Archival Security: New Solutions to an Old Problem

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THE PROBLEM OF THEFT has plagued the keepers of irreplaceable records for generations, but there is cause for deep concern today because of the sharp increase in such losses during the past decade. Moreover, despite the evidence of the upward trend of archival theft, there is little evidence to show that the archival profession has either fully recognized the seriousness of the problem or that archivists are yet taking any concerted preventive action. It is certainly true that archivists have been most reluctant to publicize losses resulting from either theft or defacing of records. It is only through the public press, for the most part, and not professional literature, that the true dimensions of this problem come into clear focus.[1]

Theft from archives has now reached alarming proportions. During the past decade several hundred archives and libraries have been victimized and many others have been and did not report it. The recent loss of the Felix Frankfurter diaries and papers from the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress capped a series of thefts from that institution and led to a complete revamping of its security regulations.[2] The thefts of valuable archival materials from the University of Virginia, the Detroit Public Library, North Carolina State Archives, Texas State Archives, Wayne State University, Yale University, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Indiana State Library, Ohio Historical Society, Virginia State Archives, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and the National Archives demonstrate the dimensions of the problem.

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[1] The most definitive article on archival theft is James B. Rhoads, "Alienation and Thievery: Archival Problems," *American Archivist* 29 (April 1966):197–208.

[2] Ms. Carolyn Sung, head of the Reader Service Section of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, reported on the theft at the session on security at the SAA annual meeting in Toronto, October 4, 1974. At the same session Edmund Berkeley, Jr., curator of the Manuscripts Division, described the theft at the Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

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Ample evidence is available to suggest that this trend will continue. The Bicentennial celebration, with its emphasis upon early American history and statesmen, has already created a market for colonial and Revolutionary documents.[3] The widespread public coverage of Watergate and the attention given in the press to the estimated monetary value of the papers of former presidents has left its mark on the minds of many enterprising persons. Widespread unemployment and the underemployment of college-trained individuals make some ordinarily honest people turn to crime. Also, archivists must contend with a whole generation of researchers who equate archival and library rules with a form of authoritarianism and who have few qualms about bypassing and subverting such rules.

The internal administration of most archival institutions must also be considered. The size of contemporary archival collections, often in the tens of thousands of pieces, precludes item-by-item identification. Without controls it is difficult to determine if items are missing and to replevin or otherwise recover stolen material. The lack of even the most rudimentary security provisions in most archives is also a factor. The trust and respect of most archivists for researchers of high academic standing only exacerbate the security problem. Most archival administrators find it difficult to comprehend that their colleagues might be involved in stealing valuable historical records or are capable of theft. The number of recent violations of archival security, involving both staff members and part-time student assistants, should give cause for concern and for precautionary measures.

Equally perplexing is the reluctance, in some cases the outright refusal, of archivists to admit publicly that they have been victims of theft. For example, in a celebrated case a decade ago several archival institutions refused to admit that their institutions had been victimized, even though many of the recovered stolen documents bore conclusive identification of the ownership.[4] The rationale for such unprofessional behavior was based upon the fear of bad publicity which might jeopardize future acquisitions or, in some cases, reputations. Many archivists are unaware of the widespread evidence of theft and believe that their experience is unique.

The motives of those who steal archival materials are important in understanding the problem and in establishing measures to eliminate and discourage such crime. The desire for singular personal possession and enjoyment of a particular letter, document, or group of

[3] Targets for thieves in Virginia and other eastern states have been local courthouses and public offices. See: Kirby White, "Security of Archives and Manuscript Collections," *Virginia Phoenix* 6 (1973):9–15; and letter, Louis Manarin to author, November 30, 1973, in possession of the author.

[4] The case involved Robert Bradford Murphy and his wife, and will be explained in detail in later pages of this study. Several archival institutions refused to admit that they had lost documents despite irrefutable proof, including descriptions in NUCMC and ownership markings on stolen items. After the trial, several of these institutions "suddenly" discovered their losses and demanded immediate return of the missing documents.

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papers has been a dominant motive in a number of cases, just as is the obsession of an art collector to steal a rare painting and prevent others from viewing it. The theft of a valuable collection of Herman Hesse papers from the Humanities Division of the Purdy Library of Wayne State University in 1969 was motivated by the desire of the thief to enjoy sole possession of such papers. The person, when apprehended, candidly admitted his motives and reported that he had no intention of either selling the collection or allowing anyone to see the Hesse letters. He expressed utter contempt for librarians and archivists and charged they had no real appreciation of the intrinsic value of such "literary masterpieces."[5]

The theft of many John F. Kennedy letters from various archives in the months following his tragic death can be attributed to a similar motive. It is difficult to recover such stolen items because they are seldom placed in the hands of dealers or given to an archives.

The kleptomaniac also has been involved in archival thefts. To such an individual the challenge to steal successfully from an archives, especially one with strict security provisions, may be sufficient cause. There are examples of theft emanating from either open hostility or psychopathic aversion to a particular institution. The defacement of archival records by persons suffering from mental disorders is not uncommon. An archivist for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts once reported that he apprehended a former mental patient prying open a display case in the exhibit hall of the State Capitol in Boston so that he could sign his name next to that of John Hancock on an early colonial document.[6] Obviously, such deviant behavior is difficult to anticipate; however, archivists should be alert to either errant or strange behavior patterns of patrons.

Several archivists report that they have apprehended researchers "borrowing" items from an institution in order to make more convenient their study of them during the evening, weekend, or at other times. The justification given in such cases is that the limited hours of some archives have made productive use of research time impossible. The obvious question arises in the minds of many as to how often such "short term loans" become permanent.[7]

[5] Detroit city police made an agreement with the thief, Darwin Yarrish, a resident of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, in order to avoid lengthy extradition proceedings which might have resulted in the loss of the Hesse Collection. Yarrish returned the stolen Hesse manuscripts and the police dropped prosecution measures. One year later Yarrish was convicted of stealing an original autographed *Leaves of Grass* from the Rare Book Room of the University of Michigan. He had in his possession at the time of his capture several thousand books stolen from libraries in Ontario and Michigan. See *Antiquarian Bookman,* Nov. 23, 1970, p. 1562.

[6] The incident was reported by Richard Higgins at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in Rochester, New York, in October 1962.

[7] The State Historical Society of Wisconsin was the site of a theft several years ago involving a graduate student who had cut several hundred articles from valuable nineteenth-century periodicals in the society's library. He was in the process of destroying the articles when he was apprehended.

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Another motive seen in recent incidents of archival theft is the desire to purge the written record of specific data. It might be a genealogist who finds information conflicting with his own preconceptions, or a researcher who finds information refuting his hypothesis. In 1960 the author apprehended a researcher stealing from the university archives at Wayne State fifteen items relating to the activities of an admitted member of the Communist Party. The justification given was the need to protect the individual from reprisal. Within the past year the same institution obtained information from a researcher who excised from a document a statement alleging that the late Walter P. Reuther had been a member of the Communist Party. The person justified the action on the grounds that Walter Reuther should not get any credit for the contributions of the Communists. Fortunately, the archives had made an electrostatic copy of the defaced document for another researcher and thus could replace the original. This type of document defacement is more of a problem to archives housing contemporary and controversial documents, but it is by no means limited to such institutions. Because such items may have neither resale nor intrinsic value, it is difficult to guard against such action.

The major reason for theft from archives has been monetary gain, and there is little evidence that this motive will change. Especially prior to the 1934 establishment of the National Archives, tens of thousands of public documents were stolen or otherwise removed from public custody. Neglect, lack of understanding of the value of such records, and outright theft by public employees have been responsible. The increase in stamp and autograph collecting and the specialization of book and manuscript dealers have provided a ready market for such records. One needs only to review current book and manuscript catalogs or auction records to see the extent of the alienation of public records. Although book and manuscript dealers cannot and should not be held responsible for the extensive loss of public records, they do become an element in the whole problem of theft.

The recent theft of irreplaceable manuscripts, maps, and rare books from the Sterling Library at Yale University is a classic example of the profit motive. Between 1970 and 1972, two men who posed as Byzantine priests stole hundreds of books, maps, and manuscripts from the Yale and other university libraries. They sold these rare items to book dealers in Chicago and New York and were apprehended only after one of the dealers offered the Yale librarian one of the stolen items. According to the New York *Times,* the thieves planned to use the proceeds of the sales "to establish some kind of parish in Queens."[8]

The theft at Yale was minor compared to the activities of a couple, Robert Bradford Murphy and Elizabeth Irene Murphy, who were

[8] New York *Times,* 17 March 1973, pp. 1–4. In addition to Yale's losses, the FBI confiscated from the pair rare books stolen from libraries at the University of Chicago, University of Washington, Fordham University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, Indiana University, University of Notre Dame, and Manhattan College.

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active in the late 1950s and early 1960s. After several years of travels to the libraries and archives in the eastern half of the United States they were arrested in Detroit on January 2, 1963, and were indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of interstate transportation of stolen property and theft of government property. At the time of their arrest, Robert Bradford Murphy was wanted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Post Office Department, which had eleven outstanding indictments against him for mail fraud. The two-week trial in federal district court in June 1963, before Judge Thomas P. Thornton, ended in a guilty verdict for the Murphys, and each was sentenced to ten years in federal prison.

The Murphy case is especially important to archivists, librarians, and others concerned about theft. A great amount of information about their activities is available from the trial testimony and the investigation by the Post Office Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The information reveals the extent of their illicit activities, the methods of stealing archival materials, the sales of the stolen documents and books to dealers, collectors, and libraries, and the evidence required to build the case against them. Fortunately for the archival profession few cases can match the scope of the Murphy caper; few contain such lessons for archivists.

The records are sparse of Murphy's early life. He was born Samuel George Matz in Cleveland, Ohio, on January 10, 1918. He served in the U.S. Navy from 1935 to 1939, when he received a medical discharge. He was arrested for lewd cohabitation in Pocatello, Idaho, in 1947, his occupation listed as a poultryman. During the trial his wife testified that he was also a successful antiques dealer.[9]

Sometime in his life Murphy became interested in stamps, old coins, guns, and rare documents. In 1959, using the alias Colonel Andrew Barnett and living in Independence, Missouri, he persuaded the New York book dealer, Charles Hamilton, to lend him several presidential autographs. He failed to return them, and the Post Office issued an indictment against him.[10]

It is not known when the Murphys first became involved in theft of archival materials, but in November 1961, Murphy visited the Georgia Department of Archives and History and introduced himself as Dr. Robert Bradford Murphy, "an historian, writer and consultant in western history for the Library of Congress."[11] He reported that he

[9] FBI records included "Wanted" posters on Murphy, which gave details of his early life. Trial transcript, June 24, 1964.

[10] According to Charles Hamilton, the well-known New York book dealer, Robert Bradford Murphy, using the alias Colonel Andrew Barnett, swindled him out of "$500 worth of rare letters of Andrew Jackson, James Monroe and John Quincy Adams," in 1957. Hamilton gives a brief description of the Murphys and their activities in *Scribblers and Scoundrels* (New York: P.S. Eriksson, 1968), pp. 24–46. Hamilton's account of the activities and arrest of the Murphys is at some variance with FBI records, personal accounts of the federal agents involved, the trial testimony, and a New York *Times* story of September 26, 1963.

[11] The account of Murphy's visit to the Georgia Department of Archives and History

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was working on a book on lesser known Americans and asked for the original papers of Confederate leaders. After a few days of Murphy's charades and odd behavior, the archivists became suspicious and contacted the Library of Congress for identification. They were informed that no such person was either on the staff of or otherwise associated with the Library of Congress. The FBI was called in to observe Murphy, but no theft was observed. Some items had turned up missing, but only after the Murphys' arrest were the items from the Georgia Archives recovered.

On August 16, 1962, Murphy, posing as journalist R. O. Stanhope, preparing to write a history of Indiana, registered at the Indiana State Library in Indianapolis. Before he left, he had stolen several letters written by Senator Henry Clay, a number of Benjamin Harrison letters, and documents signed by Schuyler Colfax, Ulysses Grant, and other famous statesmen. The documents were among those recovered from Murphy at the time of his arrest and later proven to be the property of the Indiana State Library.[12]

The nation's capital was next on the Murphys' itinerary, the specific objective: the National Archives. On August 23, 1962, he registered as Dr. Robert Bradford Murphy at the National Archives as a journalist working on a book on "Famous Sons." He gave an Evanston, Illinois, address. His approach, now polished with practice, was very convincing. He posed as an eccentric and short-tempered writer, and often shouted at the archivists on duty in the reading room. Just as he had planned, the staff avoided him whenever possible. He differed from most of the researchers in another respect. According to testimony of the National Archives staff, he refused to use microfilm and insisted upon seeing the original records in the evening when they were serviced in a central research room rather than in the divisional research areas used during the day. The reason was obvious. Researchers were carefully supervised from nine to five, but in the evening one or two archivists had to service a large reading room. This gave Murphy an unusual opportunity. He called for the files of the attorney general, the U.S. Land Office, the Justice Department, the War and Navy Departments, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other major governmental units. He pilfered at will. He even searched the files being used by other researchers, after they had returned them to boxes on book trucks in the room.

For three weeks, Murphy fleeced the National Archives of its precious manuscripts. Judging from the recovered items, which represented only a sampling of stolen documents, he did his job well. He knew the market value of letters signed by presidents and other famous

was given by Mary Givens Bryan and is available in the trial transcript, June 17, 1964. For details of Murphy's visit, see also letter, Mary Givens Bryan to author, Jan. 27, 1974, in possession of the author.

[12] Mrs. Hazel Hopper testified about Murphy's visit to the Indiana State Library. She presented extensive proof of the library's ownership of the stolen Clay, Harrison, and Grant letters. Trial transcript, June 17, 1964.

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statesmen. James Monroe was one of his favorites; about fifty of the stolen items were letters handwritten by the fifth president. There were letters by Presidents John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Millard Fillmore, John Tyler, James Buchanan, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, U. S. Grant, Benjamin Harrison, Grover Cleveland, Herbert Hoover, and others. Other statesmen and well-known Americans among his selections were Lewis Cass, John Eaton, Stephen Decatur, Sam Colt, P. T. Barnum, William T. Sherman, and Hamilton Fish.

Most of these items were valuable for their autographs alone, prices for which ranged from $50 to $500 each; but in addition some were valuable because of their contents. The stolen James Monroe letters, for example, concerned important matters of state, relations with foreign countries, and the internal problems of the young nation. Each had great value—far in excess of that of the mere signature. The letters Murphy took from the Navy Department files were also of great historic value. Several were written by the famous naval heroes, Stephen Decatur and Edward Preble. One Decatur letter was written aboard the frigate *Chesapeake* in July 1807, just after the famous incident with H.M.S. *Leopard,* and tells of his preparations to defend Norfolk harbor from British attack. Attached was a manuscript map showing the location of the American ships in the harbor.[13]

Murphy last visited the National Archives, according to the archives' registration records, on September 12, 1962. In the weeks that followed, he traveled from Washington to Atlantic City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York City, apparently hoping to sell some of the stolen manuscripts. On September 27, 1962, Elizabeth Irene Murphy stopped at the shop of Charles Hamilton, the well-known New York dealer whom Robert Bradford Murphy had swindled in 1959, and introduced herself to Hamilton's secretary as Betty Palmer. She offered for sale three historic letters, one signed by Andrew Jackson, one by Andrew Johnson, and the third by U. S. Grant. The secretary explained that Hamilton was not in, and suggested that Mrs. Murphy leave the letters for Hamilton to appraise, and return for his decision later in the day. The secretary suspected that the letters were stolen and immediately notified the New York office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation which sent their agent, Joseph Chapman, to the store just

[13] The most challenging and difficult part of the government's case against Murphy was to prove that the recovered documents were once in the custody of a particular library or archives. Fortunately the National Archives had microfilmed records which were among the recovered items. For example, the Navy Department records were filmed in 1942 by the National Archives. By comparing those documents in Murphy's custody with the microfilm, the government was able to identify watermarks, ink spots, and other unique features. Murphy, who defended himself in the courtroom, maintained, with the support of several book dealers as defense witnesses, that it was commonplace for government officials to make more than one copy of an outgoing letter and therefore it was impossible to prove whether the documents in his possession were the originals or copies. Robert Bahmer, the deputy Archivist of the United States, gave an articulate and brilliant analysis of National Archives procedures, an analysis that had a most telling effect upon the jury. Trial transcript, June 18, 1964.

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before Mrs. Murphy returned. In the meantime, Hamilton had examined the letters and decided to offer $325. They were authentic and without other identifying marks. Besides, he knew their retail value was "in excess of $1000," he told a New York *Times* reporter.[14]

Agent Chapman followed the woman out of Hamilton's shop and engaged her and Murphy, whom she met a few blocks away, in conversation. Chapman posed as a collector himself and offered to buy any other documents she might have, thus saving the "middleman's cut." Murphy told the agent that his wife operated the "Betty Palmer Antique Shop" in Philadelphia and offered to meet Chapman there. Chapman tentatively identified the Murphys as the long-sought coin thieves, but thought he should first contact his office for a better description. He invited the Murphys to dinner and excused himself therefrom on the pretext of calling his wife. Instead, he called the Bureau, and verified the identification. When he returned, the couple had disappeared. Again they had barely escaped capture.

From New York, the Murphys returned to Washington and visited several book and manuscript dealers. On October 8, Murphy used the name Charles B. Williams, identified himself as an antique dealer from Frederick, Maryland, and approached Howard Wilcox, a second-hand book dealer. He offered Wilcox about 125 letters concerning Civil War espionage and explained that he had obtained them from a local estate. Murphy asked several hundred dollars for the set, but the crafty dealer paid only $125. Murphy accepted the offer, but insisted on cash payment and left the store. The dealer immediately called in a business client who was a Civil War collector. The friend, Walter Pforzheimer, a CIA agent and trustee of the Yale University Library, was overjoyed at such a find and purchased the lot.

After his return home that evening, Pforzheimer called Edwin Fishel, who was writing a book on Civil War espionage. Fishel took a look at the letters, turned to Pforzheimer, and said, "Walter, you have been duped. These letters were stolen from the National Archives. I used them there last month. Furthermore, I can prove it because I made a list of items in this collection and copied a number of the letters." Pforzheimer contacted the FBI immediately.[15]

By this time, October 10, 1962, officials of the National Archives were already counting up their losses. Shortly after Murphy completed his research at the archives, staff members noticed that nine folders of letters were missing from the attorney general's files. Fortunately, a Stanford University law professor had microfilmed most of this file in July 1962. The archives obtained his film, checked it against the remaining files, and found forty-two items, mostly James Monroe papers, missing. The items purchased by Charles Hamilton had come from this group.

Despite the magnitude of the theft, the National Archives neither

[14] New York *Times*, 26 Sept. 1963.
[15] Detroit *News*, 12 June 1964; trial transcript of June 11, 1964.

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publicized it nor notified other archivists and dealers. The Archives and the FBI believed that such disclosure might cause the thieves to destroy the precious documents. In fact, the loss was kept a secret to all but a few of the archives staff.

The travels of the Murphys for the next ten or eleven months after their Washington ventures are not known, but among the books and historical manuscripts recovered after their arrest were items identified as the property of institutions in Baltimore, Maryland; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; Columbus, Ohio; Tampa, Florida; South Bend, Indiana; Louisville, Kentucky; New Orleans, Louisiana; and other cities.

On November 3, 1963, the Murphys with their four children arrived in Detroit. They identified themselves as Ralph and Ruth McLafferty. Murphy made the rounds of local libraries, posing as a writer and demanding access to the rare book areas of the Detroit Public Library and Wayne State University. Somehow he succeeded, for among his belongings were several hundred books, as well as maps and engravings which had been torn from volumes in the Detroit Public Library and Wayne State University Library.

Mrs. Murphy, in the meantime, was busy selling stolen books and manuscripts to local libraries, archives, and dealers. It was as a result of a routine check on a diary which she offered to the Burton Historical Collection that the FBI was notified of the presence of the Murphys. Their arrest culminated years of pursuit by federal agents.[16]

In reviewing the background of the Murphys and other persons apprehended for theft of archival material, one recognizes that there is no single pattern or occupation involved. Bona fide researchers, students, and faculty members with impeccable credentials have been thieves. Con artists posing as scholars, book dealers, librarians, archivists, and even clergymen have been caught stealing.

The dictum "Trust no one" seems to have merit and should be applied even to staff members of archives and libraries. Some major thefts have been "inside jobs." The famous theft from the McCormick Theological Seminary of the Absolom Peters Collection of rare stampless letters involved a janitor who had access to the material after hours. More recently, in 1968, the manuscript curator of the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society was convicted of stealing manuscripts from his institution. There is strong evidence that many other major thefts have involved insiders.[17]

The role of book and manuscript dealers bears close scrutiny in the

[16] In addition to the six suitcases crammed with historical manuscripts and rare books, FBI agents found on Murphy's person receipts for the shipment of ten cartons sent to Chicago earlier in the day. The cartons, confiscated by the FBI, contained mostly books stolen from libraries in Detroit, Tampa, Louisville, and other cities.

[17] One of the earliest cases of theft that received national publicity involved two employees of the Library of Congress who were convicted in 1897 of stealing rare manuscripts from the Peter Force Collection. Included among the purloined pieces were George Washington's personal record of his service under Braddock in 1755 and his diary kept in the summer of 1787. See Fred Shelley, "Manuscripts in the Library of Congress: 1800–1900," *American Archivist* 11 (January 1948):11–14.

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whole matter of archival theft.[18] Evidence presented in many trials relating to such activities corroborates questionable ethics of some persons who make a living by selling historical manuscripts and books. Too often, a dealer's only concern is the item's authenticity, not its provenance. The testimony of a prominent dealer in the Murphy trial brought forth the admission that he saw "nothing wrong in buying stolen documents as long as it isn't obvious that they are stolen."[19]

In their defense, dealers have maintained that it is often impossible to determine whether a single document or a whole collection offered to them has been stolen. There is no registry of stolen archival items and it is even difficult, and sometimes impossible, to ascertain which archival institution has custody of a particular collection of papers of an individual or organization. In some cases, dealers have returned items to archives when it was discovered that the items had been stolen; but often legal action has been required to replevin stolen documents from dealers. Many believe that "caveat emptor" has become the motto of many dealers.

The modus operandi of archives thieves should be closely scrutinized in order to develop procedures to prevent and discourage such actions. There are many examples of thieves breaking into archives buildings or libraries to steal valuable items. In such cases thieves may either steal at random, or, if they are knowledgeable, first locate the valuable items. Oftentimes archival items on exhibit have been thieves' targets. The theft of the diary of Walt Whitman from the Detroit Public Library was accomplished by the mere removal of the cover from a display case, allowing the thief to lift the diary from its pedestal.[20]

Researchers have used different techniques, depending upon the nature of supervision in an archives, to steal. Thieves have admitted placing documents in folders or notebooks, in briefcases, and on their persons. A woman's handbag—often as large and heavy as a briefcase—has been used. Few agencies search briefcases carefully. Frisking either men or women is out of the question. Some federal agencies make careful briefcase searches of entering visitors, to guard against explosives and weapons, but seldom examine the same containers when the persons leave the premises.

One of the most bizarre and complicated thefts involved thieves who systematically visited a number of archives, courthouses, and libraries in the state of Texas in 1971. An "advance team" searched such institutions to locate and list valuable documents; others followed to

[18] The problem of dealers and collectors in relation to stolen manuscripts is set forth in James B. Rhoads, "Alienation and Thievery: Archival Problems," *American Archivist* 29 (April 1966):198–201.

[19] Trial transcript, June 19, 1964.

[20] This widely publicized theft, which library officials believed was an "inside" job, ended happily for all concerned when the diary was returned ten months later with a note: "I am sorry I didn't return it sooner." Detroit Public Library, Director's Office Files.

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steal; and dealers, who were also involved, sold the stolen wares throughout the United States.[21]

A team effort was involved in the theft of valuable historical manuscripts from the North Carolina State Archives in June 1974. Three young men, using aliases and posing as genealogists, stole eleven items before the theft was discovered.[22] False identities have been used by other manuscript thieves. Robert Bradford Murphy used various disguises—that of a University of Chicago history professor, a free-lance journalist, a consultant on western history for the Library of Congress, an art historian, and a Ford Foundation official. Both forged and stolen credentials have been used by Murphy and by other thieves.[23]

Educated and well-informed persons, within and outside of the archival profession, are asked the following questions more and more frequently: How could the theft of archival materials be so widespread? How could it happen? Are not archivists to blame for this alarming increase in such theft? These questions are valid, and even though there are logical reasons to absolve the archivist from complete blame, it is apparent that the profession must bear some responsibility. It is obvious that concerted action must be taken on a nationwide basis to combat theft of archival material.

On the basis of an analysis of many recent thefts, several immediate steps can be taken by archives. First, more careful scrutiny must be given the persons hired to work in an archives or having access to the premises, from the director to the maintenance employees. Too often, appointments are made without even a cursory check of letters of reference of the job applicant. Nor are thorough interviews always given to prospective employees to determine if they are also private collectors in the same subject area as the archives or library. Post-employment checks are often

[21] Austin *Statesman,* 11 August 1971; Houston *Chronicle,* 17 June 1972, 23 June 1972, 28 July 1972, and 17 September 1972. John Kinney, of the State Archives of Texas, has studied this case, and it is discussed in his paper, "Archival Security and Insecurity"; see below, pp. 493–97.

[22] According to Paul Hoffman, head of the Archives Branch of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, the thieves were apprehended after some of the stolen documents appeared in a New York dealer's auction announcement. They were tried in North Carolina courts in March and April 1975. The ringleader was convicted of "conspiracy and handling of stolen goods" and sentenced to two years in jail. The other two thieves received one and two year jail terms. The archives is still trying to recover the stolen items, now in private collections.

[23] According to the investigation by the Post Office Department, the Murphys, in their travels in the eastern and central parts of the United States, used a number of aliases. Among them were: Jerome W. Kane, Dr. J. Webster Kane, Wayne E. Martin, Bradley M. Armstrong, Robert Benson, Col. Andrew Barnett, Louise Murphy, John Adams, Robert Williams, Ashbrook Adams, Dr. Michael Anderson, William Van Kirk, John Walker, Ashland Adams, and Frank Murphy (U.S. Post Office Department, Case Numbers 11256–F, 11419–F, 24381–F, 29868–F, 33387–F, 22523–F, 22584–F, 30585–F, and 36975–F). Mrs. Murphy admitted using many of the aliases when she testified at the trial. Trial transcript, June 24, 1964.

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justified if there is evidence of missing items, even though such reviews must be handled fairly, discreetly, and professionally.[24]

Some archives have adopted strict rules of access to certain storage areas both during and after hours. The archives of Wayne State University has rules, for example, providing that janitorial and maintenance staff are allowed in the archives only during regular working hours and under staff supervision. This practice is in contrast to other university units, including the main library which schedules such work at night and on weekends when the facilities are closed to staff and patrons. The same archival institution has prohibited access to the archives stack area by the campus security officers. This provision has engendered some resentment on the part of the campus police, but it is considered justified.

The credentials and identification of all researchers should be carefully reviewed by archivists. Some archives require at least two pieces of identification, usually a driver's license and student or faculty ID. A letter of reference, written by a student's faculty advisor in advance of a visit, is often requested. Frequently, archivists will call another institution to confirm that a researcher is either employed or enrolled there. This action has often revealed a researcher using false credentials.

Once proper identity has been established it is desirable to explain to researchers the archives rules governing the use of collections. These regulations should be available in written form for the researcher to study, and a copy signed by the researcher should be kept on file. A list of all collections used by the researcher—either at the container, folder, or individual item level—should be made and maintained. Such information is invaluable for tracing missing or stolen items as well as for determining the frequency of use of a particular part of a collection.

Many archives are now restricting the wearing apparel, briefcases, and other materials which may be brought into the reading room. The Newberry Library in Chicago and the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, for example, provide lockers and facilities for researchers to check their coats, briefcases, purses, and other such items. Notepaper, with holes punched around the edges, is provided for researchers at the Library of Congress; at the University of Texas in Austin, the Humanities Research Center provides colored paper for note taking. Within reading rooms, some institutions limit a researcher to one container or folder at a time and require that items be checked out.

Surveillance of researchers ranges from personal supervision of a reading room to two-way mirrors and closed circuit television. The use of the latter equipment, even though not monitored continuously, will cut down theft, according to some law enforcement officials. Although

[24] The investigation of the theft from the University of Virginia involved a complicated legal matter—the question of whether staff members would be required to take polygraph tests. The Society of American Archivists will undoubtedly be asked to review the matter of such tests in the future.

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vigorously opposed by some researchers as an invasion of their privacy, the use of such devices may be justified in order to provide optimum security for the archival collections.[25]

Some archives allow researchers to use archival materials without any supervision, and even assign private carrels to researchers. But this practice is being reevaluated by archivists. Many archivists have regretted the precedent of providing office space for faculty or special friends of the archives. Such special service often becomes a status symbol and other researchers with similar credentials request comparable treatment and have become irate and hostile if their requests are turned down.

Another deterrent to theft is the practice of marking archival materials with a stamp or other identifying notation. A few archives and libraries use an invisible mark which can be seen only under ultraviolet light. Unfortunately the cost of marking large collections is so substantial that many institutions have been unable to follow this practice except on a selective basis. Moreover, many archivists are reluctant to mark original documents on the basis that it constitutes alteration or defacement of the original.[26]

The microfilming and copying in other forms of archival collections is a deterrent to theft, just as the existence of multiple copies serves to discourage the purging of embarrassing information from the record. The Dominion Archivist of Canada, for example, reported a case in which a researcher admitted she had decided not to steal a document deeply embarrassing to her family, after she discovered it had been microfilmed.[27] Many institutions substitute copies of valuable individual items and store the originals in vaults and other secure places to discourage theft.

In addition to procedures to discourage theft of archival materials, each archives should have a carefully prepared contingency plan to deal with the apprehension of thieves, or to notify the authorities that a theft has taken place. The plan, of course, must be consistent with the institution's policies and procedures and with local laws and ordinances governing such thefts. In developing such a plan, certain questions might be asked. For example, what action should be taken if the

[25] A number of archives and libraries are using electronic surveillance systems, closed circuit television, and other devices to monitor reading rooms, stack areas, and other remote sections of buildings. The University of Texas at Austin utilizes television systems to monitor the lobby, loading dock, and the exhibit area where valuable items are on display. The library of Tulane University has a camera viewing the Reading Room of the Special Collections Division. According to Robert Patterson, assistant director for collection and development and head of special collections at Tulane, the physical presence of the camera acts as a deterrent to theft. Patterson to Thornton W. Mitchell, Sept. 24, 1974.

[26] According to James Rhoads, "it would take 5,000 man-years and would cost $20,000,000 to stamp . . . the more than two and one-half billion pieces of paper in the National Archives." "Alienation and Thievery: Archival Problems," *American Archivist* 29 (April 1966):206.

[27] Robert Gordon, Public Archives of Canada, letter to author, Sept. 1965.

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archivist sees a researcher either stealing or defacing a document? Should the archivist apprehend the suspected thief or should he call the police? Should the thief be apprehended on the spot by the archivist, or do local ordinances require that the thief leave the building before he can be apprehended for theft? What if the accused denies that he has stolen anything? Can he be searched without violating his rights? What if he alleges that he took the document by mistake, or for the purpose of copying it in another part of the building? It is obvious that a careful plan of action, understood by the archives staff, is essential.

There are other issues involved that require careful consideration. What if a researcher admits his guilt and even signs a written confession? Under what conditions is such a confession valid? What is the next step for the archivist to take? Does he bring charges in a criminal suit? Does the archivist notify the college or university at which the thief is a faculty member or graduate student? Should or can the archival institution bar the thief from ever using the archives again? There is little unanimity among archivists on these sensitive legal and ethical issues. Many archivists refuse to admit, either to themselves or to their colleagues, that their institutions could be the victims of such theft, and, therefore, there is no need for a plan of action. But even more disturbing has been the response of some archivists who, in order to avoid adverse publicity, refuse either to prosecute thieves or attempt to recover stolen documents.

Up to this point we have dealt with archival thefts and the problems related to their prevention and detection. It is obvious that the problem is national and even international in scope and that a carefully planned program is a necessity. What are the elements of a program to facilitate the recovery of stolen items and to publicize theft and the operation and methods of thieves? A "Registry of Stolen or Missing Archival Materials" seems to be the most appropriate mechanism for dealing with the problem. Since the registry would need the strong backing of the archival profession to be successful, the Society of American Archivists, which represents archivists from the United States, Canada, and other American countries, seems to be the logical base for such an office. The registry would provide a number of services to the profession. It would act as a clearinghouse for information on archival theft. Archives, dealers, collectors, and others would submit to the registry offices lists of stolen or missing items. The registry would include all relevant information about the material and the nature of the theft. Pertinent information known about suspected thieves, subject to proper legal safeguards, would be assembled. The items would be indexed and described according to identifying features, ownership, method and approximate date of theft, and other known information. The names of dealers or collectors involved in buying or selling stolen archival material would be gathered, and promulgated if appropriate. The participating archives

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might place restrictions upon the use and promulgation of such information, since it is possible that an archival institution might want no publicity whatsoever about a theft. The reasons for silence might range from a concern that the thief may destroy the stolen material if he learned that its loss had been discovered, to the archival institution's wish to avoid embarrassment at the loss.

The registry would be available to archivists, librarians, dealers, private collectors, organizations, and others who have a legitimate interest in determining if particular items have been reported stolen or missing. Although an item's absence from this registry does not mean that it was not stolen, the listing at least would provide some means of publicizing theft.

A second feature of this proposed program is publication of a "Newsletter" at least six times a year announcing major thefts, lists of missing items, and other data relating to the problems of archival security.[28] The modus operandi of known criminals, their photographs and other identifying information, court trials, and data on security systems might also appear in this newsletter, the distribution of which should be as wide as possible and should certainly include private dealers and collectors, historical and library organizations, and regional archival groups.

A consultant service similar to the one sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History for museums would also be a function of the registry office. Under such a plan, experts on the subject of security systems and hardware would be made available to archival institutions needing assistance. Consultants would be available also to assist archival institutions in the review and development of internal controls over researchers and archival reading rooms. Such an advisor would have to have a legal background and knowledge of local ordinances and laws relating to theft. These consultants and services would be most helpful to the smaller archival institutions which do not have the professional staff nor the financial resources to obtain such assistance.

A final product of a proposed SAA-sponsored security program would be the preparation and publication of either a manual or a series of monographs relating to security. These would aid professional archivists, especially those with little familiarity and experience with the subject of theft and related topics. The sponsorship of regional workshops and seminars directed to the security programs should also be given consideration as a part of an overall educational program.

The cost of operating a Registry of Stolen or Missing Archival Material would be considerable, and at the present time probably

[28] In January 1975, the first issue of a new publication, *Library Security Newsletter,* appeared. It is a bimonthly newsletter "devoted to book and periodical theft prevention in libraries, fire hazards, vandalism and willful mutilation, pilferage, preservation of materials and related aspects of library security." It is published by Haworth Press, Inc., 130 West 72nd St., New York, New York 10023.

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beyond the resources of the Society of American Archivists.[29] Outside financial support from foundations, government grants, or other sources seems the logical requirement. It will take a major effort to inaugurate such a program, but it would certainly be worthwhile.

[29] Acting on the recommendation of the SAA Council, Ann M. Campbell, the executive director, applied to the National Endowment for the Humanities for a grant to underwrite the costs of the establishment of a comprehensive security program. The grant has been approved by the NEH.

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