New Dimensions in the Education of American Archivists

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OF ALL the activities in which archivists engage, none, I believe, is in greater need of strengthening and enlarging than that of education. I am thinking here not only of the formal training that enables us to perform more expertly but of that development of the mind arising from an understanding of our society and the role of the scholar in it. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of the archivist as seen by the historian and to propose certain orderly advances in archival education that would seem necessary in our new world. This sort of development has long been a concern of archivists and historians, as a look at past issues of the *American Archivist* will amply reveal. A distinguished American historian, Samuel Flagg Bemis, was asked to contribute an article to an early volume of this journal, an article entitled "The Training of Archivists in the United States."[1] Since then, a fair number of articles have been written in defense of one or another point of view, but it is my contention that a systematic, large-scale attack has yet to be made by a national body acting officially and that until this important task is accomplished advanced education for archivists will not be completely feasible.

One might wonder why a person who is a card-carrying member of this Society but not a full-time archivist should presume to give

The author is chairman of the department of history at the University of Denver and director of the program in American studies. His works on medieval European history and on the religious development of the American West have been based largely on archival materials. Dr. Breck read this paper in its original form on Dec. 29, 1965, at the luncheon meeting of the Society of American Archivists held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in San Francisco.

[1] Vol. 2:154–161 (July 1939). Among other important articles in the *American Archivist* see A. R. Newsome, "The Archivist in American Scholarship," 2:220 ff. (Oct. 1939); Karl L. Trever, "The Organization and Status of Archival Training in the United States," 11:154–163 (Apr. 1948); D. M. Quynn, "École des Chartes," 13: 271–283 (July 1950); Philip C. Brooks, "Archivists and their Colleagues: Common Denominators," 14:33–35 (Jan. 1951); Ernst Posner, "What, Then, Is the American Archivist, This New Man?" 20:3–11 (Jan. 1957); T. R. Schellenberg, "The Future of the Archival Profession," 22:49–58 (Jan. 1959). See also Leon deValinger, Jr., "The Professional Looks at the Future," in Rocky Mountain Region Archives and History Symposium, *The Responsibility of the Individual for Our Documentary Heritage* (Denver, 1964).

its members suggestions for the professional development of the group. My reasons for doing it are two: first, as a historian and chairman of a department that includes an archivist on its staff, I have a certain angle of vision that may enable me to see some of your problems and opportunities from the position of a recipient of your endeavors. My second reason for these remarks is the fact that from the earliest days of my graduate work I have been keenly aware of the difficulties of re-creating the past from documentary remains and materials ancillary to them. We historians and many other professional people are in your debt and share your many frustrations, as well as your glories. Perhaps my first inkling of the necessity and difficulty of preserving materials came from some remarks of the late Prof. Herbert E. Bolton, who told us at length in a seminar how he had spent considerable time in producing a calendar of the papers in a certain archive in Mexico and how he was able finally to publish it. Since that time, I learn, the entire archival collection has been destroyed and we now know of its contents and rich treasures only from the surviving list. My own master's and doctor's theses were in the period of the European Renaissance. For the former, I was introduced to products of the archivist's labors, including that vast collection of treaties and related documents known as Rymer's *Fœdera*.[2]

For the other degree I concentrated on the study of John Wyclyf, the 14th-century reformer, and began to prepare a text of one of the parts of his *Summa*, the work on the Trinity. Where were the original versions? Locating them was no great problem, for many European collections are indexed (though in very strange ways, sometimes), and my search through them eventually produced six versions, one at Trinity College, Cambridge, three in the National Library in Vienna, one each in the Charles University and the old Archiepiscopal Library in Prague. There they had been, since at least the 17th century, waiting for an eager student to do something with them. Thanks to modern technology, I was able to have photostats and microfilms of these originals before visiting the repositories.

But it was obvious that the six versions of the same set of lectures were not in agreement, and that two were radically different from the others; one of them, the least accurate, contained whole sections that did not appear in the others. No document was in a

[2] Thomas Rymer, *Fœdera, conventiones, literæ, et cujuscunque generis acta publica, inter reges Angliæ et alios quoswis imperatores, reges, pontifices, principes, vel communitates* . . . (London, 1726–35).

hand and on a parchment contemporary with Wyclyf, so I had to be looking at copies the archetype of which had disappeared. I shall not burden you with the details of my establishment of a reasonable text—compounded as it was of these remains and my Solomonic judgment.

I did encounter some genuine archival nightmares. Whole codices of Wyclyf's other works, for instance, were copies made by Czech scribes in England, working under a table by candlelight from original notes written (perhaps by Wyclyf) in a crabbed and difficult hand! That they made any sense of what they saw is to their glory and our profit. You see, the reason for their secrecy and haste was that Wyclyf and all his writings had been proscribed and could be copied only under the most private conditions. A considerable number of these works were ordered to be burned by Archbishop Zbinek in Prague in 1410.

The works of few other writers suffered such a fate, however, or we should not be able to reconstruct the past with any degree of accuracy or fullness. The long and stately rows of the great 19th-century collections of national documents—the *Rolls Series*, the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, the *Recueil des historiens des Gaules*, and many others—testify to the completeness of the documentary record. I tip my hat to you and your predecessors for their preservation, editing, and publication.

Some of my recent concerns have been with the religious history of the American frontier. Here, too, the archivist and the manuscript collector have been at work, and here again, despite their best work, the materials are often spotty and in some cases too scanty to enable us to make a full-scale reconstruction of the original human situation. But good collections are now being vigorously constructed, and much of the past will indeed eventually be recovered. Has it not been said, and with justification, that history is written by the survivors?

But thus far I have written as though archives appear, archivists take their places, and the drama of organizing the past begins of itself. The archivist, however, does not grow in a vacuum; he is rather the product of certain forces, certain educational forms, and some sort of on-the-job training. It is my thesis that vast changes in the ways in which society will solve its problems in the future demand that we re-think the nature of the education of archivists and of historians themselves.

One might expect a historian to advocate the continuance of the European system of archival education with which he is familiar.

It does have certain bases in the study of history and government, which one would be loath to abandon. It is firmly rooted in the culture of Europe, and in the past it has devoted considerable attention to the study of the documents of the Middle Ages. Hence, the allied sciences—linguistics, geography, chronology, diplomatics, sigillography and heraldry, paleography, archeology, epigraphy, numismatics, and genealogy—are honored parts of this training. Indeed, without them, the archivist would have been unable to make a dent in the formidable pile of parchments remaining from that period. The science of diplomatics, alone, almost constitutes the "science of documents." It investigates the provenance, date, and authenticity of written documents, for the most part from ancient and medieval times. Elements of all these disciplines are still necessary in any modern approach to the archivist's art. For centuries the archivist was a self-taught and self-propelled man, often a member of a religious order, Protestant clergyman, or gifted lay amateur who had mastered his art, often by apprenticeship.

But with the rather considerable increase of attention to the national state and the need for recalling the past of the national community, formalized training in Europe enlarged the horizons of the archivist by providing institutes for the preparation of archival scholars. There is no need here to review that history, as it has been well done in several places, especially in summary form by Ernst Posner in his article "European Experience in Training Archivists."[3] The advantage of these schools (one might mention the École des Chartes, founded in 1821, and the Institute at Berlin Dahlem among them) was that they were geared to historical penetration in depth of the remotenesses of the European past. This historical "vision with one eye" gave way only slowly to a consideration of more recent European history. It goes without saying that many of these techniques have been of great use in the training of historians as well as archivists in the United States. A copy of Giry's *Manuel de diplomatique* placed in the hand of one beginning student has more than once been useful in keeping him from stumbling.

But if you will allow me the premise that each system of training for archivists has been grounded in a particular culture at a specific time, we shall be led to see that the cataclysmic changes in our society in the period since the Second World War have begun to force us to revaluate our whole thinking about the upbringing of archivists and manuscript curators. We see the beginnings in

[3] *American Archivist* 4: 26–37 (Jan. 1941).

our undergraduate college students. One hears them say over and over that the discontinuity between their new knowledge and many of the presuppositions of their professors is increasing rapidly. I am concerned here with not only the so-called explosion of facts and data (that is important enough) but also with the increasing complexity of the ways in which knowledge and facts are organized. All the new fields of study (what someone has called the "cortical Cossacks, now sweeping across the steppes of the intellect")—cryogenics, neuropsychiatry, astrophysics, biophysics, cybernetics, system analysis—have reached only the end of the beginning of their development. In government and industry, in business and religion, new knowledge and insight are providing more records than the most industrious collector can keep sight of.

Here, then, is the dilemma. These new occasions for rapid-fire collection and disbursement of data are forcing us to make choices entirely different from those made by earlier archivists. I well remember that, as a college freshman, I wanted to study the history of the Teutonic Order in medieval East Prussia. Among the materials I received when I sent away for data was a large picture of the neat, orderly folio volumes of the Order Archives, stored in the Archives in Königsberg. One could see them, study them, perhaps even master their essential contents in a full and productive lifetime. But now one reviews the calendars of the records captured by the American occupation forces in Germany and Japan and wonders if the essential job of understanding more than a small part of the record will ever be accomplished.

It seems to me that the key person in this whole problem of acquisition, storage, and preparation of documents for research is the archivist, more particularly the director of an archive. One cannot really depend on the historian, who so frequently in the past has been the aider and abettor of librarians and curators, to be of much help in the process of selecting which vestiges of the past should be discarded. For him, all are important! And you must concede that if we did have the laundry lists of the Council of Nicaea and the incidental chit-chat of the Imperial Court at Peking in the Han Dynasty we should know more about life in those times than we now do. But no world could contain all the data a historian would like to have. We must have recourse, then, to a particular type of archivist, one whose features I should like to delineate. A question is pertinent: Should the archivist have training primarily as a historian? In the long history of archives, the historian has played a significant part. In the European de-

velopment of manuscript collections, historians, along with linguists and experts in political science, have played a major share. Their concern for the record is mirrored in R. G. Collingwood's definition of history as a science of finding things out from the actions of human beings in the past, which science, he contends, proceeds primarily by the "*interpretation of evidence:* where evidence is a collective name for things which singly are called documents . . ." (italics my own).[4]

Thus, we would expect a historian to be concerned with the protection of records, even in such a remote State as Colorado in 1903. In that year, Frederick L. Paxon, who was professor of history at the University of Colorado, reported sadly to Governor Peabody that each public official determined what earlier records would be consulted and that consequently there was no ready reference to earlier decisions made by any department of the State government. Paxon's hopeful report resulted in no legislation, however, and the records were to wait until Prof. James F. Willard, another historian, wrote Gov. John Shafroth:[5]

> . . . I made a rather thorough investigation of the archives of the government of Colorado. Though many of the records are kept in excellent condition for reference, most of the smaller departments and some of the larger ones, have no idea of preserving their past records for historical purposes. In many cases, also, the records are kept in unsafe places. . . . I realize the danger of too many boards and commissions, but I do think that there should be appointed for Colorado a board or a commission of public records, whose duty it should be to promote the preservation, classification, and collection of public records.

Professor Willard compiled a checklist of *Colorado Reports* in 1910 and again in 1917.

The advent of the First World War, however, ended all efforts at a systematic survey and collection, and only the sponsorship of the secretary of state under the Public Records Survey activities of the Works Progress Administration in the depression years greatly affected the collecting and indexing of Colorado's public records. This examination "did the most complete job of surveying the state, county, and municipal records ever done."[6]

In 1943 the State legislature gave the State Historical Society—

[4] *The Idea of History*, p. 9–10 (London, 1946).

[5] Letter, Aug. 14, 1911, Correspondence Series, Governor's Papers, Colorado State Archives.

[6] Dolores C. Renze, "Report and Survey, Division of State Archives and Public Records," Sept. 9, 1963.

with its historical library and its curator of history—the responsibility of taking care of certain records.[7] From this time on the fact that the State of Colorado has had a full-time archivist made the important difference. Since 1959 the archival function has been a separate division in the Executive Department. The authority of the State Archivist was delineated broadly as the power to "formulate and put into effect, to the extent authorized by law, within the division and otherwise, such program or programs as he deems advisable or necessary for public records conservation by the State of Colorado or political sub-divisions thereof." I have surveyed briefly the development of the Colorado Archives because this is a classic example of the trinity of historian, librarian, and archivist at work, building a workable repository.

But what should be the background and education of such an archivist? Should he be trained as a librarian rather than as a historian or as an interested citizen with administrative ability? The case for the training of archivists as librarians has been well put by Theodore R. Schellenberg, whose book *The Management of Archives* was published as part of the Columbia University Studies in Library Service in 1965. Librarians have for a long time been conscious of the need for acquiring papers—indeed, one hears of authors of even modest repute frequently being approached by university librarians who want to put all their "papers" in their collection—and have been most successful in adding substantially to the book and monographic holdings of various important collections. But they have recognized that they cannot handle papers with the same techniques with which they have indexed and cataloged their books. Those very areas of specialty that we have noted in the development of medieval and early modern manuscript collections have become necessary to the librarian—authentication, paper, paleography, genealogy, heraldry, and the like—in the preparation and display of his collections.

One is then tempted to say that the proper placement of a series of courses should be in the school of library science of a university. Many factors would argue for this procedure. There is the obvious similarity between the document or manuscript and the printed book or pamphlet. Methods of cataloging books and handling documentary materials do not appear to be too different, and there is the necessity of dealing with a public, whether learned or otherwise, that needs various services. Numerous library schools already have courses in the preservation and handling of documents and collec-

[7] Senate Bill no. 50, "State Archives and Public Records," Feb. 25, 1943.

tions of materials. Thus, the administrative skills that the librarian's profession offers would seem to be more needed in our present situation than the more standard work of the historian-specialist once offered by the European curriculum.

Before we come to any analysis of the precise way in which this education might be improved in the 20th century, we should look at the standards by which the profession of archivists in America judges the greatest contributors in its field. The constitution of the Society of American Archivists is explicit in its definition of the best archivist. He is a person who has:

a. Advanced educational experience, realistically appraised, in an area of knowledge recognized as essential for the profession.

b. Professional experience in any of the fields of the Society's objectives, ordinarily of five years, which shall include the exercise of responsibility and shall demonstrate the possession of initiative, resourcefulness, and professional morale.

c. Writings of superior quality and usefulness.

These objectives are obviously intended to broaden, rather than restrict, the areas within which the archivist is to be competent and to lengthen, rather than shorten, the period of education of its members.

Let us assume for the moment that this educational program, designed to include within its limits all those who are selected as Fellows, is in some measure adaptable to all SAA members—or at least those who fall within the somewhat narrower limit of archivists. Of the Society's 1,700 members, one might assume that one-fourth are presently engaged in archival work, taken in the narrowest sense of that term. The problem raised here, then, is to discover what program of studies would be best suited to the education of the archivist in this limited sense of the professional administrator of an archival collection or a member of the professional staff.

Should a degree in archives administration be earnable at the undergraduate level? I think not. These 4 precious years are the last opportunity for a broad, general education, unhampered by the necessity of specializing in a particular technique. The present tendency in pedagogy is to push all the practice-teaching courses to a 5th year, and we might do well to keep their example in mind for any curriculum planning. The master's degree, on the other hand, seems well fitted for the archivist, though here again I am

for academic breadth as long as possible. There is so much to know and to ponder in studying the milieu (country, State, locality) in which the archivist works that any diminution of materials here might seriously hamper his effectiveness later. The thesis might be very properly, however, an exercise in the archivist's art. Two groups of people must be cared for. First are the records managers, who might find the most important master's degree for them to be one in the broader field of political science or public administration. For the archives administrator and general archivist I envisage an academic degree, chosen from a rather large number of fields in the humanities and literature.

We now come to the doctorate. All the evidence we have confirms the thought that the master's degree, which only a few years ago was considered terminal by all but the research-directed person, in many fields is now but the entryway into the doctor's degree. Indeed, so great is this rush becoming that it has already eroded the significance of the master's degree, and there are all sorts of proposals for returning that degree to its former usefulness and prestige. A solid master's degree with emphasis in archival procedures, with a thesis of some substance and depth, would be a turn in the right direction. We need guidelines for the doctorate for archivists, for a degree that will meet the demands of a profession only now emerging from the orientation it has long had towards either librarianship or towards historical studies in the narrowest sense. At first sight, it would seem that any university might simply offer the degree by the notorious process of "adding to the curriculum without effort and without thought" by which academic empires are built nowadays. Hopefully, we will have none of this.

The solution is rather for a body of dedicated and concerned people to consider what should in the future go into the making of such a curriculum and *then* to see which schools are willing to tackle the work. This curriculum study will cost money, but surely funds from any one of a number of foundations would be available, provided the sponsorship rests within, for example, this Society. Two entities within this group that suggest themselves as arbiters and planners are the Committee on Professional Standards and the Fellows. Here there should be vision and the active force to get things done properly. For their consideration, I have a few suggestions, all of them coming from outside the profession, by one who searches their collections and respects their work while doing it.

First, the degree should combine the best of the two approaches

we have been considering: that of the librarian-technician, able to cope with the new knowledge, and that of the scholar-historian or social scientist, who sees the relevance of his work to his society and is grounded in the European and American experience. The former alone is at best a technician, and the latter can easily be swamped by the need for organizing and communicating his materials.

Second, the doctorate might best be placed in the field of American studies, with special emphasis on archives in the dissertation and the selection of several fields. Whatever else these various programs in American studies aim at, their virtue is the ability to see the American experience steadily and as a whole and to see the interrelationship of all its parts. Hence, a discipline such as that of the archivist should find a comfortable room within the mansion. We aim, I am sure, at the production of a professional body. I believe professionalism is all too often limited to the possession of technique gained from practice and from certain limited courses of study, but in another sense the professional degree should be one emphasizing the standards of conduct, of attitude, and of intellectual "wholeness" that characterize the professional in any field, from athletics to zoology. The professional is one who has a real sense of craftsmanship, welded to dedication to society beyond personal gain or reward. He is able to publish, to instruct, to locate, and above all to relate all the disparate things that come his way for preservation to the demands of his time and the improvement of his society. He sees one dimension as the ability to go a second mile after being compelled to go the first, which one must cover if he is to survive.[8] No degree can confer these qualities; they are things of the spirit. If they do not animate the proposals for education, however, the profession will never come to maturity. Someone has well said that every job is either a vocation or a racket; and the choice is up to us.

Our experience at the University of Denver might be helpful in making my point that a broad, substantial background should be aimed at. When the present State Archivist first taught a course in the management of archives in the fall of 1953, the course was assigned to the graduate school of librarianship. Several years later it was moved to the department of history, where four graduate courses now appear, though no degree as such is offered. The reason for the change was not that the librarians were incompetent

[8] See Alan A. Klass, "The Spirit of a Profession," in *British Columbia Library Quarterly*, vol. 26 (1963), for an interesting discussion of this point.

or unwilling but rather that the philosophy inherent in the program demanded the widest possible academic selection of courses, both in the humanities and in the social sciences.

Our thinking at the present time is that, given sufficient direction, a doctorate in archives might most properly be placed neither in history nor in librarianship, but rather in a broad field such as American studies. That field is, of course, many things to many people and takes different shapes from one university to another. At the University of Pennsylvania, for instance, the emphasis has been on the cultural-anthropological aspect; at Minnesota one finds American literature at the core. At the University of Denver we emphasize fields of history, one in the American West and one in literature. Obviously, some determination would have to be made by the addition of fields of archival knowledge and practice and the dropping of some of the areas now offered. Perhaps we have here at the doctoral level one of the possible answers to the problem posed by T. R. Schellenberg,[9] speaking of public archives: "The methods that have been adopted to their management are a com-

until I chanced innocently to ask him what *kind* of mathematician he was. He became almost animated as he described his work as a theoretical mathematician, whereas, he informed me, most other members of his department were merely applied mathematicians. He said, "We don't talk with those fellows any more"! I include this incident merely as a cautionary tale for our mutual edification. Details, yes, but the larger picture in mind at all times is indicated in our educational planning.

One other dimension needs considerable exploration—that of inservice training and education for practicing archivists. For some time, until a plentiful supply of archivists with the master's degree is available, the most necessary practice may well be the training of people who have their bachelor's degree and are willing and able to go through some sort of intensive program of learning for greater depth and breadth in the whole field of archives. I am not here speaking of a program to familiarize the newly arrived person on the staff with immediate procedures but rather of the larger dimensions of the archivist's profession.

Summer institutes are, of course, an admirable way to attract new people to the profession and to bring others up to date in procedures. The earliest summer institutes, those at American University and at Columbia, have been followed by others. I am most familiar with that at my school, which is now in its fifth summer program. As our experience testifies, an institute of this sort will attract students from neighboring States and even from foreign countries. Let me speak of one more type of service for developing a keener understanding of the work of the profession as a whole: the regional symposium. The University of Denver, under the direction of the State Archivist, pioneered in this sort of program two summers ago. In connection with the centennial of the university, we held a 2-day "Rocky Mountain Region Archives and History Symposium," which brought together some 70 people as participants and speakers. It may be that we in the Rocky Mountain West have greater need for such a conference, but I believe that all who attended were inspired by the bringing together of western cattlemen, some local- and State-history writers, librarians, businessmen, teachers, theologians, railroad enthusiasts, and professional archivists. The theme, "The Responsibility of the Individual for Our Documentary Heritage," was in keeping with the overall theme of the university centennial.

We prepared a simple transcript of these proceedings, but in looking over the final form in which they were distributed, I won-

dered if proceedings from a number of such institutes might not have a very wide appeal and might not be published collectively from time to time. They certainly form the raw material of experience out of which some of our best new thinking comes.

New dimensions always imply directions, and for us at this time I believe these are three. Our best new thinking must first be inward, for the education of the individual archivist as a contributor to the profession is completely dependent on the finer values and discipline of the archivist himself. No system, so far as I know, can make up for their lack. The second direction must inevitably be outward; and here lies one of our greatest opportunities, in seeing new ways of tackling the proliferation of data—what Charles Francis Adams in speaking of the proliferation, already becoming great in his day, called being "bankrupted by our possessions," by their bewildering complexity and volume. The third direction is our duty to improve the quality of archival work. We are not yet, with all our gains, so good as we should be or, to put it in the form of the words of an old cowboy:

I ain't what I oughtta be,
And I ain't what I'm gonna be,
But I'm better than I wuz.

The record of the Society of American Archivists would seem to indicate that his sentiments could be echoed and, hopefully, surpassed.

I end on a note of urgency. As one historian among many who enjoy the rewards of your labors, I know that no great historian—Prescott on Spain, Motley on the Netherlands, Bolton on Mexico, Churchill on England—could have existed without the patient accumulations of the archivist. But if history teaches us anything, it is that the past is merely prolog and that the future is always new, different, and difficult. We cannot *train* people for it. To do so

nificent nucleus for action. But if we are to begin to produce the historian-archivist-librarian-scientist that we all see dimly on our intellectual horizon, we must begin now. We need more and we need better educated (more unconventional, if you will) archivists than we have ever had in the past. And we need them now. You are the only people to help us in the universities to see our way clearly to a solution of the problem. But you can do it. If I did not think so, I should not be so insistent, so concerned, or so hopeful.

Realization

A decision to recatalog an entire collection is not lightly made. This is particularly true when the card catalog has been prepared so meticulously as has the catalog for the [phonograph] record collection of the Illinois State Library. Automation, however, has brought a number of changes, among them the realization that while man may be the master, the machine is a rather inflexible servant.

—BETTY OHM, "Here's One for the Record," in *Illinois Libraries,* 47: 120 (Feb. 1965).

They Had His Number

Sir:

In reply to your letter of August 29, 1934, relative to the daily Treasury balance, you are advised that the Treasury Department issues on each work day a daily Treasury statement containing the Treasury balance. This balance and all other figures appearing on printed Treasury statements represent actual transactions on the books of the Treasurer of the United States, based on daily reports from Federal Reserve banks, etc. It is, of course, out of the question for this Department to make any changes therein, and it would, therefore, be absolutely impossible to use the number indicated by you as the balance on August 29, 1934.

You must realize that you are asking the Department to falsify its official records. No doubt you hold a lottery ticket containing that number, representing a chance in the so-called "numbers game," which ticket is illegal and represents a violation of the laws of your state and city. It is believed that the matter should be called to the attention of the proper local authorities.

—DIVISION OF BOOKKEEPING AND WARRANTS, Department of the Treasury, letter sent, Aug. 31, 1934, in National Archives, Record Group 56, General Records of the Department of the Treasury.