

# The State Archivist—3-D Public Servant

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THE ARCHIVIST, I firmly believe, is a 3-D personality. He is a scholar, an expert technician skilled in the arts of his profession, and a public administrator. If he is genuinely alert in every situation to the interest and usefulness of the archives in his custody and aware of his opportunity to become a highly significant factor in the realm of scholarship and culture, he will hardly be able, in good faith, to restrict his activities to the one function of the preservation of archives. Any practicing archivist soon discovers that archival production, collection, preservation, and use are interrelated parts of an integral process and cannot and should not be too rigidly compartmentalized. He also soon learns that *he* is best qualified to deal with archival matters and that, in order to make his own work more meaningful and effective, he *must* concern himself with those matters if he would save archives from impairment by administrators, politicians, historians, and others.

I do not believe that the archivist should be, as is too often the case, a passive receiver of archives. He must be aggressive in his collection and preservation of materials. If he is content to receive only those materials that survive administrative neglect or come to him by administrative whim, he will soon discover that the archives are greatly impaired in quantity as well as in physical quality. Lest you think this is a heresy, compounded of current developments, let me recommend to you two excellent articles of far-reaching vision published in the early issues of our professional journal. I refer specifically to Albert Ray Newsome's article in the October 1939 issue of the *American Archivist*, "The Archivist

\* Paper read, Aug. 18, 1958, at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Salt Lake City, as part of a panel ("Aesop Revised—The Turtle and the Hare, or How to Make Haste Slowly in Records Management") over which Leon deValinger, Jr., presided. The papers read at that session by Robert H. Darling and LeRoy DePuy were published respectively in *American Archivist*, 22:211-215 (Apr. 1959) and 23:49-55 (Jan. 1960). Mrs. Renze is the Colorado State Archivist and Records Administrator. She is a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists and has served as the Society's secretary since 1956.

in American Scholarship," and Robert C. Binkley's article, "Strategic Objectives in Archival Policy," in the July 1939 issue. The foresight of these two scholars was uncanny, but the challenge they offered, I am sorry to say, has been most inadequately met by many of our State archival programs. By and large such programs are of fairly recent origin—records management programs even more recent. Programs of effective archives/records administration can be counted almost on one hand, and generally speaking they are less than ten years old.

We all understand most of these matters among ourselves and are able in confidence to put a finger on the deficiencies inherent in many of the administrative structures within which we operate. We would like to speak out concerning these deficiencies, but we are deterred by a sense of loyalty to the particular organizational pattern in which we may be set. We have drifted into a condition in which we operate as a somewhat negative force. It will take a great deal of courage and many heroic measures for us to break away from the time-honored way of letting programs develop casually when we know from the outset that they bode rough going ahead, or for us to face up to elements hostile to innovation, lacking in initiative, and fraught with timidity. For our profession the next few decades will hardly be the time for pleasant capitulation to the customary. I am inclined to think that our differences are greatly overemphasized by some who have not yet had the opportunity to examine the principles upon which the Society of American Archivists was founded. If to a greater or less degree we have been enacting the fable of the hare and the tortoise, today we have a unique opportunity to reappraise our objectives and to determine how we can renew our faith.

Many of our members attend our conferences and annual meetings for the general purpose of having unofficial conversations with workers in fields of mutual interest or to meet people they know or want to know. Others are looking for jobs or for promising young men and women to fill jobs. But so many hours have gone into developing such sessions as this in which we are now engaged that presumably the majority here today have come to contribute and to learn. Many who come to learn, however, will return to do things exactly as before. It is possible that our meetings move too fast to allow one to absorb new ideas and relate them to the everyday work in a particular archival or records administration activity. And, of course, there is always the question of how actively a participant wants to assume the mantle of leadership so as to achieve a dynamic, studied approach to common problems. Shall

we be so fearful of endangering our more or less comfortable career status that we shall be reluctant to mobilize opinion—politically and administratively—to bring about a climate for effective operation?

To all but a few, ideas are lost unless focalized after a meeting such as this. One of the most valuable benefits to be derived from any session is to learn where to get more information. "Who has succeeded in doing what I am trying to accomplish?" "To whom may I write to learn how it was done?" We should not miss any opportunity to learn about people—our professional colleagues as well as those who have only a general interest in our activities—and their knowledge, their expectations, their understanding. Approached openmindedly, a forum such as this should result in better archives administration in its broadest sense, better administrative-political relations, and better junior-senior, headquarters-field, line-staff, and program understanding. What a splendid opportunity to get acquainted with the members of our profession with whom we must work now and in the future! Throughout all phases of the development of a good State program the necessity and the challenge are to build and maintain an adequately trained work force to do the job required, to develop latent talent within the work force, and to achieve physical housing and operational budgets sufficient to carry out an effective archives/records administration program. Such training and leadership can be done best by those of our profession who are on the first line of fire.

Too many State programs are entered into by parent agencies anxious for the prestige or stimulation of support that resides inherently in the cultural values of an archival program. Such motivation is basically good and is helpful in getting the work started, but it often reveals no real comprehension of the magnitude of a good program. In the end it usually results in subordinating archives to other interests or in an unwillingness to provide adequate personnel and other resources. The archivist, if he is to produce results, must have top-management support. He must participate actively on the planning level of government; he must be adept in overcoming resistance to new methods in his conception of his own work and that of others; he must be diligent in creating a sense of responsibility; and frequently he must redirect the emphasis of programs. One of the most important jobs of the State archivist is to indoctrinate management in an understanding of, and active interest in, the importance of the orderly acquisition of vital records, and thus to bring about the will to do something about the nonessential accumulation that besets every unit of government and business today.

Running through all the branches of archives administration are common problems of organization, personnel, control, and finance. A new force has strengthened the conception of archives administration held by academicians whose primary interest lay in historical research. To contend otherwise would be provincial thinking and organizational myopia. It is curious, for instance, that many historians disregard administrative history as a valid field of research. In fact, except from the point of view of the lawyer, very few systematic analyses or histories of our administrative system have been written. Students of history have closed their eyes obstinately to this enormous terrain, studded with governmental problems of first magnitude and fascinating interest; and most contemporary historians even today dismiss the subject with a casual chapter. This area of research provides a great challenge to the archivist and the records administrator.

The way in which archival programs are administered is almost as important as the function itself. I maintain that though archives administration and records management may seem superficially to warrant quite different kinds of control, a common denominator prescribes basic guidelines along which both programs should be carried out. Indeed, the two areas are inseparable in effective programing. I am alarmed at the growing tendency to split into narrow fields of specialization. If we are to gain stature and develop sound professional rapport we are going to have to broaden our horizons. We must train men and women to become better archivists and records administrators. We must accept the fact that not all judgments can be made on a completely intellectual basis, or, on the other hand, on an entirely practical or administrative basis. In the final analysis, however, we must be willing to understand that it is necessary to develop ourselves as good judges of policies and enduring values; we should spend less time on the *processes* of decision-making and more on *what* is being decided and *why*.

Extensive reading about records management programs and many years of listening to discussions on the differences between the "records management man" and the "archivist" have brought me to the conclusion that *too often it is assumed that decision-making on documents of enduring value can be done on the operational level, that it can be reduced to an automatic formula, and that the results will be as reliable as the calculations of a computer*. Fortunately there are those among us who are either too practical or too skeptical to believe such hocus-pocus, but it must be admitted that some of our able colleagues, in their zeal for a specific area

of work, and equipped with just the right scientific "lingo," have been able to cast their spell. And this is because—let's face it—some of us have not been willing to meet the challenge on our own. Because this is so, archivists and records managers must resolve not to continue on divergent paths but rather to join together in fostering the objective of closer alignment, combining their knowledge and efforts to bring about an integration of interests. If we do not so join together, we shall impede administrative decision, slow the pace of execution, and make the whole archives/records administration process bureaucratic in the most objectionable sense.

It is important that as archivists/records administrators we learn to speak out for ourselves and to exhibit whatever traits of independence and leadership we may possess. It is well to put proper emphasis on originality and dissent in our initiative and enterprise and to avoid conformity for the sake of conforming. If we can do this we shall succeed, I think, in making some impact on public policy, offering a definite contribution from our combined professional strength. The best way to "make haste slowly" is to make it clear to all that every aspect of administration is related to and tested by the final touchstone of an enduring archival program, which can stand on its own merits as an integral component of government on Federal, State, and local levels.

### **Misconstruction**

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—H. W. Halleck, Commander in Chief, in a letter to Maj. Gen. W. T. Sherman, Aug. 29, 1863, as printed in *Memoirs of Gen. W. T. Sherman*, 1: 363 (New York, 1891).

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