

# Changing Times

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“IN the beginning was the Word”—and man has been concerned with its preservation ever since. The burning desire of man has long been to leave behind some record as a guidepost for generations following him down the corridors of time. We are living in an age when man’s greatest ambitions are seemingly on the edge of fulfillment, when the stars towards which man has reached for untold centuries suddenly seem only an arm’s length away. Within our time—during the last half of this twentieth century—we shall know perhaps the secrets of the stars. The ingenuity of man has enabled us at last to make a key to fit the lock of eternity.

Measured against the progress the 1960’s will record, conditions in State archival institutions in 1933—the year my work in one began—seem primitive indeed. What was it like in those days? The National Archives was not to be established until the following year, 1934. There were no training courses for archivists. For restoration of manuscripts, the old silking process was being used. There were no developed systems and procedures for collecting and controlling archives. Manuscripts were being cataloged as if they were library books. Laminating and microfilming of records were untried processes. There was no Society of American Archivists to turn to for guidance. There was no uniform State archival legislation.

My State of Georgia was deficient or lacking in all these things, but we were not unique. Looking about, we discovered that other States were also in their archival infancy. Some State archives were being administered by historical societies, libraries, historical commissions, or secretaries of state; some few were independent agen-

\* Presidential address, Oct. 6, 1960, at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Boston, Mass. Mrs. Bryan, a Fellow of the Society and Director of the Georgia Department of Archives and History, is beloved not only as “Georgia’s Miss Mary” (the title of an article about her in the Dec. 1959-Jan. 1960 issue of *Georgia Magazine*) but as the professional mentor of her colleagues in many other States. Her and Secretary of State Ben W. Fortson’s longtime campaign to obtain funds for a new State Archives Building became successful in 1960 under the administration of Gov. S. Ernest Vandiver, and they are now working closely with State Auditor B. E. Thrasher, Chairman, State Office Building Authority, and the architect, A. Thomas Bradbury, on plans for the \$3,000,000 structure. Her photograph appears as a frontispiece in the Jan. 1960 issue of the *American Archivist*.

cies, embracing all types of cultural activities. Some States had no archival agencies at all, and I regret to say that four of our States still have none. There was little archival literature and there were no American manuals on archival practice. *Modern Archives; Principles and Techniques*, by T. R. Schellenberg, was not published until more than 20 years later.

Attics, closets, and basements of State capitols periodically yielded packing boxes of records, and lack of space soon became a byword. We were old hands in the space battle long before the conquest made headlines for the scientists. Nevertheless, scientific explorations of *outer space* seem likely to become an accomplished fact much sooner than the archivists can perfect ways to keep from running *out of space*.

But back to the dim days. On the part of State administrators there was little interest in archives and records, and that little was vague. Few could even pronounce the word "archives," and those who could thought that it meant only ancient records. Our public archives were looked upon by the ordinary citizen as places for the select few, for scholars and historians engaged in research and special writing. In State archival institutions the archivist has always clearly understood that he must serve scholarship, but the general public was not then educated to the realization that such an institution was also a public service agency to State and local government and to the people. But, with meager funds and a correspondingly inadequate staff, none of us could carry out the purposes of the laws that established our archival institutions and outlined our duties and functions. In the area of understanding we were so isolated from the civilization whose records we were trying to preserve that our cries for help reached the public only as faint murmurs.

Among us, however, were some pioneering souls; and a few scholars, historians, librarians, and curators of historical manuscripts did strike out bravely in the first half of the twentieth century, bringing to public attention the chaotic conditions in archives across the nation. The *methods* our trailblazers used in evoking the awareness of the American public were new, but their problems were by no means new. The 1794 "advice on records" by Court Councilor and Professor Carl F. Haeberlin, translated for us by Fritz Morstein Marx in his article in the January 1952 issue of the *American Archivist*, is as timely today as it was foresighted in 1794.

Our road was rough, but it was not without wells beside which we could pause for refreshment. There was comfort, too, in knowing that even if the world was not ready for the course we were charting, future generations might be in on its development—even

as we now are witnessing practical application of the computer principles projected in 1833 by Charles Babbage, the father of modern electronic computers, whose invention of an "analytical engine" preceded by 100 years its adaptation for use.

Twenty-seven years ago the problem of what to do about the records looked big, even vast, but we had only a shore-line view as we stood on the beach of the 1930's.

Times began to change in 1934 with the establishment of the National Archives. In 1937 another ship was launched with the first annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Washington. As Margaret C. Norton pointed out in a former presidential address, the New Deal had made available millions of dollars for archival work through the Historical Records Survey. Through the Public Works Administration, some Federal funds matched State funds for State archives and library buildings. All of these happenings between 1934 and 1940, while the country was yet in the throes of depression, would have been a tremendous boon to our profession, as Miss Norton pointed out, had we but been prepared to give professional guidance. There were, however, only a handful of trained archivists to meet these challenging opportunities or to offer real leadership to the Historical Records Survey. How little our profession had to offer the first Archivist of the United States, R. D. W. Connor! Some State archival institutions were older than the National Archives; the first, in Alabama, dated from 1901. A few archivists were called to Washington, but most of the staff of the National Archives had to be recruited from ambitious young scholars willing to experiment with new techniques.

During my year as your president I have been on a journey of review across a total of 8,440 pages of the *American Archivist*, the voice of our profession, which this year observes its 22d birthday and the completion of its 23d volume. The Society's 15 presidents have made 16 presidential addresses, all delivered at annual meetings and published in the *American Archivist* between 1938 and 1960. This reviewing junket of mine has been a sentimental journey because I have, along with some of you, been in on the groundwork, and have had the pleasure of knowing personally our professional colleagues as we have struggled together to solve our problems. A few of them, no longer living, left a firm foundation for our American archival profession in the record of their experiences, thinking, and professional wisdom.

You do not need me to define "archivist," "records manager," "records administrator," in this paper. Far more has been said than done about our being one and the same. We want to promote our

partnership, and this means "giving" on both sides. The problems, goals, and philosophy of the archivist have been discussed with blueprint exactness in articles published in the *American Archivist*. Such articles have not always referred to the records manager in their titles; but if you records specialists read carefully, you will find a cohesion of purpose between the archivist and the records manager and will gain a better understanding of our mutual responsibility.

Perhaps we need to set up a "forum," with topics such as "The Records Manager Looks at the Archivist" and "Archivists Look at Records Managers." Although, with some justification, some of the records people still think that long-haired archivists live in ivory towers and wear thick lenses—the better to pore over ancient documents—today's practicing archivist is much more than a mere custodian of records. We are in there pitching on the very day when records are created, whether in textual or other forms, and we want to help the records manager preserve the suitable records, which become the later "archives." The success we achieve in our common field can be measured only in the satisfaction felt by those we are employed to serve. We are a common profession but we serve different interests in the records field. Let's "blast off" together into outer space, with a better understanding of our common goals. How many people in the archives profession are interested to the full extent in information theory—new communication and computing devices—in charting or planning for the future? A new technology—in the mechanized systems for searching, correlating, and synthesizing recorded knowledge—will doubtless be in general use in the not too distant future. Again, are we all ready for these "changing times"?

Without a review of the past we do not know what to do with today or how to plan for tomorrow. When men begin to think, they can base their thinking only on the facts of the past. Although study of the past does not make a dull man intelligent, not even the brilliant man can act intelligently without some knowledge of the past. We archivists as a professional group are not using what is available in print in our field, nor are we keeping up fully with new literature touching on our interests. More of us need to enroll, perhaps, in a Speed or Rapid Reading School or a Reading Dynamics Institute!

Our Society's interests go far beyond purely technical or narrowly professional matters. There has been too much grumbling in recent years among the different elements in our Society, which might be

disturbing if we did not recognize it for what it is—"change we think we see in life due to truths being in and out of favor."

What are these truths in and out of favor? Several of our past presidents—Wayne C. Grover and Morris L. Radoff, for instance—have spoken in their presidential addresses of the new specialists in records management who emerged in the 1950's. Whether our common interests are many or one is not the point I wish to consider here. I wish to emphasize what I believe to be our trouble area.

Actually the truths at odds are those of the specialist and the generalist. The generalist takes the eagle's-eye overall view of our profession, the specialist the closeup, worm's-eye view. A specialist has been defined as "one who knows more and more about less and less, until he knows everything about nothing." *A Society composed only of specialists would soon collapse, for nobody would be left with the overall view—nobody who could see the woods as well as the trees.* Now I am not belittling the specialists. Specialists we must have, more of them all the time, but everyone should be "educated" in a wider sense. We need more specialists equipped with broad perspective, to exert critical judgment on what they are doing as specialists. Business and industry say that generalists are badly needed in the corner office. The specialist cannot function effectively at the top level of management if all he brings to it is his specialty. What we need in our Society is more specialists who are capable of functioning as generalists. The narrowly trained expert may be in for a nasty jolt as his skills grow out of date. The only safety in the years ahead lies in a professional training so broad and flexible that the individual can survive and adapt himself to changing situations. It is possible to be both a generalist *and* a learned specialist. One who is both has written this to his specialist friend: "Wake up! Live at the level of your time! Crawl out of that talent-trap which you refer to as your 'field' and look around. You may learn something about the only era you will ever live in, and about the only species you will ever be a member of." Let's not lose each other in our specialties; let's keep that one communication line always open—the knowledge we all should hold in common. We need more leaders who are generalists in our profession, who can understand the main findings of the experts and can translate them in the broadest terms for us who need that overall view.

As a writer on "The Nature of Information Retrieval," in *Modern Trends in Documentation*, declares,

the nostrums, the hardware, even the systems that we advocate today will be as dead as mutton ten years from now. And most of us won't be; that's one of

the reasons why there is still some faint value in liberal education. If we are taught how to think, if we are taught the basic sciences, the basic languages, the basic arts of communication, we will have some value from our education still remaining ten, twenty, or even thirty years from now. Let's keep our interests alive but at the broadest level so that when it turns out that we have backed the wrong hardware we won't be left without any valuable experience.

Also, whether we are archivists or belong to the special area within archives administration called records management, we need to know and constantly study American history and American government. The voice of our Society has been strongly urging this need for many years. It has pleaded for more administrative histories of our States and local governmental agencies, of which the shortage is especially acute. It seems to me that some of us have failed as conductors of energy in our dynamic system. Our advancement hinges on the efforts of the *whole* man. As disconnected components, we shall be completely lost in the supersonic era in this last half of the twentieth century. The whole man must be a happy combination of the generalist and the specialist.

It is true that this is the age of the manager. Management has become a science and requires men of special ability who have learned its techniques through both formal study and intensive practice. Management is the marshaling of resources to get a job done. What's new is that nonbusiness, nonprofit, public-service enterprises, such as government on all levels, are turning to the professional manager. In our "population explosion" the demand for public services is growing rapidly and their administration is becoming more complex. In the past, government agencies, cities, hospitals, colleges, could be administered by people who had little if any training in management. Not now.

In the Society of American Archivists the committees are basic. Originally set up to fill the needs of an earlier day, they were overhauled in 1954 by the then president, the Archivist of the United States. As I see it, the responsibility of our committees does not end with carrying out their assigned special area and duties. The chairmen of committees have a moral obligation not only to our profession but to society. Appointment to one of our committees opens the door of opportunity to explore, to ferret out, and to pass on to the rest of us—and particularly to our newer members—the information and advice they and we are seeking. The healthiest sign of growth has been the recent inauguration of workshops at our annual meetings. Here the specialists can come together and discuss their common interests, projects, and problems. Here the gen-



eralists can receive the benefit of the specialists' thinking, and vice versa.

Obviously the projects and studies of our profession cannot be geared to night-shift production. We need grants to give us money and time for such projects. The Carnegie Corporation of New York has recently supplied a grant to study State Libraries in the United States, which will include State Archives under the administration of State Libraries. At this time many interesting studies are going forward, which will benefit all cultural activities. Archival agencies, libraries, historical societies, museums, and custodians of historic sites and monuments merge at the cultural level to preserve and teach the best from the past and present. The future will see many cultural centers in our States, utilizing different buildings for different purposes. Certainly our thinking about functional buildings is changing as the pattern of progress grows clearer. No one building can any longer contain all the facets and factors of our culture.

Present-day educators state that the sum total of man's knowledge has doubled in the last ten years and will double again in the next ten years. As we stand on a new frontier, bringing us more records—not only textual but in the form of motion pictures, sound recordings, punch and aperture cards, video or magnetic tapes, electrostatic prints, electronic computations, and many more—it is plain that archivists will tend to become less concerned with preserving records in paper form than with preserving them in their newer forms. Modern tools and devices are on the way in, the paper business is on the way out, and we may predict that the 1960's will be known as the "systems decade." Are we ready to meet the challenge of tomorrow? To meet the many satellites soon to be in orbit, the American archivist and the American scholar must also get into orbit!

Let's take inventory and get a new bearing on where we are going and how we are to manage, select, preserve, and use the records and techniques of today and tomorrow. Is it unreasonable to suppose that if microfilm is going to become really accessible, home viewers will become as commonplace and as necessary to an educated world as books and magazines? The day is coming when historians and other investigators can borrow—from our archives, manuscript depositories, and libraries—records on film, which will be charged out like books and can be read and studied leisurely on home viewers.

Finally, lest we prepare for finality instead of a future, are we ready for atomic warfare? We hope and pray it will not come, but hopes and prayers do not exempt us from preparation. The Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM), is thinking ahead about

the preservation of essential records by State and local governments; its proposed legislation will receive consideration in most if not all of our 50 States during the next 2 years. This should give our State archivists and records managers the opportunity to improve the scope and quality of State records programs. Our Society was one of the 12 participating organizations giving professional advice to OCDM in the development of its program. We must see that this proposed legislation is channeled to State administrative departments responsible for our archives-records programs.

This activity could open the doors of State and local administrators to the realization that *their* records should be the concern of the archives-records managers. As State archivists and records administrators, some of us have barely scratched the surface in carrying on a State and local records program in the true sense of the word. We need to emphasize that local history is a miniature of American history. Ours is the responsibility for seeing that the best of Americana is preserved for generations to come after us, and that the records they will need are intact.

These are, indeed, changing times. For the years ahead many scholarly interpretations can be placed upon the slogan engraved in the granite of our National Archives Building: "What is Past is Prologue." I give you, in closing, the taxi driver who, when asked what he thought the words meant, gave an answer that neatly encompasses the whole man's outlook. Said he from the corner of his mouth: "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

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### ***FDR Took a Sample***

The President then said that shortly after he had become President Sumner Welles had complained to him about lack of room in the State Department, that he had told Welles that they ought to move out their old files. He said that Welles said that they had no old files, that everything they kept in the files in the office of the State Department was current and had to be referred to frequently. The President said, "A short time later I went over to the State Department and was wheeled down one of the corridors. I stopped at an office and went in. There were a few people working there and there were some files. I went over to the files and opened one at random and took out a folder." He said, "It was dated 1904 and had to do with the raising of horses." He said, "I told Sumner about this and asked him if that was what he meant by 'current files.'"

—From a memorandum of a luncheon conversation between Charles W. Taussig and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jan. 16, 1945 (Taussig Papers in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Box 52).