

Archivists and Records Managers— A Partnership

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THE FIELD of archives and records management encompasses a relatively wide area of agreement and disagreement. When we agree, we do so quietly; but we are loud in our disagreements. There are those who believe that the records profession is big enough to provide ample room for archivists, records managers, manuscript custodians, and those with allied interests. There are others who believe that the gulf between archivists and records managers is so wide that it cannot be bridged readily.

If this paper emphasizes the view of the records manager, it is because the archivist's position has been stated often and ably, for instance by Theodore Schellenberg in *Modern Archives*. My discussion today relates largely to State archival and records management programs. Others in this session may discuss the subject as it pertains to State government, to Federal Government, or to business.

If there is competition between archivists and records managers, I believe it is one between two branches of a common profession. If this emphasis on differences is pursued with vigor, the entire profession will be the loser; and the entire profession will bear responsibility for the loss. The administration of records, reasonably defined (as in the approach of the National Archives and Records Service), is indivisible. Each part of it depends largely upon every other part. Take away one — records management — from its relationship to the other — archives administration — and you remove a vital link. Combine the two branches and you present a united front whose total impact toward professional betterment is many times greater than the sum of efforts separately pursued. Morris Radoff proposed three years ago that "we strike out boldly":

Let us recognize as truth that a record being made is the same record which a few years later may find its way into our sanctum sanctorum . . . If we delay we shall be first divided and then overcome by a proliferation of specialties.¹

* Paper read, Aug. 18, 1958, at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Salt Lake City. The author previously had been on the staff of the Illinois State Archives. He is now with the Division of Public Records, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg.

¹ "What Should Bind Us Together," in *American Archivist*, 19:7 (Jan. 1956).

I suggest that the misunderstanding between archivists and records managers is to some extent the result of the "either/or" fallacy to which we Americans seem addicted. In our profession one must be either an archivist *or* a records manager. (Manuscript custodians, historians, and librarians with responsibility for archives can happily remain aloof from this contention.) Dr. Radoff at our Nashville meeting asked this very pertinent question, "Why could not the same man be both archivist and records manager?"

Records management had its origin in archives, but the increased volume of records brought problems too large for the lone efforts of the archivist. To meet the need a new group of specialists arose. The origin of records management was traced by Wayne Grover in his address to the Society in 1954:

The occasional advice of archivists . . . however helpful, was not enough. The administrators needed the continuous, intelligent, and practical day-to-day assistance of specialists on their own staffs.

Thus arose the records administrators and records managers — specialists not only in the disposition of records . . . but in the numerous details of systems and procedures that go into the paperwork of any large organization. Their common link with the archivist is their interest in improving the quality and decreasing the quantity of an organization's records . . . They contribute to and improve the administrative methods and actions out of which archives are formed.²

A heightened professional morale must be developed in which all segments of our group share. We as human beings are prone to look backward to the great days of the "founding fathers." Let us rather anticipate challenges which, if accepted and met with effort, may bring our profession into even greater repute. There are major efforts in which we could exert ourselves as one body — efforts which must depend, however, upon the sum of individual endeavors. Foremost among these is a genuine, objective survey of the effectiveness of State records agencies — to discover just how good or how poor our archival and records management programs are. Mary Bryan and all those records people who provided information for her surveys of archival institutions have laid the groundwork for such a project; there has been considerable discussion of its desirability. I believe we have arrived at the time for action, even though it would take two or three years to complete and even though it would cost money. Whether, for example, such a survey is accomplished by individual institutions on a do-it-yourself basis with subsequent *outside* professional evaluation, or whether it is done by a roving

² "Archives; Society and Profession," in *American Archivist*, 18:5 (Jan. 1955).

records-audit team on a regional basis, is of secondary importance. The primary need is for instituting such a project.

A second project that this Society well might encourage is closer liaison between the National Archives and the records establishments of non-Federal governmental agencies. The possibility that this interchange of ideas would benefit primarily other agencies would not, I think, prevent the National Archives from playing a major role. Such an effort could not be expected from the National Archives, however, unless State and other governmental agencies should invite it.

Two other projects might be mentioned as the kind that both archivists and records managers could support. First, I would endorse Wayne Grover's suggestion in his presidential address of 1954 — the establishment of a permanent, full-time secretariat for this Society. Secondly, positive efforts should be made toward obtaining representation from each State and Territory in the Society's activities. Do you not find it difficult to understand the lack of representation in our annual meetings by records people from certain States?

Some projects to which both archivists and records managers could give their support have been suggested. But we must face certain obstacles to effective cooperation of the two branches of our records profession. Let us consider those relating to communication, professionalization, governmental level of operation for the records agency, and the related subject of responsibility to other units of government.

Communication is a subject of such attention these days that it has become almost a conversational fad, and whole seminars have been devoted to it. It is nevertheless one of those subjects we ignore at our peril, and I fear our Society has done just that. We at a professional level have no small responsibility for promoting effective communication, first among ourselves and then with all those with whom we come in contact. This loss in intracommunicating has meant that too many records managers do not fully respect archivists and that too many archivists lack a respectful comprehension of, and consequently sympathy for, the efforts of their fellow records managers.

The Society of American Archivists could cut loose from its early attachment to the American Historical Association, but the Society will be irreparably damaged if it allows records managers to pull away from joint responsibility for records as a whole. The 1957 Detroit meeting of the American Records Management Association,

apparently very beneficial, I cite merely as one example of the splintering of our overall Society. If these tendencies continue they can only weaken what some of us believe should be a united front of archives/records management.

After solving the problem of internal communication within our group we then must somehow persuade the decision-makers in top management that, essentially, we should abandon the attitude that says: "This is the way we do it in *our* State, and we don't care how it is done in any other State." Such an attitude strikes at the very foundation of our professional Society. Changing it, I assure you, is no small task, because we must in effect learn a language largely unfamiliar to the members of our profession. We may have to learn much better the art of "political talk."

The archivist all too often, I fear, does not play his proper role in the affairs of his own government. One reason for this may be his inability to converse in the language of his fellow government officials. I am not suggesting that he lower his standards to fatuous talk about "delivering" votes on election day. If the archivist/records manager promotes real economy in government he can more effectively aid government on election day than in the purported manner of "small-time" patronage clerks "getting out the vote" once every two years. More seriously, though, he had better be able to explain these twin questions: What are archives? What does an archivist *do*? Especially should he be able, in simple language, to explain just what services he can render other officials. He needs, likewise, to publicize his activities for the general citizen.

I believe it not inappropriate to raise the question: How professional a group are we? As additional spheres of activity tend to lend themselves to the professional approach the society in which we live has become increasingly secularized, generally more democratic, and more professionalized. In such a society, does not our association have a compelling duty to become increasingly professional? This duty *is* compelling because of our place in the structure of government — again I am speaking from the standpoint of government — and because *we* have the responsibility for the preservation of its records.

Let us look, then, at one aspect of the professional approach, the archivist as scholar. Archivists on a number of occasions have expressed concern about the lack of scholarly output from their fellows. Such concern was forcefully stated by the president of our Society, Lester J. Cappon, at the Columbus meeting in 1957:

... both in historical origin and in the function he performs the archivist is not

a mere caretaker of the paper residue of the past but a person with scholarly proclivities and, at best, a scholar himself. And his field of scholarship, however narrowly or broadly defined, is history.³

I agree that the archivist should be a person with scholarly proclivities. I feel constrained, however, to point out that concern with scholarship is likely to have a divisive effect by pushing records managers farther apart from archivists. Concern with scholarship means to the records manager interest in "academic" pursuits. The more "pragmatic" public-administration or business-administration education generally expected of a records manager differs markedly from the background expected of the archivist. True, there are certain defects in the records manager's training, for instance, the lack of courses in methods of research to enable him better to evaluate and analyze the archival types of records that he necessarily encounters.

The archivist today needs to be primarily an administrator; if, in addition, he can be a practicing scholar, so much the better. As a rule, however, the archivist as an administrator and his associate archivists as supervisors just do not have the time to do research of their own and still carry on their regular duties. The archivist's function, as it concerns research, is a simple one — to furnish meaningful assistance to the scholar who may use his archives. Only the archivist knows his own material; only he can aid fully the researcher. Whether full assistance has invariably been furnished in response to reasonable requests is a question of more than academic concern. This unhappy situation results partly from the lack of alert, interested, imaginative staff members. The archivist himself may have fallen victim to a regular routine of providing only those services specifically requested.

We have shirked our responsibilities in that we have not opened our archival treasures fully to all those who have legitimate interest. To be sure, we have prepared detailed guides for those hardy souls with sufficient fortitude to journey to State capitals and university cities, a number of them remote. But all too often we have ignored the researcher who is unaware that we have archival materials in his field of interest. I believe it is our duty not only to *prepare* but to *publish* information on the holdings of our institutions. Anything less means shirking our full responsibility.

We should not expect to write histories ourselves or to pursue research in our own archives. As I see it, our responsibility is to arrange our records in such a manner that responsible researchers

³ "Tardy Scholars Among the Archivists," in *American Archivist*, 21:3 (Jan. 1958).

can, with reasonable effort, unearth new material. If we do so our history can be reevaluated in terms of new meanings and in the light shed by new disciplines. Today we all believe that history is much more than a chronicling of political and military events. History, meaningful and comprehended, is also the story of our culture, our economy, our social background. It recounts the total experience of individuals and groups that make up our experience as a nation. The political scientist, the economist, and the sociologist will also become our clients if we on our part show interest in their quest.

Having discussed the subjects of communication and professionalization let us turn now to a consideration of the place of the records agency in the hierarchy of government. The records manager agrees with Dr. Schellenberg that his own records management program must be placed at the high governmental level prescribed for archival administration, one which will "enable it to deal *effectively* with all other agencies of the government."⁴ But the records manager finds that all too often his archival colleague has been placed at an organizational level one or two steps too low to carry out an effective, meaningful program. His immediate reaction is that it is futile for the two to work together.

What Dr. Schellenberg has to say about the responsible archivist could well include the records manager with administrative responsibility:

The effectiveness of an archivist . . . depends upon his status in the government, and his status should depend upon the nature of the work he is to accomplish. . . . If the archival program is a new one, . . . [the problems he encounters] may relate to matters that are ordinarily handled only at top governmental levels, such as the placement of his institution in the governmental structure, its legal authority, and its policies that have governmentwide effect. Or they may relate to various phases of the execution of the new program, such as . . . the formulation of policies regarding access and preservation. . . . If most of his problems involve policies handled at the top governmental level, he should be placed high enough in the hierarchy to enable him to deal effectively with government officials on them. He should then be able to deal with other government departments on the basis of equality.⁵

What then should be the relationship of the archives/records management agency to its parent State government? What should be its responsibility to other State officials? I believe that it should be an integral part of State government. For this task it should form a major division of a department of administration or admin-

⁴ T. R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives; Principles and Techniques*, p. 121 (Chicago, 1956).

⁵ *Modern Archives*, p. 121.

istrative services or of an independent archival and/or historical commission; or it should function as an entirely separate department. The records unit should be a service agency for all other units of State government, just as the National Archives and Records Service serves the Federal Government. The archives/records management agency must have budget sufficient and personnel adequate to furnish whatever precise services it agrees initially to perform, but in a relatively short time it should provide all needed records services in the three main areas of creation, maintenance, and disposition. As a service agency, the only significant test is that it contribute to increased efficiency and economy in terms of the management of records.

The State Archivist's responsibility to other officers of his State government concerned Henry Howard Eddy some years ago:

Our direct service to the governments of our states is thus limited chiefly by the circumstances that we are too busy serving the public, or rather a certain specialized and insistent portion of the public, spending our energies where they contribute somewhat less than they could if invested in larger tasks of more sweeping significance. We have not made our state archives service agencies in the sense in which the National Archives is a service agency . . . If state archives and state archivists are to become and remain briskly vital, if they are to grow and continue significant in the scheme of state affairs, we must make a more definite contribution to the continuing efficiency of our state governments.⁶

If such an integrated archives/records management task is performed by the archival agency, then the records manager can willingly work alongside the archivist. Today's new responsibility that the archivist/records manager owes to other officials of government is nothing less than a fully integrated archives administration, records management, and paperwork control program.

⁶ "The Responsibility of the State Archivist to the Other Officers of His State Government," in *American Archivist*, 11:30 (Jan. 1948).

Such a Multiplication of Copies

Time and accident are committing daily havoc on the originals deposited in our public offices. The late war has done the work of centuries in this business. The lost cannot be recovered; but let us save what remains: not by vaults and locks which fence them from the public eye and use, in consigning them to the waste of time, but by such a multiplication of copies, as shall place them beyond the reach of accident.

— Thomas Jefferson to Ebenezer Hazard, Feb. 18, 1791; original in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.