

University Archives in the Boston Area

By ANNE MACDERMOT *

McGill University
Montreal, Canada

IT IS AXIOMATIC that no self-respecting educational institution should be without an archives. In practice, however, only two out of eight distinguished institutions in the Boston area can claim a *proper* archives. Two others have improper but very useful archives, and the remaining four possess neither and in varying degrees are concerned about their lack.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

In discussing university archives in this area there is no choice but to start with Harvard. Not only are the Harvard Archives the oldest and best-established in the country, but the university's proximity has a marked effect on the policies and practices of its neighbors.

Officers at both Boston University and Boston College, for example, are well aware of the difficulties facing an archivist who accepts the responsibility of archival papers without clearly defined official authority to deal with them. For this reason they look with heightened respect at the work and standards of Clifford K. Shipton, custodian of the Harvard Archives.¹ Mr. Shipton pioneered at Harvard from the time he took over the nucleus left by President Sparks until February 6, 1939, when a formal set of regulations adopted by the President and Fellows of Harvard defined the records of the university and the authority of the archivist.²

Today he handles material from about a hundred university agencies. (The Business School and Medical School maintain independent archives.) With his senior assistant, K. C. Elkins, and a staff of four others he accessions a steady flow of incoming cor-

* The author was formerly an assistant editor of the *McGill News*. Her interest in McGill archives led her to attend the summer Institute on Historical and Archival Management at Radcliffe College in 1959. During that summer she made the investigations on which this paper is based.

¹ Since this article was written, Mr. Shipton has become librarian of the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester, Mass.

² Ernst Posner, "The College and University Archives in the United States," reprinted by *Miscellanea Archivistica*, Città del Vaticano, 1952.

respondence files, minutes, student-activity records, personal papers of university officers, biographical material on alumni, prize papers, and dissertations. The Archives Department keeps a location file and assigns to its files call-numbers by which departments may request their records.

Mr. Elkins tallies 48,085 volumes and pamphlets in his care and 39,580 "other items." The space they occupy is one side wall of stacks in the Widener Library, where archives boxes are impressively lined up alongside the complete publications of the Harvard University Press. The two main categories are "HU" (Harvard University Collection) and "UA" (University archives proper). Much of the latter will shortly be moved to the basement, including the comptroller's office files. This office may be given its own key and free access to files that are in constant use.

The Harvard Archives has a reputation for conservatism and very close restrictions. Departmental records later than 1909, for example, are closed, and even the earlier ones may be consulted only by permission of the librarian or custodian. To consult records later than 1909 approval by the head of the department concerned is necessary. Again, regarding the personal and professional papers of staff members (which the Archives is particularly glad to receive), Mr. Shipton stresses the tight restrictions placed on confidential papers.³

Almost all problems likely to crop up in a university archives have been met and resolved by this smooth-running department, including early irregularities caused by individualistic professors or possessive secretaries. Conscious of its role in public relations, the department is on the one hand sensitive to the reputation of the university and its graduates and on the other aware of its duty as a service department to answer as many questions as possible. From all I could ascertain it does this cautiously but well. In giving advice to newly established university archives Mr. Shipton is known for his generosity. To give a specific example, he offered to visit the principal of McGill University, Montreal, should he so desire, to discuss the proposed archives there.

At Harvard a visitor is impressed by the efficiency and promptitude he encounters when entering the Archives reading room on the top floor of the Widener Library, with its wall-to-wall shelving of crimson-backed theses. The theses (always a headache to university librarians and at California the principal cause for establishing an archives) are dealt with in characteristically clear-cut

³ Clifford K. Shipton, "Harvard University Archives; Goal and Function," in *Harvard Library Bulletin* (Winter 1947).

fashion. Pasted on the back of each dissertation is the following sticker: "This volume is the property of the University but the Literary rights of the author must be respected. Passages must not be copied or closely paraphrased without the previous consent of the author. If the reader obtains any assistance from this volume he must give proper credit in his own work." At the bottom of the sticker are entered the name and address of the author and the date of the thesis.

Finally, Harvard's policy on biographical material is useful in a comparative report on archival procedure in universities. Mr. Shipton does not attempt the impossible by saving all clippings about famous Harvard men. Rather, he limits collection to news items on less well-known alumni, thus complementing the publicity job done by the newspapers. Regarding photographs, Harvard seems deliberately casual. Interested in maintaining only the formal record, the custodian leaves photographs and display items to other branches such as the manuscript collection. Nor are any risks taken by rash display of rare items such as the earliest minute books. These are kept locked in cabinets in Mr. Shipton's office.

RADCLIFFE COLLEGE

Following, naturally, in Harvard's footsteps is Radcliffe, the only other college in the Boston area with a true archives. The custodians admit that by 1955 they almost felt *compelled* to organize their archival material, after the Institute on Historical and Archival Management had met for several years on the Radcliffe campus.

Apart from the fact that this archives is smaller than Harvard's, there is another big difference between the two. Unlike Harvard, Radcliffe has no full-time archivist. The continuity so striking at Harvard, where Mr. Shipton runs a department he built up himself, is missing in the women's counterpart. Instead, the reference librarian fits archives work into her other duties. The records fill a medium-sized fireproof room in the basement of the library. The transferral schedule was devised by an archivist, Jackson S. Saunders, who spent the year 1955 at Radcliffe conferring with all departments concerned. He drew up a report, which was approved by a committee headed by the college treasurer, and designed a working schedule. Since Mr. Saunders' departure, the system has stood up fairly well, although Lucy M. Manzi, the reference librarian, says she would rather use a card system than the present register.

Cooperation with all college departments is reported to be very

satisfactory. The core of the archives is the section on students' records, arranged alphabetically by surnames and containing each student's record from admission to graduation. In addition there are records from the graduate school, the physical education center and the dormitories. The last include lunchroom records, with sample menus.

The demand for material is not heavy. Last year, for instance, Miss Manzi had 19 requests in November and 9 in March. She and the head librarian have the only keys to the vault. In an outer room is an interesting collection of books written by Radcliffe graduates. These fall outside the domain of archives but are welcomed by Radcliffe.

Each year Radcliffe holds an Alumnae Day and calls on the Archives for display material. At the new graduates' center, similar material has been used.

THE WOMEN'S ARCHIVES

This archives, at Radcliffe College, does not qualify from any point of view as a true archives—except in the use of Hollinger boxes! The Women's Archives breaks all rules of provenance, sanctity, and gift-soliciting. Even its name is hard to swallow, if you try to imagine a parallel "Men's Archives." Yet, despite its incongruities, it does contain valuable material that attracts the attention of both men and women from a surprisingly wide field.

Here, as at Harvard, there is a full-time archivist in charge. Dr. Barbara Solomon is director, and Mary Howard welcomes the visitor and takes endless pains to find or suggest material. The collection—for that is what it really is—centers around the women's rights collection and is housed in Brierly House. In adjacent Longfellow Hall are certain suffrage records, including detailed records of Massachusetts women involved in the movement and, after 1920, the stories of women holding Federal posts.

The Women's Archives, now 16 years old, has broadened its scope to include the papers and diaries of any American women of distinction. A recent acquisition, for example, was the correspondence of Harriet Beecher Stowe, presented by Mr. and Mrs. Lyman Beecher Stowe. When a large file arrives, Miss Howard is torn between getting it briefly indexed, boxed, and on the shelf, and spending more time on completing a detailed analysis of the contents. She and her assistant receive a good many requests from high-school students, as well as undergraduates and graduate students. She takes a justifiable pride in a useful cross-index that gives the loca-

tion of other papers (for instance, the papers of Emily Dickinson in the Houghton Library).

Between the Radcliffe Archives and the Women's Archives there is a sort of no man's land for the complete papers of any renowned Radcliffe graduate. The Radcliffe Archives claims her student file and the Women's Archives claims the records of her later activities. To date, however, there has been no serious conflict.

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

This university has an interesting working archives. Under the title "Tufts Collection," a very careful and auspicious start has been made on developing an archives for Tufts under the supervision of Russell Miller, associate professor of history.

Given a sabbatical year's leave of absence from teaching duties and the services of an expert half-time typist, Dr. Miller has made real progress in organizing and indexing the early papers and publications of Tufts. He has done this with the definite purpose of writing a history of the university, and his energy and optimism give his project a very happy air.

Dr. Miller has been both lucky and diplomatic, it seemed to me, in enlisting enthusiastic support and cooperation from every department on campus and apparently from the student body as well.

The library has lent experts to advise on an intricate master index and has made available part of a fire-resistant vault to house the most valuable records and memorabilia. The president, vice presidents, and provost have all helped by turning over their ledgers and early minutes. Students already have volunteered help in sorting routine material. It is planned that such official records as trustee and faculty minutes will be microfilmed. Tufts has a photocopy machine, a reader, and a cabinet to store the microfilm prints.

Founded in 1852, Tufts has been fortunate in a succession of secretaries who kept the university's minutes and records in excellent order. These records formed the base of Dr. Miller's project. Several sets of the early volumes of supporting documents to the faculty minutes had been badly damaged by dampness from inadequate storage, and each of these pages had to be detached and rebound. In these cases Dr. Miller had to renumber the references in the corresponding file of minutes.

Apart from the Tufts collection of early university papers, the institution has five other collections. One of these consists of an extensive collection of photographs presented by a faculty member; large albums fill several bookcases in the library basement and provide Tufts with a graphic record of its early years. This collection,

as well as the other four, badly needs organizing and indexing. Dr. Miller was interested in Radcliffe's success in employing an archivist to set up a system and then leaving it in the hands of the library.

Dr. Miller himself has only a secondary interest, of course, in the custody of the papers he is organizing; his main interest is in making them available for scholars who want to use the material. To this end he is taking great pains with a master index, which will have such complete cross-references that the files can be used by anyone. There is not much restricted material, and what there is will be filed separately. He is filing material in metal cabinets, alphabetically by name or subject—for instance, President Ballou under *B*. Much of the early history of the Universalist Church is tied in with Tufts' development; and, where relevant letters are held by the church, Dr. Miller is having photoprints made and filed at Tufts to complete the record.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY AND BOSTON COLLEGE

Though fundamentally unlike, these two institutions resemble each other in four ways that are important to an archival survey. Both institutions have undergone considerable physical upheaval since their founding; both have on their staffs loyal and knowledgeable librarians with 30 years' service; both are approaching a centennial milestone; neither has an archives.

In charge of the library at Boston University is Robert H. Moody, who calls himself a historian turned librarian. As such, he naturally sees the need for an archives and cares a great deal about the historical backgrounds of the university. He says, however, that he already has his hands full running a library, where the books, like everything else at the university, get very hard wear. Though he has the interest and background to establish an archives, he believes that he could not manage it along with his present duties, and he would be distressed to undertake half measures.

In his care, but unexamined and in the basement, are the early university records. Mr. Moody stressed the effect on these records of the constant moving, with resulting disruption. He also said that the rather new public relations department would soon be asking for material for the centennial celebrations and that this material was not in good order. What Mr. Moody has managed to do, on his own, is to maintain a vertical file. There he keeps miscellaneous documents, filed *A-Z*, including clippings on early Boston University, alumni notes, manuscripts, and other documents. It is admittedly a hodgepodge, and Mr. Moody regards this filing system simply as a stopgap measure.

My overall impression of Boston University was of rush and tumble, where records are created so fast that there is hardly time to file them, much less to examine and index them. At the moment there is no budget for an archives.

Boston College, high on a sweet-smelling hill at Newton, provides quite a contrast to concrete-bound Boston University. When you see the tranquil Gothic buildings and consider its proud Jesuit tradition, you wonder why no archives has been established.

The director of the library, John O'Loughlin, provided the answer. Here too is a story of change and moving. Boston College was founded within the city of Boston, in the "South End." With expanding city limits, it had to move several times before finally, in 1913, it built and settled into the graceful Newton campus. The earliest college records, except for the minutes of the trustees, were left behind in the South Boston quarters and later were destroyed. Furthermore, the Jesuit rule is to change university presidents every six years, and the resulting turnover does not make for continuity in recordkeeping.

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

In 1961 M. I. T. will be a hundred years old. By that time plans for an archives program may have been formulated. The librarian, William Locke, was optimistic. Dr. John E. Burchard, dean of humanities, was less hopeful. He said that in 1946 he had proposed establishing an archives and had had a survey and study of Harvard's program made. This was submitted to the president with recommendations. At that time the budget would not allow the minimum recommendation, and the idea was dropped. Dr. Burchard said that the tentative plan was to employ a professional archivist for a few years to set up the archival program and work with a senior staff member, perhaps a professor emeritus, who would carry on.

Apparently there are two conflicting points of view at M. I. T., one interested in a records management program and the other in an archives for historical research. Until these two can reach agreement, Dr. Burchard feels, there will be difficulty in going ahead with an archives.

BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

While the majority of universities in the Boston area are having trouble starting an archives program because they have dodged the issue for too many years, Brandeis is without one for a different reason. It is too young.

I had half expected to find an efficient records management program under way at the 11-year-old university. The librarian, Louis Schreiber, explained that Brandeis was as decentralized as most other colleges and that each department preferred to keep its own records intact. In many cases they were still considered "live files," needed for ready reference. Mr. Schreiber said that between 1948 and 1951 he had been concerned about the problem of accumulating records and had informed the president and deans that the library would be willing to cooperate in any records management plan that might be set up. Mr. Schreiber's point then, as today, is that he would rather face the question of records immediately than let them develop into a large-scale problem that would probably in the end tumble into the library's lap. The administration's answer to date, however, has been in the negative. Even the public relations office at Brandeis can still easily remember the events of the past 11 years in the university's dynamic growth. No one at this stage wants to relinquish his records.

SUMMARY

After visiting the institutions discussed, I came to the conclusion that universities and colleges follow the universal law of supply and demand when it comes to archives. The demand may come from three quarters: a scholarly request from one or more members of a university staff wanting to write a history of the institution; a public relations need for information to approach alumni for funds; or a purely practical need for better housekeeping of space-consuming records. Until one or more of these pressures affect a university, it is likely to consider archives a needless frill.

Correct Doctrine

. . . I have here (today) no abiding place but must go immediately after luncheon to a meeting, I rather hope the final meeting, of our interdepartmental committee on the new archive building (or Archives Building, as our legislators have very regrettably, after grave discussion and full presentation of correct doctrine, decreed that it shall be called).

—J. Franklin Jameson to Worthington C. Ford, Apr. 16, 1931, in *An Historian's World: Selections from the Correspondence of John Franklin Jameson*, p. 346-347 (Philadelphia, 1956). Quoted by permission of the American Philosophical Society.