Toward National Archival Priorities: A Suggested Basis for Discussion

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THE ARCHIVAL PROFESSION faces major tasks and decisions in several areas: automated systems and subject access; collecting and appraisal in relation to intellectual control and records management; education and training; and archives as part of information science. The importance of some of these areas has been acknowledged by the appointment in recent years of appropriate *ad hoc* committees or task forces by the Council of the Society of American Archivists. But this does not mean that there is general agreement on what the next steps should be.

In the final chapter of a book entitled "Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis"[1] (to be published by the University of Washington Press in 1982), I raise what I see to be the crucial issues in these four areas. This article is based on that chapter; it suggests questions archivists must ask as we try to come to terms with our mixed traditions and achieve consensus on national priorities.

Two archival traditions have prevailed: the historical manuscripts tradition (HMT) and the public archives tradition (PAT). The HMT was dominant until 1960, and since then the PAT has gained ascendancy. The HMT was shaped by two factors: the collecting of the accidental documentary remnants of the remote past, and an orientation to item control instead of control of items as integral members of record series. (In the latter case the general subject character of the item is implicit in its association with the other items in the series.) But the HMT was fated to deal with items as items because only rarely

[1]In the book the author modifies and extends many points made in "Arrangement and Description: Some Historical Observations," *American Archivist* 41 (April 1978):169-81.

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were series ever collected intact.[2] The nature of the collecting of manuscripts and of the methods for their intellectual control were in harmony. Later, when repositories turned to collecting the more integral records and papers of the recent past, the sheer mass of paper defied techniques of control that were concerned with single items rather than items as parts of a collection. In the 19th century, when the HMT took root, the only systematic method of intellectual control was that provided by librarianship. What documents were collected had usually been separated from other records with which they had originally been linked. They normally came under some form of library administration, either in a historical society or library. Preconceived classification schemes that had originated in the library field were applied to give the collected items an apparent unity they lacked. Items were usually grouped by subject and arranged chronologically within each group, and cataloging was done directly from an examination of the manuscripts themselves. If calendaring was the goal—and it usually was—the items would be arranged and listed chronologically, the listing accompanied by a synopsis. A proliferation of finding aids resulted: catalogs, calendars, shelf lists, special subject indexes, and other aids. Moreover, this array of finding aids could not be approached from a single access point such as a union catalog; each aid stood on its own.

After World War II major manuscript repositories began collecting manuscripts of recent origin. State archives, following the lead of the National Archives, became more oriented toward contemporary records and applied techniques of records management to assure their integral character. Major manuscript repositories borrowed heavily from concepts and techniques that were being developed at the National Archives. They were forced to borrow from the PAT because the HMT was item-oriented and thus incapable of dealing effectively with the extensive, integrally related manuscript collections they were acquiring. This amalgamating process led manuscript curators successively to accept the principle of provenance as the basis of arrangement, the series concept as the main unit of control, and finally, in the 1970s, the concept of a hierarchy of record levels over which controls would be established progressively, beginning at the record group/accession level and ending at the item level. This concept of establishing progressively refined controls had its beginnings in the United States with Waldo Gifford Leland in 1909[3] and was expanded by the National Archives staff after the reforms of its finding aids system that began in 1941.

Knowledge of these archival traditions makes it possible to view pressing archival problems of the present in both an historical and a theoretical context that can in turn provide a basis for determining national archival priorities.

Automated Systems and Subject Access

Our earlier preoccupation with traditional cataloging and the card catalog format has obfuscated an objective analysis of the whole array of finding

[2]See Lucile M. Kane, "Manuscript Collecting" (pp. 29–48), and Philip G. Bauer, "Public Archives in the United States" (pp. 49–76), in William B. Hesseltine and Donald R. McNeil, eds., *In Support of Clio: Essays in Memory of Herbert A. Keller* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1958). Chapter 1 in Kenneth Duckett's *Modern Manuscripts* (Nashville: American Association for State & Local History, 1975) is also useful. Duckett's book is fully within the HMT.

[3]Waldo G. Leland, "American Archival Problems," in American Historical Association, *Annual Report, 1909* I:346–47.

aids and their relationships: what they are and what they might become. Traditional cataloging has led to the separation of the technique itself from the total process of control that begins with accessioning and ends with description. Such automated library networks as the Ohio College Library Center (OCLC, now called On-line Computer Library Center) and the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN) represent a continuation of the HMT. *Anglo-American Cataloging Rules* (AACR) is intended to ease the way toward the use of these automated systems, but these rules seriously restrict the adaptability of these networks to the cataloging of modern manuscript collections. In following AACR, one uses the whole collection as the source of cataloging information. In other words AACR is in the HMT because cataloging is done from the actual manuscripts and not from a control device, such as an archival inventory, that records each successive stage of control. Archivists should be wary of becoming locked into automated systems without deciding what the source of cataloging information is to be and what level of detail a national system should be prepared to handle. If these library networks cannot handle archival data that are hierarchically arranged according to record levels and are progressively brought under control, the expenditure might be a complete waste.

Analysis of fundamentals is needed before major commitments of resources are made. For example, such pilot projects as that for President Edmund E. Day's papers at Cornell University and the BRISC project[4] proceed directly to file unit analysis without having first taken advantage of the information that is provided by the provenance method. These experiments ignore the cost-beneficial results that the provenance method provides in a self-accessing manner, and they closely resemble features of calendaring, a technique that has been considered antiquated since about 1950. If scale alone is considered, it is highly doubtful that these pilot projects are relevant. To become even moderately effective in dealing with the archives of 20th-century society, pilot projects like these must move into the records management field. They must become part of the files management process, devising useful file titles and standard entries for proper names instead of passively accepting and coping with what they find when records are received in the archives. Neither of these two pilot projects even takes this aspect of the problem into account, although in each of them dissatisfaction is expressed about the descriptors with which they had to deal.

Archivists should also postpone a decision about automated systems until we have more fully considered the feasibility of and need for on-line access.[5] At the national level, do we need to provide users with as much information as the repository has established for any or all of its holdings? Perhaps yes, perhaps no; but the question should be addressed. For example, because of their

[4]See H. Thomas Hickerson, Joan Winters, and Venetia Beale, *SPINDEX II at Cornell University* (Ithaca: Cornell University Libraries, 1976), especially pages 35–49. For a critique of the relationships between manual and automated systems, see Lydia Lucas, "Efficient Finding Aids: Developing a System for Control of Archives and Manuscripts," *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981): 21–26; Richard H. Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: I. Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Winter 1980): 64–75; and Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: II. Report of an Experiment Comparing Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Spring 1980): 191–207.

[5]Critics of SPINDEX object that the system is off-line. But SPINDEX has its defenders. See *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981): 5–7, for a debate among David Bearman, Nancy Sahli, and Frank Burke.

smaller compass, statewide and regional networks might permit faster progress in recording data from series and file unit levels than would networks that depend on the initiative of a central national office. Many repositories can provide access to a substantial number of their accessions at file unit level for on-site users. They can input this data into statewide and regional networks directly, in the way that the Washington statewide records survey project and the Midwest State Archives Project are now doing. This same degree of access should be considered in an automated system at the national level when a national network is prepared to handle data below the collection/record group level. A manual equivalent of this is achieved now when copies of inventories are sent to off-site users who respond to information they derive from NUCMC or other union catalogs and subject guides. At the repository level, it would seem shortsighted and not cost-effective to feed data into a program that cannot handle data below the accession level, and to do this simply because a terminal for that program is conveniently available. Also, can archival data be mixed with publications data when the reference terms imply something quite different for each category? And, as the quantity of data from archival finding aids is much larger than that for regular library materials, how much of the archival data can be accommodated without constituting an overload of the system? My impression is that in archival history, a fear of overloading the catalog is what limited its role as a finding aid and denied to it a comprehensive integrative function in the manner of a union catalog. Decisions about automated programs should be made with deliberate speed, but with an emphasis on deliberation. Consensus on construction of the manual systems that are to be automated must precede the adoption of automated systems.[6] This proscription does not preclude experimentation of the type now in progress with SPINDEX. There is, however, an element of finality about inputting data into OCLC or RLIN that ought to be guarded against if joining the network means a long-term commitment of resources that might better be conserved until the issue has been examined more fully.

For progress in the matter of subject terms, for example, we must accept a pace that proceeds by record levels instead of skipping to content analysis at the file unit level. Present practice in subject analysis is too undisciplined to be usefully continued, unless a larger purpose can be served, such as a general thesaurus. In proceeding by record levels, primary subject characteristics down to the subgroup level should be noted first; these are relatively easy to establish. It is at the subgroup level that provenance is most helpful in implying subject matter acted upon. To provide topical subject access effectively, a thesaurus of primary subject terms for each archival field might be developed: one set of terms for state and local public records, one for college and university archives, one for business archives, and other sets of terms unique to other archival fields. A composite of all these primary topical subject terms could constitute the basic list of subject terms. Experience with establishing these lists for all archival fields should be instructive for establishing lists for use at the series level. To deal systematically with these problems will

[6]The SAA's National Information Systems Task Force is currently dealing only with the problem of formatting information. It has not yet addressed the fundamental issue of whether the actual manuscripts or the finding aids are to be cataloged. And, among finding aids, it has not yet been agreed that the inventory should be the control document.

require attention to indexing languages and thesaurus construction. As a guide, Dagobert Soergel's pioneering work will provide a good starting point.[7]

This raises the general issue of subject access. Subject access is the heart of the problem. The different modes of subject access ought to be more clearly recognized. As Richard H. Lytle indicates, provenance itself provides a high degree of self-access to orderly papers and records.[8] The name of the record creator, whether a person or corporate entity, private or public, implies something about the subject matter acted upon. For example, in the records of the Forest Service we can expect to find an array of forest resources subject matter. Subject content at this level does not depend on content analysis for its revelation; it is implied without such analysis. An inventory will record the arrangement of record series, along with a brief series description if one is needed. Relationships among series, and of the file units comprising them, can be studied in an inventory. For example, if there are gaps in a correspondence series but none in the minutes, then the minutes can be searched for information missing from the correspondence. If the minutes refer to a relevant subject report, then the inventory of the report series can be checked to see whether it is present. If there are subject series—and in most 20th-century collections they abound—the series description or file unit headings can be checked for clues. Characteristics of a series are made known by describing, in an inventory format, the order of the file units that comprise the series. This process represents description according to provenance. Provenance in this context serves as an inferential system of information, and this usage conforms to Lytle's meaning when he distinguishes between the provenance and content indexing methods of subject retrieval.[9] At each successive level of control there is a higher probability that the information being sought is there. This probability depends on the record level from which it is derived; if it is derived from the file unit level the reference will carry a higher predictability of success in the search than it would if the term had been derived from a subgroup description. The content indexing method should be employed only with an awareness of what kind of information is needed that the provenance method has not revealed, and only when there is a high probability both that the information is there and that it is needed. If the information is not needed, it would seem to be unnecessarily expensive to extract it.

Another mode of subject access also takes advantage of two elements that are given. One element is provenance, and the other is the methods users employ in approaching manuscript collections and archives. This mode recognizes that users normally will have done background reading about their chosen subject before approaching archival sources. In the course of this reading users will have associated proper names with the topical subjects of interest. In this way users provide their own mode of subject access; the repository can take advantage of this by maximizing its control over proper names to provide users with a higher degree of precision in their search.[10] This is relatively easy if at least some of the records are arranged

[7]Dagobert Soergel, *Indexing Languages and Thesauri: Construction and Maintenance* (Los Angeles: Melville Publishing Co., 1974).

[8]Richard H. Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: I. Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Winter 1980): 70–71.

[9]*Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

[10]To my knowledge I am the only archivist to have incorporated this proper name-subject linkage into a finding aid system; it is a cornerstone of the University of Washington system.

alphabetically. Provenance is less helpful as a self-accessing method where files are arranged chronologically. To reveal proper names in such arrangements requires analysis of the files themselves for their primary content, including proper names. In all of this it is important to recognize the complementary relationship of the provenance and content indexing methods. Hindsight provides a lesson here. If the disciplined standards of "describable item cataloging," as outlined by Sherrod East in 1953 and Ken Munden in 1956, had been broadly practiced since 1956, we would now be in firm command of the problem, instead of having to start almost from scratch.[11] East and Munden placed item cataloging within the framework of establishing progressively refined controls.

Collecting and Appraisal in Relation to Intellectual Control and Records Management

The persistent inability of archivists and manuscript librarians to process and describe papers and records of recent origin for effective access has adversely affected collecting and collection development. Arrangement and description have too long been harnessed to expensive cataloging principles; this has contributed to the lag in collecting of contemporary archival documentation. Traditional cataloging has not only been expensive, but its undisciplined character has made it relatively unreliable as a method for providing comprehensive access. While granting that lack of proper storage is a second major factor in retarding collection development, the primitiveness of our methods for intellectually controlling materials of recent origin has been a strong primary inhibitor in its own right.[12]

There is a definite relationship at another level between intellectual control and collecting of contemporary archival documentation. Effective standards of appraisal are essential if we are to pursue our mission of collecting all that is worth preserving. Yet these standards depend upon a qualitative assessment of the documentation already in archival custody. Qualities in papers or records are hidden by the way they are arranged and described. We need to be aware of significant gaps in the collected data if those gaps are to be filled in. We need to know where collected series leave off so that we can insure their continuation. We need to know the quality of archival sources in custody, how they have been used, and their potential not only for continued use but for new uses—e.g., for other categories of scholars, different research methods, and for more uses in administration. Above all, we must work to minimize the element of chance in collecting, and move into more systematic collection development, following the lead recommended by Mary Lynn McCree in defining collecting objectives.[13] In this, the goal should be nationwide archival coverage, and the various archival societies should take the lead in coordinating this collecting activity. Coverage must aim at comprehen-

[11]See Sherrod East, "Describable Item Cataloging", *American Archivist* 16 (October 1953): 291-304; and Ken Munden, "Cataloging Rules in the Departmental Records Branch," *American Archivist* 19 (October 1956): 291-302.

[12]A hidden factor is a psychological one associated with the false notion that only old or rare documents qualify as "historical." In reality any current papers or records having potential archival value are historical and researchable.

[13]Mary Lynn McCree, "Good Sense and Good Judgment: Defining Collections and Collecting," *Drexel Library Quarterly* 11 (January 1975): 21-33.

siveness in scope, and at consecutiveness for major archival series within record groups and manuscript accessions.

As an accompaniment to these considerations, we must be more selective about what we acquire. Collecting is initially an appraisal decision. Standards of appraisal are crucial to the implementation of this goal. We must decide what to keep and what to destroy. For archival documentation to be as authoritative as it should be, it must not only be comprehensive in scope and consecutive in sequence, but it must exclude useless and/or minimally useful series and file units. Historians and those from other academic disciplines, administrators, and individuals who depend upon archival sources will be handicapped to the extent that this larger goal is not accomplished. However, all those who create, work with, or use archival sources need to engage in the appraisal process together, each bringing his or her perspective to bear upon the documentation requiring evaluation. In addition to historians who use traditional methods of research, those who employ techniques of quantitative analysis must be involved. Similarly, other kinds of users, both actual and potential, need to be identified and brought into the decision-making process. The professional organizations, whose constituents either are major users of archives or are concerned with their collecting and organization for use, ought to become involved in the appraisal process. At a minimum, those professional associations that represent historians, political scientists, public administrators, records managers, archivists, and librarians ought to join the effort.

Machine-readable records in particular need attention because they are being produced in enormously increasing volume and there are few programs set up to deal with them as archives. Those series that are archival in quality can be identified at their creation and be earmarked for archival retention. In appraising machine-readable records, records managers will have to be consulted and coordination with them will need to be undertaken systematically.[14]

Apart from the matter of machine-readable records, archivists who are not responsible for overall records management at their institutions need to work closely with the people who are assigned that responsibility if they are to assure the preservation of archival records. Institutional archives depend upon close articulation with records management. Like machine-readable records, other archival record series need to be identified in records schedules so that they can be scheduled for either archival review or definite retention. In an institution that has an archives but no records management program, the archivist should seek to establish records management, preferably under archival control, so that a layer of administration is not imposed between the archivist and the records. The degree to which records management is influenced by archivists will largely determine the quality of the archives. Special librarians should do the same for the institutions they serve if there is no archivist.

Active involvement in records management is essential to the archivist's mission; records management is fundamentally a system of appraisal and it

[14]See Charles M. Dollar, "Appraising Machine-Readable Records," *American Archivist* 41 (October 1978): 423–30.

should be developed within that frame of reference.[15]

Education and Training

We archivists, manuscript curators, librarians, and historical society administrators would have functioned better in the past if we had all been formally trained either for archival work or at least in an appreciation of what it entails. To review the literature on archival training and education is disheartening. Who should undertake the training, the historical profession or schools of librarianship? The American Historical Association (AHA), the Organization of American Historians (OAH), and the American Library Association (ALA), representing their respective professions, have until recently almost completely ignored their responsibilities in this matter. The question, however, is not only the persistent one of who is to teach the subject, but, even more important, how it can be taught most effectively. Although the specific components will vary in accordance with the local situation, it is crucial that the historical perspective be taught, in particular for its value in collection development, appraisal, and reference service. Archival methodology has not been of central interest to historians, but it must receive primary attention if the advantages of an historical perspective are to be fully implemented in the archival context. The value of the historical perspective for the archivist is in improving his or her ability to bring researchers and their sources together, as Robert Warner suggested in 1972; this is preferable to Samuel F. Bemis's view that archivists should primarily be historians.[16]

Substantially all archivists, manuscript curators, and manuscript librarians (including the author) have taught themselves while learning the job. Most come from backgrounds in librarianship and/or history. Entering as neophytes, most have concentrated on learning the then current state of the archival art; the present state of confusion and disarray suggests what the earlier conditions were like. Too few have raised themselves above narrow mastery of mere techniques borrowed from myriad institutional settings. As a result, the literature has lacked general relevance, and we have muddled through. Acquiescence to the prevailing conditions has been typical. As an example, it took about two generations for the concept of different record levels to become part of our common language, and even now too few really know how to translate this recognition into actual

[15]In trying to establish a system that would assure the retention of archival records and the routine disposal of non-archival records, the National Archives invented records management. At its core this system has been concerned with files management at the point of operations, and with the scheduling of records for disposal or retention. In the later 1940s the staff saw the need for regional archives and records centers to implement the program. Records centers were established, beginning in the early 1950s, and archival components were added to them beginning in 1969. These are the three key elements of the appraisal system; most other elements in the spectrum of records management functions are intended to support these elements.

[16]See Samuel F. Bemis, "The Training of Archivists in the United States," *American Archivist* 2 (July 1939): 154–61, and Robert M. Warner, "Archival Training in the United States and Canada," *American Archivist* 35 (July/October 1972): 347–49. The *American Archivist* 31 (April 1968) is particularly useful for the historical information provided by the authors: Houston G. Jones, "Archival Training in American Universities"; Theodore R. Schellenberg, "Archival Training in Library Schools"; and John C. Colson, "On the Education of Archivists and Librarians." Two 1979 articles carry the debate to the present: Lawrence J. McCrank, "Prospects for Interpreting Historical and Information Studies in Archival Education," *American Archivist* 42 (October 1979): 443–55; and Nancy Peace and Nancy Fisher Chudacoff, "Archivists and Librarians: A Common Mission, a Common Education," *American Archivist* 42 (October 1979): 456–62. McCrank would rely on instructors in librarianship to teach archival management, while Peace and Chudacoff would make cataloging the cornerstone of archival courses.

levels of control; an example of this lack of understanding is the slow progress of the National Information Systems Task Force and the debate about AACR2. If archival education had been formalized like that of other professions, the quality of the professional literature would undoubtedly have been higher. An academic program would not only have prepared most for a vocation, but would also have provided for the necessary continuing interaction between the practitioners and their teachers. The teachers, with their graduate students, could pursue problems that practitioners face daily but have little time to resolve with the needed care. This kind of interaction and research are what academic status for the subject would bring about. Without such status there is no reason to believe that the future will be different from the past.

There are encouraging signs, however. Both the history and library professions are awakening to the opportunities for a role in archival education. The AHA and the OAH are well on the way toward training aspiring historians for such nonacademic careers as archival work. Also, individual library schools[17] are responding with archival management courses, preparing recruits to librarianship for archival work, but the ALA is not involved in this effort. The kind of organizational leadership that characterizes the history field is lacking in the library field. Perhaps the initiative being exercised by these few library schools will stimulate the ALA finally to assume greater responsibility than it has since the "halcyon" days of 1937–40, when August F. Kuhlman and his Archives and Libraries Committee were trying in vain to activate ALA's interest.[18] There is a real possibility that this will happen as a result of the basic reorientation that is leading the library field to encompass all aspects of information control and access.

The role of the SAA in archival education has been largely peripheral. Lacking an academic link, the SAA has, for the most part, substituted archival workshops, beginning in 1964 with one-day sessions that were cosponsored by NARS and local institutions. After the SAA secretariat was established, education became a more definite program. The SAA's *Basic Manual Series,* which began in 1977, is intended to provide building blocks for the education process. Some are excellent, some are inadequate, and some are not really manuals.[19]

More recently the SAA has considered accreditation as a means of influencing

[17]The University of Wisconsin, Wayne State University, and Case-Western Reserve University are examples.

[18]A.F. Kuhlman headed the ALA's Archives and Libraries Committee, 1937–40. He organized annual meetings that brought together manuscript librarians, public record archivists, historians, and others. The proceedings were published as *Archives and Libraries.* His efforts represent the nearest the ALA has come to being involved in archival education.

[19]For example, the manual on arrangement and description (David B. Gracy II, *Archives and Manuscripts: Arrangement and Description,* Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1977) fails to distinguish successfully between series and subgroups; it does not show how to translate controls that are established in the arrangement process into a descriptive program; and it contains serious inaccuracies. That such a crucial manual as this one has just been reprinted without revisions casts doubt on the judgment of the editorial board. In the manual on business records (Edie Hedlin, *Business Archives: An Introduction,* Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1978; see p. 8, "Provenance") the editors allowed the author to equate the principle of provenance with the concept of original order. The editorial board's decision to include accessioning in the same manual as appraisal (Maynard J. Brichford, *Archives and Manuscripts: Appraisal and Accessioning,* Chicago: The Society of American Archivists, 1977) is questionable, because accessioning is a critical first step in establishing control and therefore should properly be included with arrangement and description. Brichford devotes only one page to appraisal in relation to manuscript collections.

archival education, and in 1977 it approved some guidelines for that purpose. (See the *SAA Newsletter,* May 1977). However, the traditional bias of SAA against such courses being conducted in library schools is evident in this comment, quoted in the March 1980 *Newsletter,* that one of the problems of professional education is "keeping library schools from controlling archival education programs." I know of no attempt at such control.

Returning to the issue of who should teach, there seems to be no question that initially archivists should comprise the primary teacher pool. Archivists must be the teachers "initially" because the quality of archival literature is so uneven and diffuse that only an experienced archivist can compensate for its deficiencies. Instructors in "public history" should recognize their own limitations and those of the literature on the subject; they should also recognize the critical importance of including an archival practicum. Instructors in librarianship also should recognize their own limitations and be aware of the history of library catalog codes and of their shortcomings for modern manuscripts. In light of this history I find it absurd to make cataloging the cornerstone of archival education.

Conclusion: Information Science

Of primary importance to librarians and archivists is the impact that automation has had on both the production and storage of and access to information. This reorientation is leading to a redefinition of librarianship as "information science," which is concerned with access to intellectual information and is thus quite different from applications of automation for administrative data about records.

Automating access to information for intellectual objectives is non-routine and much more complicated than automating programs to handle library and archives business functions. To do it well, we need more studies of user behavior and a better understanding of the hierarchical structures into which information is organized, and we must continue to study the ways in which these two features of information science affect each other.[20] Beyond the intellectual horizons of both archivists and librarians, it seems, is a clear recognition that they must devise ways to affect the quality of the information that is generated in the first place. Information quality is determined in the workplace by the kind of file headings employed, by the way(s) files are organized, and by other ways information is generated and managed. Librarianship has many of the essential tools required for these tasks; archivists (and records managers) can learn to use and adapt them. If archivists in particular do not pursue an active role in information management they must inevitably perform the role of "refile" clerks—making better sense of records that are poorly identified and organized originally.

Whether or not they assume this kind of active role it is nevertheless of utmost importance to learn how much information is provided in a cost-beneficial and self-accessing manner, as it is in the mere recording of useful original filing index terms in an inventory format. In addition, the very structure of the inventory format should convey the basic relationships of the series and of the file units that make them up. All of this can be done without the expensive and subjec-

[20]Richard H. Lytle, who is chair of the National Information Systems Task Force, and the task force itself are dealing with this problem. The SAA's Finding Aids Committee also dealt with this issue while under my chairmanship, 1976–78. See also Lytle's "Intellectual Access to Archives: I," 66–70.

tive type of content analysis employed, for example, in the BRISC project.

While there is some recognition of hierarchy of information among librarians (e.g., in analytical cataloging), with manuscripts and archives this feature is more significant. Librarians generally deal with each book as a discrete unit, and they impose relationships by means of subject classification primarily; whereas archivists must both arrange (the equivalent of publishing) and describe each accession in terms of its hierarchical structure which usually includes two to four intermediate levels between the accession/record group and item levels. As we prepare to automate archival and manuscript information, we must consciously shed the historical manuscripts tradition once and for all.

How difficult this is to do is indicated by the BRISC experiment, which Lytle analyzed. Although its creators believe that they are acting within the PAT, their practices represent a return to the HMT: they largely ignore the information that is easily provided by intelligent use of the provenance method and resort instead to content indexing in the tradition of librarianship, a tradition that is rooted in calendaring as well as in cataloging. Once the vestigial baggage of this tradition has been removed as a restraint, archivists and manuscript librarians can concentrate upon the central purpose of modern manuscript collections and archival management—the collecting or bringing into archival custody of all archival documentation of contemporary society. The problems that have been associated with providing intellectual access will no longer be an impediment to such collecting goals if the HMT is abandoned. To do this effectively, sound records management principles must be developed as part of the general appraisal process and there must be interdisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration, brought together from a strong sense of urgency and a commitment to the end result, the systematic collection of the archives of contemporary society and their organization for use. It is high time that we move ahead.