

THE TRAINING OF ARCHIVISTS IN THE UNITED STATES¹

THE Committee on the Training of Archivists originally owes its existence to the writer's appointment as chairman in 1936 with instructions to appoint a committee and to bring in a report with recommendations for the training of archivists. The writer requested Professor Herbert E. Bolton, Dr. R. D. W. Connor, and Professor Theodore C. Pease to serve with him. All three gentlemen accepted. The chairman later requested Professor Ralph H. Lutz, director of the Hoover War Library, to serve on the committee and that gentleman accepted the responsibility.

After some preliminary deliberation, conducted by correspondence, the committee accepted the proposal of Dr. Connor that in constructing a plan for the training of archivists in the United States we should pay particular attention to the practice of foreign, particularly European, countries, whose extensive archival history affords a larger volume of experience than is available in North America. We have not had the time to pursue a thorough investigation into the general history of the training of archivists. Indeed a monograph on this subject is a very appropriate task for an American historian today. Nevertheless, the perusal of some special literature and the travels and observations of the different members of the committee afford the following general statement.

Early in the nineteenth century it was the custom to designate as chief of archives some literary or historical personage generally considered as an ornament to the nation, who could draw from this post sustenance for his own support and leisure for the pursuit of literary or historical activities. This custom still prevails in certain countries, notably Spain and those of Latin America like Brazil, Peru, and Chile. Archival subordinates were generally selected from persons trained in jurisprudence rather than in history. Advance toward formal special training for archivists was registered during the latter half of the nineteenth century by a tendency to select archivists more and more from the ranks of historians, and more and more from historians who had had a formal university training in historical criticism and paleography. In France the *Ecole des Chartres* became the predomi-

¹ In its original form this was a committee report presented by Mr. Bemis at the second annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Springfield, Illinois, October 24, 1938.

nating influence (if we exclude always mention of political favoritism, as we do in these paragraphs).

In England, archival appointments appear to have been made from plausible university graduates, of highest standing, who had passed the general examinations for the civil service; upon appointment they were thrown into an apprenticeship of copying documents, preparing inventories, indexes and calendars, and assisting in the general processes of publication. The classical basis of the English civil service together with this type of apprenticeship, divorced as it is from any intensive preliminary training, does not appear to have borne ill results, as can be testified by any American scholar who has used the admirably organized and serviced Record Office or the manuscript rooms of the British Museum.² In Austria it was the instruction afforded by the Institute for Historical Research which, in the second half of the century, began to supplant legal training of the universities in education for archivists. In 1895 the archival authorities resolved in favor of making all archival appointments from graduates of the Institute for Historical Research, which is a department of the University of Vienna; in 1927, an ordinance of the Austrian government declared it obligatory for all Austrian state archives to make appointments only from candidates who had been trained in the Institute for Historical Research and who had successfully passed examinations. In recent years the curriculum of the institute has included a special course of lectures on public documents as well as on diplomatics, paleography, and the conventional historical courses,³ and *Archiv- und Bibliothekskunde*.

In Germany during the latter half of the nineteenth century, historians began to supersede jurists as exemplified by the appointment of Heinrich von Sybel by Prince Bismarck in 1875, as director of the Staatsarchiv and the beginning of the "Publikationen aus den preussischen Staatsarchiven." This was the beginning of the tendency to appoint historians as archivists with their staffs drawn from doctors

² For non-governmental and local archives custodians the British School of Librarianship and the Library Association give examinations under the title of "Paleography and Archives," covering the history, making, preservation, selection, and use of archives. Many of the questions employed, and material for the student preparing for the examinations, are published in H. G. T. Christopher, *Paleography and Archives* (London, 1938).

³ For the history of the training of archivists in Austria, see Prof. Ludwig Bittner, "Die geschichtliche Entwicklung des archivalischen Besitzstandes und der Einrichtungen des Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchivs," in *Inventare österreichischer staatlicher Archive, V. Inventare des wiener Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchivs* (Vienna, 1936), IV, part 4. Verlag Adolf Holzhausens Nachfolger, Wien.

of philosophy trained in the historical seminars of the German universities. In 1917 a decree of the Prussian ministry required for admission into professional archival service in the state archives the following:

1. passing the state examinations in philology;
2. a year's course of special training in the Prussian state archives, after which the candidate was usually obliged to undergo a year's apprenticeship in some "provincial" archive;
3. a reorientation in the set-ups for examination, to which university graduates were admitted;
4. extension of written examinations to analysis of medieval sources in Latin and German and of German and French documents, as well as an oral examination to demonstrate familiarity with archival practice, jurisprudence, and historical methodology.

From this rigorous requirement it was but a step to the organization in 1930 of a special Institute for Archival Science and Historical Training in the Prussian state archives in Berlin-Dahlem (*Das Institut für Archivwissenschaft und geschichtswissenschaftliche Fortbildung am geheimen Staatsarchiv*). This institute has the distinction of being the most serious and rigorous school of higher learning in the world for the special preparation of archivists. Requirements for matriculation are: intention to pursue an archival career, sound and personable health as attested by a state physician, and a degree of Doctor of Philosophy in history from some German university. Successful completion of the one and a half years' course is not a guarantee of appointment, although it is a prerequisite for appointment.

The curriculum assumes a general training in history, as attested by the Ph. D. degree, and an acceptable thesis; a training which must have included historical research and methodology, paleography, historical geography, legal history and *Germanistik*. Instruction in this school tends to be of a technical nature: further intensive work in paleography, training in use of historical sources of the Middle Ages, particularly dealing with the Empire and the Papacy, and practice in the critical examination of manuscripts, establishment of their authenticity, significance of their content, etc.; chronology; genealogy; heraldics. The candidate is then initiated into some experience in the preparation of manuscripts for editing and publication. His final examinations include not only these subjects but jurisprudence, economic and social history, German fine arts and the Polish language. The organization and curriculum of this institute are most interesting

for those of us who plan the organization of curricula for the training of American archivists, but, of course, this particular technical background, while essential to German archivists, is not indispensable for American archivists. The rigor of the qualifications and the technical excellence of the curriculum, including, as it does, the element of apprenticeship, in association with professional archivists, is a model toward which our instruction might strive as an ultimate goal.⁴

In Spain the state archives have been staffed by government appointments, made in a hit-and-miss manner from likely university graduates with a background of legal or historical studies. A few of these appointees have been very fortunate choices, developing into distinguished and scholarly archivists. The same may be said of Italy, which has produced that eminent leader of archival "science," Signor Casanova; and of the Latin-American countries. In the Argentine today the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas is making its influence felt for the best in archival appointments, changing the emphasis from a legal background to historical training after the fashion of European practice.

The reader will note the relatively small stress placed by the best foreign practice on so-called library science, and the overwhelming insistence on historical erudition, scholarship, constitutional and legal history, all this emphasizing the particular country concerned, and linguistic accomplishment in the relevant documentary fields. It is the historical scholar, equipped now with technical archival training, who dominates the staffs of the best European archives. We think it should be so here, with the emphasis on American history and political science. A course in "library science" would be useful, particularly for purposes of cataloguing and for the arrangement of libraries auxiliary to archival practice. But there is a distinct danger in turning over archives to librarians who are not at the same time erudite and critical historical scholars. They tend to put the emphasis upon cataloguing and administration, on mechanics rather than archival history and the sacred *principe de provenance*, to which they are usually oblivious. We have recently witnessed some distressing examples of the decimal system turned loose in government archives. Originally the archives of the Mexican Ministry for Foreign Affairs

⁴For the history of the training of archivists in Germany, see the article by Albert Brackmann, director of the Prussian state archives in Berlin-Dahlem, "Das Institut für Archivwissenschaft und geschichtswissenschaftliche Fortbildung am geheimen Staatsarchiv in Berlin-Dahlem" in *Archivalische Zeitschrift*, 1929-1931, Dritte Folge, Siebenter Band der Ganzen Reihe 40. Band, pp. 1-16. (Munich, Theodor Ackermann, 1931).

were built up in the conventional order, by countries and ministries from which the documents issued. It is today the custom in some foreign offices, as in the United States Department of State since 1906, to classify the documents by subjects according to a decimal system of cataloguing. Legations abroad, and all officials in the ministry, are instructed in this new filing system which has its superior advantages for administrative purposes, although it presents difficulties for the historian. The archivist, however, has only to adapt himself to this system of filing when it begins, when the documents begin to flow in by the new order. But in Mexico a very efficient and zealous archivist, trained in modern library methods, has reorganized the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs according to the decimal system applied *ex post facto*, completely scrambling up the archives which hitherto had been conserved and used according to the old order. It is as if one took a printed book and rearranged the paragraphs and pages in alphabetical and sub-numeral order according to the items of the index! Impressed by the assiduity of this young man, the Mexican government has given him and his disciples carte blanche with the decimal system into one departmental archive after another, with results paralyzing alike for the historian or the administrator. This *ex post facto* application of the decimal system is likely to wreak further havoc at the hands of librarian-archivists. In archival science the librarian can play a useful role, more useful than is admitted in European practice, but it should always be a subordinate role.

After review of foreign practices, and consideration of the peculiar needs of American archives, the following conclusions seem warranted.

At the outset it might be stated that in the training of archivists it is possible to distinguish between two groups: (1) the first, or more exalted group consists of persons seeking education and training for the position of responsible archival direction in major municipal, state, and national archives. These might be designated as archivists of the first class. Such persons should be recruited from the level of training required for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in American history, according to a preparation based on a curriculum which will be set forth briefly below. (2) The second group will consist of archivists of small municipal divisions, county, state and special commissions, authorities, and establishments of minor political significance, as well as archivists for business firms, corporations, banks, and other private

enterprises. It is conceived that this class of archivists would require a less formidable and scholarly preparation, one equal to that of the Master's degree in the social sciences, with a support in library technique. In the remarks below, each of these groups is separately considered.

Group 1. Archivists of the first class. To begin with, candidates for such training should have received a college education, specializing in the social sciences, including a reliable knowledge of the American political system and its historical development, together with the history of the United States and a broad knowledge of modern history and international relations. A reading knowledge of French and German acquired in undergraduate days is of good value for graduate work where these languages are indispensable for the first class archivists. As for graduate instruction to include a university training for archivists, it is suggested that a special instruction for those who intend to enter into archival work might be easily grafted on to graduate instruction in American history in any first class American university. The existing instruction in American history, leading to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, offers fundamental elements for a sound preparation for archival careers, but the student intending to go into professional archival work should be directed into a thesis which would cause him to handle manuscript material of some considerable range and out of official archives, thus affording him training in such problems of diplomatics and paleography as can be associated with American history. In pointing up a course of graduate study in history designed to meet the needs of archivists, a course, or courses, should be introduced on the history of archives, and on archival practice, past and present; and the student should be made acquainted with the special literature dealing with archival work, particularly abroad, and notably in Germany, France, Holland, and England. It is believed that one comprehensive course could include all these subjects and that such a course might be indicated as a substitution for another course which the graduate student might otherwise have taken. A course containing the elements of library practice, including classification and cataloguing, is also recommended. Teachers should insist further upon an absolutely uncompromising stand for competent knowledge of French and German as indispensably necessary for the matriculation of any student who intends to go into archival work. Spanish also would be desirable. These languages, par-

ticularly French and German, are indispensable for adequate study of archival practice abroad. Associating the training of archivists with work for the doctorate in American history will afford to the student some latitude of choice for a later career: after he receives the degree, if he does not prefer to go into archival work or does not find the proper opportunity to do so immediately, he would still have an avenue of teaching American history open to him, and vice versa.

The writer remains much impressed by the German example of apprenticeship as a part of the course for the training of archivists and believes it worthwhile for those universities embarking on such a curriculum to consider the possibilities of a voluntary apprenticeship with the National Archives at Washington, or with appropriate state archives.

Group 2. Archivists of the second class. As a graduate training for the second group of archivists mentioned above, it is believed that a two years' course of training on the level of the Master's degree should be erected on an A.B. degree in the social sciences—the same pediment for graduate work for governmental archivists mentioned in class one. The courses taken in graduate work should include special seminar instruction which will evaluate and appraise documentary materials and courses in American local government (in particular state and local documents), economics and sociology, with special attention directed to the records and particularly public records which exemplify these subjects. Before or during the two years of graduate work in history or political science there should be a selected course from the school of library instruction, particularly in the federal and state documents, bibliography, classification and cataloguing, supplemented by practice work designed to fit all the matters together with special reference to archive practice. It should be possible for competent students to graduate, if they desire, from this Master of Arts work into the Ph.D. work for archivists of the first class above described.

The quantity and quality of Ph.D. instruction in American history makes it possible easily to insist upon the Ph.D. degree for the profession of archivists of the first class, but that it might be too rigorous an imposition on young persons who wish to support themselves in such work to insist that they be given Ph.D. training for archivists of the second class; these could content themselves with the requirements for archivists of the second class.

For the great majority of the average candidates for the archival profession the graduate training above suggested will be of the greatest value, indeed indispensable; but the writer does not wish to dismiss the possibility of promising young men and women rising by hard work and self-discipline and study from the very lowest ranks of archival employment to the top, even without formal university training. After all, education is self-education. Universities and teachers are helps and short cuts to success in determined efforts for self-education and personal advancement.

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