One can never be completely easy, however, in granting this privilege. Recently I discussed this subject with a well-known archivist, whose institution grants stack and after-hours privileges to people who come armed with recommendations. He was disturbed about the ease with which historians have written letters to him, recommending that the bearer, often a student on his first research expedition, be granted the full freedom that would be accorded the most trusted scholar. He felt strongly enough about the lack of discrimination evident in such letters to speak plainly on the matter before an historical association. In this, as in many other areas, there must be the closest cooperation between the historical and archival professions.

After manuscripts are returned to the reading-room attendant, we try to refile them the same day. If little time is allowed to elapse

between the time of return and the filing, losses can be more easily detected and the possibility of filing error is reduced. Since we have an inventory of all the volumes in each group of manuscripts, a missing volume can be detected immediately. Not so the loose, uncalendared material in the file boxes. Our only safeguard in preventing the loss of these loose papers is the surveillance by the reading-room attendant.

A few months ago, I was reminded that certain kinds of manuscripts try the will power even of honest men. An avid private collector of early Minnesota autographs came to look at our Henry Hastings Sibley manuscripts. When I opened the folder displaying letters of Minnesota fur traders — signatures that were missing in his own collection — his eyes took on an acquisitive glitter. He picked up a letter with a show of reverence and said, "Please don't turn your back on me."

Because we do have many manuscripts that are particular temptations, we have formed a "reserve collection." In this group are papers of numerous literary and political figures, papers of Washington, Lincoln, Franklin, and others. Some of these items came to us as individual pieces; others are taken from our larger collections. When a letter is removed from a collection, a cross-reference sheet bearing its number in the reserve collection is put in its place. A calendar card is made for each item in the reserve collection. All reserve materials are stored in a special vault. Staff members and searchers alike treat with considerable respect manuscripts precious enough to be promoted to the reserve class.

We long ago abandoned the practice of allowing a stack attendant to help us either in bringing manuscripts from the stack area or in refiling them. The physical labor for the professional staff is arduous, particularly in handling business records. But we have found it less strenuous in the long run than repairing bindings or spending days of hunting for a volume lost in a complex filing system by a stack attendant who thought that at last he had mastered all those catalog numbers.

One of our most annoying and disturbing problems is that for years we have not had a complete reinventory of the collection. Periodically we have inventoried the smaller classifications, correcting misfiling, recording missing items, and noting physical condition. In January of 1956 we shall at last begin the overall inventory. When it is completed, we shall know just how good the society's security controls have been in the past decades. The inventory will reveal, too, documents that need restoration and those

that must be removed from general use until they can be repaired. We have already had microfilm, photostatic, and typewritten copies made of some collections that are too fragile to be used by the general public.

I like the optimistic note on which Mr. Land ends his paper. I, too, want to end on such a note. When we have executed our responsibilities to manuscripts to the best of our ability and to the limits of our physical resources, we need, I believe, to unknit our brows and to think often and long about the privileges of working with manuscripts. Last summer, after supervising the packing of some hundred cartons of historical materials in an old house in western Minnesota, I sat on the steps, warm, slightly soiled, and tired, but elated, waiting for the truck that would carry the boxes to St. Paul.

When the truck driver arrived, he looked at me curiously and asked, "You work for the State?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Well," he said, "I suppose that jobs are hard to get."

I agreed with him, but personally I add another meaning to his comment. Jobs such as ours, jobs that — in spite of worries about mutilated or pilfered manuscripts — offer a maximum of continuing pleasure, are indeed hard to get.

#### COMMENTS BY RICHARD DUNSTAN HIGGINS

The problem of providing defenses against human foes has been quite thoroughly covered by Mr. Land's paper and all that remains, it would appear, is the recitation of specific cases involving theft and damage or threat of damage by human beings.

Questions have been directed to me from time to time — with such frequency that I am no longer embarrassed — concerning the theft of certain documents and papers from their vaults in the Archives of Massachusetts. Unhappily, I am not able to answer such questions. The thefts took place some time ago, before my appointment as chief of the Archives Division. Furthermore, the vast collection of material in the Archives of the Commonwealth has never been cataloged; and it is thus impossible to determine the extent of our losses.

With respect to the problem of having the archives cataloged, the present secretary of state, Edward J. Cronin, whose responsibility includes the Archives Division, has made repeated appeals to the legislature to provide at least five persons to be assigned to

such work. Secretary Cronin, who has always demonstrated an intense interest in our particular problems, has made herculean efforts to improve the situation.

I can say this, that some documents and papers are still missing and that others turn up at irregular intervals. I must also inform you that the person responsible for the recent thefts from the Library of Congress, mentioned by Mr. Land, caused much consternation in our institution.

Two other episodes come readily to my mind, involving two different problems faced by archivists and librarians in whose custody important records are kept.

Last year, for the first time in history, we removed the constitution of the Commonwealth from its vault in the Archives and placed it on public display in a State House hall near the Hall of Flags. This was done at the urging of the Massachusetts Law Association, which sponsored Massachusetts Heritage Month, a laudable program that did much to awaken interest in our constitutional processes among our school children, lawyers, and many other citizens. In Massachusetts, I might add, we are inordinately proud of our constitution. It is the oldest in the Nation, older than the Federal Constitution. It was placed under glass and vigilantly guarded by a Capitol police officer.

I was later informed that on one occasion during its exhibition an individual with a peculiar sense of humor approached the display case and attempted to lift the glass that covered the preamble and declaration of rights.

Said the police officer, "What are you trying to do?"

The man replied, "I just want to sign the Constitution!"

Whereupon the police officer retorted, "Well, my friend, I am afraid that your are 174 years too late!"

This true story illustrates, I think, the extreme care that must be exercised whenever the original of a priceless document has been put on public display.

The second incident, entirely devoid of humor, involved a number of important personages and a piece of paper that under ordinary circumstances would have been of no consequence. It was an "expense return," temporarily in our care until the date of its destruction under the law. This paper was removed by a person who signed our register with a false name and an illegible address. The person in question had asked for and received a number of such political expense returns made by several parties and candidates in a State election 5 years ago. On his departure from the room, he sur-

reptitiously removed one of the papers. This proved to be the expense return of one of three individuals under investigation by the Supreme Judicial Court — a controversy long drawn out that evoked massive newspaper publicity.

Needless to say, the paper did not reappear, nor was the culprit responsible for its theft ever discovered. The unfortunate disappearance of this paper was another incident in a case that terminated calamitously for all concerned.

We have since been pledged to even greater vigilance with respect to our signature roster. Persons visiting our office and seeking to examine material are now required to provide legitimate identification, unless they are known to us.

As has been so eloquently illustrated by Mr. Land, there are really only two different types of human foes — those we know, such as persons who work for or near us, and total strangers. We archivists have had unfortunate experiences with both types of human foes and it is understandable that the more fatal foe is the Enemy Unknown. Taking into consideration, however, the inadequate physical facilities with which many of us have to cope and the lack of proper protective devices in most areas, I am immodest enough to think that on the whole we do a rather good job of protecting what is in our care.