Communication and Events in History: Toward a Theory for Documenting the Past

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Abstract: While communication is a central factor in society, the creation and functions of documents of interest to archivists and historians have not been extensively studied. The author reviews several investigations of communication in history along with selected publications from other disciplines that address the nature of communication, especially writing as a social activity. He also delineates the elements of a document-level study of communication through presentation of a study of document functions derived from a set of letters in the Harvard University Archives. The author concludes with the presentation of a three-part classification of document-event relations, which is considered in regard to general areas of historical study.

Communication in Society

INCREASINGLY, THERE IS AN AWARENESS of the centrality of communication in human society. It has come to the attention of investigators in a number of disciplines,[1] and one student described it as "the fundamental human social process. Communication is the tool that makes societies possible."[2] In reviewing the literature on communication studies, however, it becomes apparent how much of the previous work has been grounded in a concern with oral communication (in both preliterate and developed societies) and in the phenomena of mass media.[3] Relatively little has been done on written communication at the more dynamic—organizational and personal—levels.

Documents are at the center of the concern of historians and archivists, and yet neither profession has directed very great attention to a consideration of writing as social communication and to the functional relationship of documents to historical events. The pursuit of such a research program is potentially significant on two levels: (1) In order to understand more fully the social texture of the past, it is desirable both to comprehend the nature of communication as a network of relationships and to appreciate the functions that documents play at the point of their creation as an element in the structure of societies. (2) As users or custodians of documents, historians and archivists need to understand the characteristics and limitations of the documents.

Archivists, Historians, and the Nature of Documents

Archivists for some time have recognized historians' relative lack of interest in the origins or social functions of the documents they use. W. Kaye Lamb, former dominion archivist of Canada, referred to the phenomenon that is "well known to anyone who serves readers in a searchroom, that the purpose for which a record is consulted frequently has little or nothing to do with the purpose for which it was originally made."[4] When historians speak for themselves—at least in their programmatic literature on historical method, if not in practice—they often present a similar view. Louis Gottschalk, author of *Understanding History*, one of the chief American works on historical method, reveals relatively little interest in the question of origins or initial purposes of documents in history. He conceives of documents as sources of information and stresses the value of records considered as accounts of events by eyewitnesses.[5] This emphasis on documents as testimony to events was recognized among manuals on historical method in a study by sociologist-historian Vernon K. Dibble.[6]

There is a new history emerging that

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[1]Richard W. Budd and Brent D. Ruben, eds., *Approaches to Human Communication* (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Co., Inc., Spartan Books, 1972). This collection of essays examines various approaches to the study of communication, ranging from anthropology to zoology and encompassing such diverse fields as art, economics, general semantics, history, nonverbal behavior, and sociology.

[2]Wilbur Schramm, *Men, Messages, and Media: A Look at Human Communication* (New York / Evanston / San Francisco / London: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), 2.

[3]See, for example, A. George Gitter and Robert Grunin, *Communication: A Guide to Information Sources*, Psychology Information Guide Series (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1980).

[4]W. Kaye Lamb, "The Changing Role of the Archivist," *American Archivist* 29 (January 1966): 6.

[5]Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), 53, 56–57.

[6]Vernon K. Dibble, "Four Types of Inference from Documents to Events," *History and Theory* 3 (1963): 203–221. In this important paper, Dibble outlines three ways in which historians actually use documents to reconstruct events in addition to the use of documents as testimony. In spite of this evidence from use, Dibble points out that the manuals on method tend to emphasize only testimony or reports by witnesses.

concerns itself with smaller interactive communities of various types, from towns to professional groups.[7] Also of importance is the point of view of historians such as those associated with the French *Annales* School, for whom a broadly defined conception of communication is a fundamental orientation in historical study.[8] It is from an imagined juncture of historical community studies and the examination of communication as foundational social function that the initial perspective of this article emanates.

Communication in History: General Studies

An investigation of communication in history, from the outset, presents a paradox. We have chiefly the remains of one form of communication (written documents) from which must be inferred other forms of communication (oral) that have left no artifactual remains. We must also use the written documents to infer the relations of both these communication modes to larger events in history.

The historical relations of written to oral communication have been the subject of study by some scholars who have examined especially the character of these relations during great periods of transition. Jack Goody discusses the historical origins of writing and the question of how it related to speech. He argues that the introduction of writing had significant effects on the use of language,

beyond just the recording of speech: "Writing is critical not simply because it preserves speech over time and space, but because it transforms speech, by abstracting its components, by assisting backward scanning, so that communication by eye creates a different cognitive potentiality for human beings than communication by word of mouth."[9]

Further development of a general understanding of communication in history, and especially of writing, is given in M. T. Clanchy's study of medieval England.[10] One particular value of Clanchy's study is that it gives a reasonably detailed account of the historical development of document-based society by tracing the emergence and social functions of different types of documents. It not only illuminates the history of the society itself during the years under study, but it also argues by example that a historian's use of documents for any purpose is greatly enhanced by a general knowledge of what functions the documents themselves performed.

It is widely acknowledged that the introduction of the printing press in the fifteenth century was a landmark in European history. The full impact of the technology of printing has not been investigated, but the work of Elizabeth L. Eisenstein has made a substantial beginning in our understanding. While appreciating the cognitive and social differences that divide oral from written cultures and the work that has been done

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[7]Aspects of these trends are discussed in several essays in Michael Kammen, eds., *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States,* edited for the American Historical Association (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1980); for example, Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Community Studies, Urban History, and American Local History," 270–291. Also see David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1982).

[8]Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, 375. Also see Traian Stoianovich, *French Historical Method: The Annales Paradigm* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1976), especially 62–102.

[9]Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge/London/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 77, 128.

[10]M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

to illuminate them, she asserts that "the gulf that separates our experience from that of literate elites who relied exclusively on hand-copied texts is much more difficult to fathom." Furthermore, in stating that the change from script to print affected both recordkeeping *and* information transmittal, Eisenstein demonstrates an appreciation of both the static and dynamic social functions of all documents.[11]

Approaches to the Study of Communication in History

While the foregoing studies suggest the value of examining communication modes within relatively large historical periods, a movement toward the development of theoretical knowledge should begin by examination of the phenomenon of communication within closer contexts. Fortunately, studies are under way in several disciplines that may help the historian and archivist to understand the very fundamental act that leads to the creation of documents. Of critical importance is the realization that "there are different *kinds* of writing which serve different functions for different groups of people at different times."[12] Shirley Brice Heath has examined the history of writing in the United States in its public, and to some degree in its private, aspects.[13]

Present-day sociological and psychological studies of communication also are beginning to generate some potentially useful ideas. Consideration of social functions of writing sometimes is a cen-

tral point in these studies. In the introduction to a recent collection of essays, Martin Nystrand observed that "more than anything language is an activity motivated by users' needs to make things known in particular ways for particular purposes and to establish and maintain common understanding with other conversants; and the form of a particular text is always determined as much by the conversants' need to function in these situations as it is by whatever it is they wish to express." Nystrand further states that "written and spoken language serve very different functions for users."[14]

Writing is not only a personal and social tool, but it is also an element of bureaucratic functioning and may have peculiar roles to play in that context. In spite of the bulk of paper that is produced within bureaucratic organizations, it does not appear that much attention has been devoted to the theoretical aspects of the question. Stanley Raffel has written on the subject from a sociological perspective. He began with the study of medical records and ended by considering much more generally the nature of records and their relations to events. Raffel's consideration of the uses of records by bureaucrats is particularly interesting. For example, he suggests a partial explanation for the existence of voluminous records in large, modern organizations in two ways: organizations require "rational, efficient and objective observations," while at the same time the fact that such observations are required

[11]Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge/London/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 9, 24.

[12]Marcia Farr Whiteman and William S. Hall, "Introduction," *Writing: The Nature, Development, and Teaching of Written Communication*, Vol. 1: *Variation in Writing: Functional and Linguistic-Cultural Differences*, ed. by Marcia Farr Whiteman (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1981), 2.

[13]Shirley Brice Heath, "Toward an Ethnohistory of Writing in American Education," in Ibid., 24–25.

[14]Martin Nystrand, ed., *What Writers Know: The Language, Process, and Structure of Written Discourse* (New York/London: Academic Press, 1982), 10, 11.

may help to ensure that employees will be present at the events observed. In turn, administrators achieve presence at events "by reconceiving of the record as itself the event."[15]

Design Elements for the Study of Documents in History

Archivists are very seldom concerned with the nature or function of individual documents. Likewise, while historians may be concerned momentarily with single items, their ultimate interest is in a reconstruction and understanding of events on a higher level of generality. In the development of an adequate theoretical understanding of documents as communication and their relation to events, an examination of the micro-levels of historical phenomena would appear to be the correct place to start. The limited range of understanding gained by an examination of the literature on writing, print, and bureaucratic uses of documents suggests that archivists, historians, and other investigators currently lack an adequate grounding in the atomic level of the subject of document-event relations.

It is more difficult to understand social functions of documents in communities of the past than communities of the present where investigators can use direct observation and interviews. Historical studies, at least initially, must begin with relatively small and easily defined communities within a limited range of time. While this may not be the normal unit of historians' interest, it is the only way to build up a body of certain knowledge as a contribution to a general theory of communication in the historical context. In conceptualizing this undertaking, there is

value in examining other studies, especially ethnographically-oriented investigations or methodologies where communication is a special focus. It also is possible (although not considered directly in this paper) that insight and assistance can be found in the methodology and research results of social scientists who have developed and used the techniques of content analysis.[16]

The development of an understanding of communication in the functioning historical community and of the relations of documents to events will be a difficult task. In addition to sensitivity to the role of documents, vigilance will be necessary if one is to grasp the likely part that oral communication played, although no physical remains of the oral mode exist. In all historical studies, of course, the investigator does not approach a topic without some degree of prior understanding (and perhaps preconception) based on general background reading and study. As J. H. Hexter has stated, historians routinely approach a topic through two records, the documents themselves and the "second record, which is everything that historians bring to their confrontation with the record of the past."[17] Understanding of the likely collateral role of unrecorded oral communication and generalizations regarding the relations of documents to events will, to a certain extent, draw upon this "second record" just as the historian must in the reconstruction or interpretation of significant and complex historical events. The initial stage of investigation, however, insofar as possible, should be a careful analysis of sets of individual but related documents. From this exercise

[15]Stanley Raffel, *Matters of Fact: A Sociological Inquiry* (London/Boston/Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 28, 102.

[16]See Matilda White Riley and Clarice S. Stoll, "Content Analysis," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills ([New York]: The Macmillan Co. and The Free Press, 1968), Vol. 3, 371–377; also, Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, The Sage CommText Series, no. 5 (Beverly Hills/London: Sage Publications, 1980).

[17]J. H. Hexter, *The History Primer* (New York/London: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1971), 78–79.

will grow a classificatory and conceptual understanding of the varied and immediate functions of documents in communication that in turn can be viewed in the context of interplay between documents and higher-level historical events.

Keith H. Basso has extended the perspective of ethnography of communication into the arena of writing which encourages the use of a similar approach for history—what might be called the ethnography of documentation. Basso's approach "focuses upon writing as a form of communication *activity* and takes as a major objective the analysis of the structure and function of this activity in a broad range of human societies." Following other investigators in the field, Basso identifies aspects of communication events in terms of "the status and role attributes of participants, the form of the message, the code in which it is communicated, a channel of transmission, and the physical setting in which the message is encoded and decoded."[18] These are all aspects that eventually must be incorporated into historical studies.

Exploration through an Example

As an illustration of the level and character of understanding to be gained by looking at individual documents related by community and time, I have examined a set of 108 letters from the records of Harlow Shapley, director of the Harvard College Observatory, during the years 1925 and 1926.[19] These records include a large proportion of Professor Shapley's personal/professional papers as well as his official administrative records. The documents examined were those filed alphabetically between Hagen and Hawes in order to incorporate documents involving external professional activities as well as administrative documents filed under the word Harvard. Individual letters in the document set were examined in terms of their communication functions. The identification and description of these functions was based on the documents themselves. They were not judged or grouped by any *a priori* classification scheme. In fact the development of a model classification was one of the goals of this exercise, but it was to be an inductive classification representing observed functions.

The examination of the document set resulted in several impressionistic conclusions that need to be explored more extensively and systematically. It is apparent that documents do not always have single functions, and it sometimes is difficult to determine which function is primary. The real (that is, primary) function of a document may not be apparent without examining the response of the recipient. A very tentative hypothesis is offered that official bureaucratic documents may be more likely to serve single communication functions while personal/professional letters may more often serve multiple functions. Examination of a great many letters may aid in the development of ideas regarding the significance of the order (sequence) of functions in a multi-function document. It is possible that background knowledge of the conventions in letter writing, which may differ over time, could be gleaned from extant manuals on letter writing.

The perceived document functions that resulted from the examination of the Shapley-Harvard Observatory letters encompassed the following activities: acknowledged or thanked for information, an object, favor, or decision re-

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[18]Keith H. Basso, "The Ethnography of Writing," in *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, ed. Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer ([Cambridge]: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 426, 428.

[19]Records of the Harvard College Observatory, Call number UA V 630.22: Harvard University Archives. (Two additional letters, in German, were excluded from the analysis.)

ceived; answered a request for information; accepted or agreed to an offer, proposal, or arrangement; evaluated a past action, event, or a promulgated idea; transmitted a document; transmitted an object; reported the occurrence of an event, action taken, or decision made; reported the results of an intellectual exercise; advised, commented on, or endorsed a proposed future course of action; informed, by the provision of information or opinion (the informer took initiative); announced, or informed about, a future event; proposed future action; requested advice, opinion, or information; requested an object; solicited or offered an opportunity, object, assistance, or arrangement; invited, requested future action; instructed or commanded (future) action; authorized/informed regarding (possible) future action.

The list of document functions suggests the complexity and subtlety of document-event relationships. It becomes apparent, however, that one important element in classifying documents in this regard is the observation of the descriptive verbs, modified where necessary by the object of action. There undoubtedly are various ways in which the descriptive verbs could be arranged in sequence to suggest relationships. Table 1 gives the primary verb descriptors that were associated with the list of document functions from the Shapley-Harvard Observatory letters. The table represents two additional factors of interest. Documents appear generally to be responses to a previous action or to initiate action. This aspect is represented in the "action mode" column.[20] Furthermore, documents appear, in general, to be oriented toward something that happened in the past or something that will happen in the

future. This is reflected in the "time reference" column. Both columns include certain document functions that could be at either extreme—responsive or active, past or future—and this consideration is reflected in the table as well.

The descriptive verbs in the table help to label documents in terms of their general functions and suggest the nature of the micro-events with which the documents were associated. They also aid in defining categories of social interaction within the historical community under study. Whether the use of descriptive verbs alone would be adequate for an understanding of historical communication events would depend to a certain degree on the level of abstraction that is desired or is to be tolerated. These document function designations theoretically could be explored from the point of view of other relational considerations, such as the individual correspondents, whether letters are incoming or outgoing, the social or hierarchical relationships of senders and receivers, and general content categories such as administrative, professional, or personal. A simple count revealed, for example, that letters written by Harlow Shapley were somewhat more likely to fall at the active end of the action mode continuum than were letters written to him. Other attempts at relational analysis have suggested that the ambiguity represented by the "responsive or active" section of the action mode column is a hindrance to clear understanding and is an area for further study. Among the questions to be considered are the manner and the degree to which analysis is limited by the act of applying descriptive verbs as labels (or surrogates) for document functions. For example, in some cases it is easier to make a decision

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[20]Although broader in its coverage and implications, this is not unlike Hilary Jenkinson's assertion that "all correspondence may be said, in a sense, to be a matter of question and answer." *A Manual of Archive Administration*, New and rev. ed. (London: Percy Lund, Humphries & Co., Ltd., 1937), 177.

Table 1

Generalized Document Functions				
Action Mode	Time Reference	Document Function	Summary Analysis Number of Documents	Percentage of Total
Responsive				
	Past	1. Acknowledge/Thank	7	
		2. Answer	9	
	Future	3. Accept/Agree	2	
			(18)	16.7%
Responsive or Active				
	Past	4. Evaluate	4	
	Past or Future	5. Transmit	8	
		6. Report	21	
	Future	7. Advise/Endorse	5	
			(38)	35.2%
Active				
	Past or Future	8. Inform (initiate)	5	
	Future	9. Announce	3	
		10. Propose	3	
		11. Request	23	
		12. Solicit/Offer	6	
		13. Invite	6	
		14. Instruct/Command	2	
		15. Authorize	4	
			(52)	48.1%
Total			108	100%

as to whether an individual document is responsive or active if the document is not labeled. There also is a question of whether some documents may be neither responsive nor active, neither past nor future oriented.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that the scheme presented in this paper is intended for heuristic purposes only. A larger study over a greater period of time involving additional document types in different social sectors will introduce complications and subtleties of document function not encountered at all in this small study. Nonetheless, it does seem probable that functional categories will prove to be both finite and relatively manageable.

A Theoretical Classification of Historical Events and the Relations of Documents

In order to grasp more fully the relations of documents to historical events, it would be helpful to classify those events as simply as possible. This goal brings the topic face-to-face with one of the most difficult areas of social and historical investigation, the relation of thought to physical action in society. A number of scholars in various disciplines have grappled with this general problem, and I am neither qualified nor willing to enter very deeply into the discussion. Robert F. Berkhofer examined the question in the light of historical method and social science research. He considered the relation (or distinction) between the "ideactional and behavorial" in history, that is "what the actor thought and what he did." Berkhofer concluded that "all in all, the documentary evidence available to historians tells them more about the subjective states of the actors than about their actual behavior, other than the production of the document itself, and physical objects as such reveal more about themselves as objects than they do attitudes about their role in past life or their actual place in past behavior."[21] Berkhofer, however, appears to have undervalued an important point, that the "production of the document" is more than the physical act of putting ink to paper. It is the production of a social instrument with a function defined and made possible by the structure of the society it serves. In certain significant ways a document is a unique physical object that does indeed carry its own functional label as well as a substantive message.

The document-event relationship is a complex one that brings together idea (language), action, and social instrument. As a conceptual device alone, it may be fruitful to think of historical events (as represented in documents and studied by historians) as one of two kinds. They may be viewed as verbal events or as action events reported verbally. In their linkages to documents, verbal events further subdivide into those that are information/idea-oriented and those that are action-oriented. Verbal event:information/idea-oriented documents are largely ends in themselves. Poems, stories, scientific papers, and recipes are examples. The creation of the document was itself the event, and the event is in the document. Verbal event: action-oriented is the most complex and numerous class. In this instance, the document is truly an instrument, intended to being about action—from the sending of a watch by a mail order house to the launching of an invasion force. Sometimes a verbal event: action-oriented document is itself close to an action event. An example might be a letter of acceptance or of authorization in which the event and the issuance of the document are essentially simultaneous. Letters of transmittal also play this function of combining the verbal and the action event.

The third class, action event reported, is relatively straightforward, at least in the abstract. The historian would have no way of knowing about such events (in the absence of documents of the other two classes), if the event were not reported in a surviving document. While the event is reported in the document, the document had no role in the event itself.

I am not prepared to make any statement regarding the exclusivity of these classes. The ambiguities of the classification become apparent when an attempt is

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[21]Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *A Behavioral Approach to Historical Analysis* (New York: The Free Press; London: Collier-Macmillan Ltd., 1969), 17–18.

Table 2

Document-Event Classification Incorporating Document Functions

Verbal Event: Information/Idea-Oriented	Verbal Event: Action-Oriented	Action Event Reported
Answer	Accept/Agree	Acknowledge/Thank
Evaluate	Transmit Object	Report
Transmit Document	Advise/Endorse	Announce
Report result of intellectual exercise	Propose	
Inform (initiate)	Request	
	Solicit/Offer	
	Invite	
	Instruct/Command	
	Authorize	

made to relate it even to the relatively few document functions generated in the study of Shapley-Harvard Observatory letters discussed above. For purposes of discussion and critique, however, the classification of these functions in relation to the broader document-event classes is given in Table 2.[22]

The nature of document functions and the limitations of the language mean that Table 2 includes a number of ambiguities, not all of which can be identified or explained here. Each document function designator was put in only one class, and different persons may classify them differently. Documents that answer a prior request, for example, may simply give information, justifying their presence in column one, verbal event: information/idea-oriented; on the other hand, the documents may convey advice or recommend some action, in which case they could go in column two, verbal event: action-oriented. The same is true of documents that evaluate or inform. The category "report result of intellectual exercise" is listed under verbal event: information/idea-oriented on the grounds that the events reported reside in, or are closely allied to, the document and have no objective existence outside the document. In fact, these are reports of mental events and in that sense may share some of the qualities of action events reported. Documents that report in a more general sense (on an event, action, or decision) are classed with action event reported. These documents in turn, however, may sometimes be more appropriately placed with verbal events: action-oriented, when the reporter is one of the participants in the occurrence reported and the report itself may in some way affect future action.

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[22]I am aware that this scheme and the paper in general do not address directly the question of how documents relate to historical events in the more usual sense of noteworthy happenings in the past. Those events are matters derived generally from the substantive content of documents. My concern here is with the networks or structures that underlie social reality and not with specific and extraordinary occurrences. At the same time, it should be appreciated that the larger events are limited or molded in significant ways by the social structure represented in the network and functions of communication at the document level.

Table 3

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">**Document-Event Classification
As Related to a
Typology of Historical Study**</td></tr>
<tr><td>Verbal Event:
Information/Idea-
Oriented</td><td>Verbal Event:
Action-Oriented</td><td>Action Event Reported</td></tr>
<tr><td>Intellectual History
History</td><td>Intellectual/Societal
(Including social,
political, economic,
military, etc.)</td><td>Societal History</td></tr>
</table>

The foregoing discussion of empirically derived document functions and their relations to the more theoretically conceived document-event classification clearly is exploratory and is intended to invite further consideration and study. At the same time, the three part document-event classification suggests a means by which an apparent gap between concern for document creation and document use may be bridged conceptually. This can be illuminated by relating the document-event classification to general areas of historical study. These relationships, in greatly simplified form, are shown in Table 3. As the table suggests, the different classes of document-event relationships (and thus their relevant document function categories) seemingly underwrite different approaches to history. The left and right columns of Table 3 can be interpreted as representing the extremes of those historians who stress ideas and those who stress actions (or material factors) in history. The more

complex view is in the center column, where the interrelations of ideas and actions are the focus of attention.[23] The greatest number of document function categories are likely to be found in the middle column, and these inevitably will be the most complex in terms of document-event relations. Studies of the use of documents by historians tend to endorse the view given in Table 3. For example, those historians of science who work chiefly in internalist (i.e., intellectual) history use a different configuration of documents than those who do externalist or social history of science.[24]

The Need for Continued Study

The more deeply one delves into the relations of documents, historical events, and the reconstruction of the past by historians, the more complicated and interrelated all of these interests become. The intention of this paper has been to suggest some approaches to the under-

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[23]For some areas, such as the history of science, the most exciting prospects for study involve not only the question of how ideas affect society, but also the question of how society and events affect the structure and content of the ideas themselves.

[24]Clark A. Elliott, "Citation Patterns and Documentation for the History of Science: Some Methodological Considerations," *American Archivist* 44 (Spring 1981): 138–140.

lying questions. More broad-based studies in communication such as those reviewed at the beginning of this paper are to be encouraged. At the same time, the redirection of communication studies toward the specific interests of archivists and historians is necessary. The tables in this paper represent possible foci for such studies. They encompass micro-level analyses of the social functions of documents, an overall conceptualization of the relations of documents to historical events, and the relations of the foregoing to the work of historians. The larger issues, ultimately, are the concern of this paper. There is, in fact, no firm expectation that the specifics of the presentation given here will survive the scrutiny of other investigators. If the paper entices such further consideration and study of the issues, however, its purpose will have been served.