

# Professionalism and Archivists in the United States

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**Abstract:** Since the formation of the Conference of Archivists in 1909, archivists in the United States have been concerned with their own professional status and standards. Although archivists have made tremendous strides in the development of professionalism, especially over the past decade, recent self-assessments reveal that their profession still has serious deficiencies. This essay, using sociological models and examples of other professions, attempts to analyze some of the reasons for these problems and suggests an agenda of issues for archivists' consideration. The article discusses society's image of the archivist and its understanding of the archival mission, archivists' need to develop a stronger national voice, problems with archival education, the purpose of individual certification and institutional accreditation, and the need for archivists to acquire a broader notion of their own potential. While an improved professionalism is not the only solution to the problems archivists face, it is certainly a means for working towards their mission and its goals.

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AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS CAN BE PLEASED with their progress since they organized as a profession in 1936 with the establishment of the Society of American Archivists (SAA). Archivists have made significant strides toward accomplishing many of their founders' dreams. At the first Conference of Archivists in 1909, the SAA's precursor under the aegis of the American Historical Association, Waldo G. Leland charted a course in which the archivist would emerge as an independent professional with standard methodologies and specialized education.<sup>1</sup> At the final Conference of Archivists in 1935, Theodore C. Blegen called for an autonomous professional association, noting that the recent establishment of the National Archives "heralds a new era" for the archival community.<sup>2</sup> And at the first assemblage of the SAA a year later, A.R. Newsome stated that one of the three main objectives of the new organization was the "development of a genuine archival profession in the United States."<sup>3</sup> The archivist's concern with professionalism is by no means new. Since the founding of the first public archives in 1901, professionalism has been a consistent theme.

Leland, Blegen, and Newsome would be especially proud of the achievements archivists have made just in the past decade. There is now an excellent descriptive literature on archival practice; archival education is much stronger; national standards exist for many archival

practices; national leadership is more evident and improving yearly; and archivists are much more aware of their occupation's condition after a few years of intensive self-analysis on institutional, state, regional, and national levels.

Two major concerns of American archivists have emanated from these recent efforts and achievements. The first is the better articulation and adoption of a mission for the archival profession, culminating in the SAA's Goals and Priorities Task Force report. The report succinctly describes the mission of archivists to be "to ensure the identification, preservation, and use of records of enduring value" and presents a variety of goals necessary to accomplish such a mission.<sup>4</sup> The increasing realization and acceptance of the problems archivists face in accomplishing their mission is the second trend of recent years. The archival community is extremely weak in resources—staff, facilities, and funds—needed to work toward its mission with any realistic hope for success. Compounding this problem, archivists lack the authority, public recognition, and influence to pursue successfully the necessary resources. In addition, the documentation of modern society (post-World War II) presents a myriad of challenges—such as an increasingly complex information technology, the voluminous nature of modern records, and the intricate relationship of contemporary documentation—that stretch the

<sup>1</sup>"American Archival Problems," American Historical Association *Annual Report 1909* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 342-48.

<sup>2</sup>"Problems of American Archivists," *Bulletins of the National Archives*, no. 2 (November 1936): 3-4.

<sup>3</sup>"Objectives of the Society of American Archivists," *Society of American Archivists Proceedings*, Providence, R.I., December 29-30, 1936 and Washington, D.C., June 18-19, 1937 (Urbana, Ill.: [Society of American Archivists, 1937]), 64.

<sup>4</sup>*Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the Society of American Archivists Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: SAA, 1986). See also F. Gerald Ham, "Planning for the Archival Profession," *American Archivist* 48 (Winter 1985): 26-30; and Richard J. Cox, "Strategies for Archival Action in the 1980s and Beyond: Implementing the SAA Goals and Priorities Task Force Report," *Provenance* 3 (Fall 1985): 22-37.

barely adequate existing archival resources even thinner, forcing archivists to devise creative ways to use their assets.<sup>5</sup>

The reasons for the difficulties impeding the archival mission are both internal and external. The external cause of this dilemma is the manner in which society appreciates—or fails to appreciate—archival records. David Gracy, in a series of interesting essays, has clearly shown that the public has a weak image of archivists, the nature of their work, and the importance of their occupation.<sup>6</sup> The subject requires considerably more study and corrective action. The internal factors are inherent in the structure of the archival community. Are there problems that weaken its quest? Apparently there are, as this article will suggest.

This essay is an examination of the nature of the archival profession to determine to what extent internal conditions are responsible for the poor management of America's documentary heritage. What follows, then, is not a comprehensive picture of the challenges archivists face in striving to accomplish their mission. As a gauge for evaluating the internal weaknesses of the archival profession, sociological models of professionalism are employed. The article is not designed to argue whether or not archivists constitute a true profession. Rather, the sociological models are intended to provide a framework for the discussion about how to strengthen the archival profession that started with the

state assessment reports, the SAA Goals and Priorities Task Force report, and the various statements of the SAA Archives and Society Task Force. It is hoped that this essay will stimulate further evaluation of current archival issues, such as individual certification and institutional accreditation, that are important to the future success of the archival profession. Over a decade ago, in 1973, an SAA president lamented that archivists "are still not sure what a professional archivist is or what makes him so, or how he is distinct from a nonprofessional or unprofessional archivist."<sup>7</sup> The problem is that time is growing short and archivists need to decide about such basic concerns. Archivists are literally at a crossroads, celebrating the golden anniversary of their professional association and facing a new world of information technology and new vocations.

### Sociologists and Professions

Despite a vast literature on the subject of professions, sociologists have readily acknowledged difficulties in defining what a profession is or enumerating its characteristics. Identifying the elements of professions is difficult because they are fluid; "professionalism is a matter of degree."<sup>8</sup> Because professions claim social standing and recognition, many sociologists have been hesitant to identify occupations as professions and to help them acquire the accompanying social benefits, especially since the late 1960s, a period marked by anti-credentialism and

<sup>5</sup>For a convenient summary, see Bruce W. Dearstyne, "The Records Wasteland," *History News* 40 (June 1985): 18–22.

<sup>6</sup>David B. Gracy II, "What's Your Totem? Archival Images in the Public Mind," *Midwestern Archivist* 10, no. 1 (1985): 17–23; and "Our Future is Now," *American Archivist* 48 (Winter 1985): 12–21.

<sup>7</sup>Wilfred I. Smith, "Broad Horizons: Opportunities for Archivists," *American Archivist* 37 (January 1974): 11.

<sup>8</sup>Bernard Barber, "Some Problems in the Sociology of the Professions," in *The Professions in America*, ed. Kenneth S. Lynn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 17.

similar sentiments.<sup>9</sup> Many sociologists have also found it difficult to measure empirically the characteristics of a profession because professional status is mostly the result of image: "a professional is a person whom other people . . . are willing to treat as a professional."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, two major models of professionalism are useful for studying the nature of occupations.

The oldest, and still very important, sociological model of professionalism is the taxonomic paradigm that dates back to Abraham Flexner and 1915.<sup>11</sup> The model remained ascendant at least through the 1960s. Although this method only determines the "ideal" characteristics of a profession, it remains useful because it distinguishes phenomena of occupations often viewed as professions.<sup>12</sup> The lists of such characteristics usually include at least five attributes, briefly described as follows:

*Specialized knowledge or systematic theory.* A profession has a body of knowledge that is the foundation of its work. Usually such knowledge is intellectual rather than based upon purely practical experience; such knowledge constitutes theory, and an understanding of this theory is a requisite for entry into the profession. The profession's specialized knowledge is developed through systematic research, primarily conducted at professional schools within a university.

*Community sanction.* A profession has been sanctioned by the public to the ex-

tent that it controls its own educational system through accreditation, governs practitioners admitted into its ranks, and possesses some degree of independence from the public's judgment on technical issues. A profession has far more exacting standards for itself than the public has for it. Implicit in the community's sanction is its recognition of the profession, usually including as well acknowledgment from clients, other professions, employers, government regulatory agencies, and educational institutions.

*Professional cohesion or organization.* A profession displays cohesion via the existence of a professional association in which most of its practitioners hold membership and participate. Professional associations reinforce the mutual identification of distinctly occupational interests, provide social support for individuals, sponsor continued education, and work to enforce standards of professional competence. Such organizations are the key to general professional improvement and growth and, as a result, often provide the main forums for the resolution of intra-professional conflicts necessary to the continued growth of the profession.

*Professional culture.* The difference between an occupation and a profession has often been said to be that the latter possesses values, norms, and symbols that transform work to a calling. A profession is not only full-time work,

<sup>9</sup>Julius A. Roth, "Professionalism: The Sociologist's Decoy," *Sociology of Work and Occupations* 1 (February 1974): 6-23; Douglas Kelton, "The Sociology of Professions: An Emerging Perspective," *Sociology of Work and Occupations* 5 (August 1978): 259-83; and Eliot Freidson, "Are Professions Necessary?" in *The Authority of Experts: Studies in History and Theory*, ed. Thomas L. Haskell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 3-27.

<sup>10</sup>Adam Yarmolinsky, "What Future for the Professional in American Society?" *Daedalus* 107 (Winter 1978): 159. See also Mike Saks, "Removing the Blinkers? A Critique of Recent Contributions to the Sociology of Professions," *Sociological Review*, n.s., 31 (February 1983): 1-21.

<sup>11</sup>"Is Social Work a Profession?" *School and Society* 1 (26 June 1915): 901-11.

<sup>12</sup>Recent efforts to measure empirically such elements are by John B. Cullen, *The Structure of Professionalism: A Quantitative Examination* (New York: PBI, 1978) and "An Occupational Taxonomy by Professional Characteristics: Implications for Research," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 22 (June 1983): 257-67.



distinguishing it from the efforts of amateurs; it is a calling that attracts individuals to pursue it actively. One of the signs of a fully-developed profession is the duration and stability of a professional association and its membership. There is a community, a sense of identity, shared values, and common language supported by the continuity of practitioners.

*Institutionalized altruism.* Built into a profession is a structural system that promotes behavior of its practitioners beneficial to others. This type of service orientation includes concerns for staying abreast of developments in a field so that clients are not harmed and standards are maintained to protect clients. This altruism is founded on the responsibility mandated by the profession's monopoly of knowledge and control of its use.<sup>13</sup>

Such a list of attributes characterizing a profession should be an extremely helpful standard for evaluating an occupation's ability to accomplish its mission.

The other predominant professionalism model is one that analyzes the process of professionalization. Proponents of this approach point to what they perceive as the main weakness of the taxonomic paradigm, that it cannot be empirically tested. The professionalization model uses a historical view to examine an occupation's ability to gain authority from

society over a period of time. The earliest models of professionalization were efforts to arrange the characteristics from the taxonomic model into some logical set of chronological phases. Such a sequence might run from the formation of an occupation, to the development of training schools and professional associations, to a period of political agitation for legal recognition, establishment of entry standards and a code of ethics, and finally to the full emergence of a profession.<sup>14</sup> More recent models have seen the essence of professionalization as a "power-orientation" or abiding concern with "ideology."<sup>15</sup> One of the newest and most useful schemes for professionalization posits that the professional power held by an occupation is the main element of its success: the "most professional occupations are those having members who exhibit high levels of autonomy [in his or her area of competency] from clients and autonomy from employing organizations." According to this model, an occupation's potential for claiming professional status lies in the characteristics of its service (whether it is essential, exclusive, or a complex service requiring special status) and in its ability to build a suitable image. The level of an occupation's professionalism is determined by the degree of autonomy society grants it.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>These five elements are based on the following studies: Ernest Greenwood, "The Elements of Professionalization," in *Professionalization*, ed. Howard M. Vollmer and Donald L. Mills (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), 9-19; Cullen, *Structure of Professionalism*; J.A. Jackson, ed., *Professions and Professionalism*, Sociological Studies, no. 3 (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 3-15; Barber, "Some Problems"; Wilbert E. Moore with Gerald W. Rosenblum, *The Professions: Roles and Rules* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970); William J. Goode, "Community Within A Community: The Professions," *American Sociological Review* 22 (April 1957): 194-200; Ronald L. Akers, "Framework for the Comparative Study of Group Cohesion: The Professions," *Pacific Sociological Review* 13 (Spring 1970): 73-85; Robert K. Merton, *Social Research and the Practicing Professions*, ed. Aaron Rosenblatt and Thomas F. Gieryn (Cambridge, Mass.: Abt Books, 1982), 109-34, 199-209; and Philip Elliott, *The Sociology of the Professions* (London: Macmillan, 1972).

<sup>14</sup>For example, see Harold L. Wilensky, "The Professionalization of Everyone?" *American Journal of Sociology* 70 (September 1964): 137-58.

<sup>15</sup>The most detailed description of this is Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>16</sup>Patrick B. Forsyth and Thomas J. Danisiewicz, "Toward a Theory of Professionalization," *Work and Occupations* 12 (February 1985): 59-76.

### The Sociological Models and the Classic Professions

Very early in American history three occupations—divinity, law, and medicine—began to acquire significant power and influence in society. Sociologists have studied these as the epitome of professionalism. Although all three vocations exerted significant influence in the nineteenth century, strongly held democratic ideals conflicted with the idea of divinity, law, and medicine gaining authority and power greater than that of individuals or families. During the Progressive period from 1890 to 1920, the increasing complexity of an urban-industrial society assigned a new value to expertise, social control, and economy and efficiency.<sup>17</sup> Law and medicine especially solidified their positions of strength during this era, clearing the ground for their remarkable growth since 1920.

It is evident that law and medicine are the quintessential professions as defined by the taxonomic model. Society has fostered their growth by highly valuing their missions: medicine is, as one sociologist declared, the result of "a vital and universal need" and justice is the hallmark of every advanced society. Both occupations have developed considerable bodies of specialized knowledge, strong and energetic professional associations, strict control over professional entry through licensing and control of their knowledge, excellent educational standards, and immense political influence. Finally, both the legal and medical pro-

fessions can claim essential roles in society, even retaining levels of respect beyond the limits of their own realms of expertise; the extent of such success has enabled both professions to survive scandals, controversies, and other challenges.<sup>18</sup>

Both law and medicine are also classic examples of the sociological models of professionalization, having gained significant power and autonomy from clients, regulatory agencies, and society at large. Prior to the end of the nineteenth century, medicine had little control over standards of practice within its discipline; well-trained doctors often competed equally with quacks and drummers of patent medicines and elixirs. The growth of urban areas, however, led to the spread of modern hospitals, which in turn became centers of education, specialization, and research and development. These changes were supported by the growth of self-regulating medical societies, which gradually tightened standards and control over the market for physician care and the training necessary to administer it. The development and adoption of the germ theory of disease along with a wider interest in public hygiene, successes in surgery and antiseptics, stunning victories over diseases like tuberculosis and polio, and the increased membership and visibility of the American Medical Association (its membership grew from 8,000 to 70,000 between 1900 and 1910 alone) earned a greater trust from American society.

<sup>17</sup>Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); and Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization 1889-1920* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

<sup>18</sup>For studies of the two professions, see Eliot Freidson, *Profession of Medicine: A Study of the Sociology of Applied Knowledge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Larson, *Rise of Professionalism*, 159-77; Douglas Alan Klegon, "Lawyers and the Social Structure: An Historical Analysis of the Role of Professionalization Among Lawyers in the United States" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975); and Maxwell Bloomfield, *American Lawyers in a Changing Society, 1776-1876* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

Such trust became evident after the Second World War when medicine essentially received public endorsement of its self-regulation and the release of immense quantities of research monies.

The legal profession has shown a similar pattern of development. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, it lacked power over admission to practice in the courts and had no educational standards. During the latter years of the nineteenth century, however, large legal firms supporting the new and larger American business corporations were formed. These firms led to the creation of the American Bar Association and the establishment of a more scientific body of legal knowledge. Lawyers led the political reform efforts of the Progressive era, acquiring a stronger public image in the United States. Throughout the twentieth century the notion of law has remained a prevalent concern of many citizens and that concern has been largely entrusted to a powerful legal profession.

### **American Archivists and the Sociological Models of Professionalism**

According to the criteria outlined above, the archival community has a number of fault lines that impede progress in its management of America's documentary heritage. The taxonomic model of professionalism reveals that the archival community is very weak in at least three of the five attributes. The pro-

fessionalization paradigm shows that archivists have not moved much beyond the initial stage of establishing a "potential" for professional status. In contrast with the successful cases of medicine and law, the archival community's flaws are even more apparent. A comparison to the more closely allied occupation of librarianship also shows the difficulties impeding archivists' progress toward their occupational goals.

One attribute of a profession is a body of specialized knowledge or theory. Archival theory, however, is only partially developed. Although over the past decade a stronger archival literature has developed, its orientation has been toward the description of practices rather than the fostering and sustenance of theory. Archivists have learned better how to arrange and describe, exhibit, and care for historical records, but they have still not satisfactorily figured out how to identify what constitutes a historical record<sup>19</sup> or how to deal with the complexities of a modern society awash in information.<sup>20</sup> A major reason for the lack of theoretical orientation may be that since the early 1970s archivists have mainly emphasized building a strong professional association—a commendable goal that has, unfortunately, focused the energies of the SAA on assistance to novice or inexperienced professionals.<sup>21</sup> Archivists have few opportunities for pure or sophisticated applied research,<sup>22</sup> and vir-

<sup>19</sup>See the comments on appraisal in Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983).

<sup>20</sup>See, for example, two recent strong arguments in this direction: Hugh Taylor, "Information Ecology and the Archives of the 1980s," *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984): 25–37; and Richard M. Kesner, "Automated Information Management: Is There a Role for the Archivist in the Office of the Future?" *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984–85): 162–72.

<sup>21</sup>The most influential aspect of the SAA probably continues to be its annual meetings, which provide the main forum for the discussion of professional issues and account for the origins of a significant portion of published archival literature.

<sup>22</sup>The main exception to this is the recent research fellowship program for study of modern archives sponsored by the Bentley Historical Library of the University of Michigan, with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, NHPRC (1983–1985), Earhart Foundation (1985), and National Endowment for the Humanities (1986). The NHPRC has also funded various "model" projects over the past decade, although the actual effect of this work has not been adequately studied.

tually no control over or even influence on archival education, except for institutes or apprenticeships. There are only minor distinctions between the training of archivists and the training of historians or librarians, and there is no evidence of any internal hierarchy in archives administration that distinguishes professional from para-professional or technical work.<sup>23</sup> Archivists have recently heard much about their "cycle of poverty" in resources; there also seems to be a similar cycle of poverty in archival theory. A lack of standards on professional education perpetuates a system of poor education and training, which in turn weakens the development of archival theory and the establishment of stronger professional standards. Other professions have faced similar difficulties. Reform efforts in both law and medicine were led by a few universities, which influenced the adoption of strong educational platforms by their professional associations.<sup>24</sup>

Community sanction of the archival occupation is probably the weakest element of archival professionalism. This weakness is closely related to the difficulties faced by archivists in education and theory. Archivists do not, in any substantive way, control entry to their ranks. It seems that virtually anyone can become a "professional" archivist by

simply declaring to be one. Furthermore, because of the apparent greater concern of the professional archival associations about strength in numbers rather than standards, these groups are often quick to embrace such self-anointed practitioners of archival administration.<sup>25</sup> It is small wonder, then, that the public has such a poor or incomplete understanding of the work of the archivist. The lack of certification of individual archivists and accreditation of archival education programs—or the installation of some other system to strengthen and enforce standards of archival work—only suggests that such problems will continue to haunt archivists. Indeed, archivists need to face the fact that such problems have existed for a very long time. Over a decade ago, a survey of the archival profession concluded that it was "still in the formative stage . . . [its] bounds . . . still remain undefined, and the professional identity of the members is uncertain."<sup>26</sup> If many archivists remain confused about whether they are historians, public historians, librarians, information specialists, records managers, or just archivists,<sup>27</sup> how will the public know what to sanction about archivists?

Professional cohesion is one of the strengths of the archival occupation, although even it leaves much to be improved. For many years archivists were

<sup>23</sup>For some of the most critical comments on this matter, see Lawrence J. McCrank, "Public Historians in the Information Profession: Problems in Education and Credentials," *Public Historian* 7 (Summer 1985): 7-22.

<sup>24</sup>Paul Starr notes that once a single institution, Harvard University, risked reform in medical education, other medical schools began to follow suit. After the Johns Hopkins University medical school introduced very radical changes in 1893, its innovations became the common standards of the American Medical Association in only two decades. See Starr, *Social Transformation*, 115-20.

<sup>25</sup>This is not to dismiss the value of such services by these professional bodies, but only to suggest that the predilection of the associations has been too long with providing assistance to entry-level and young professionals, without comparative opportunities for mid-career archivists. This is especially important because the profession is aging and gaining experience and responsibility. See David Bearman, "1982 Survey of the Archival Profession," *American Archivist* 46 (Spring 1983): 233-39.

<sup>26</sup>Frank B. Evans and Robert M. Warner, "American Archivists and Their Society: A Composite View," *American Archivist* (April 1971): 172.

<sup>27</sup>This is especially evident in the debate about the relationship between history and archival work as displayed in recent issues of *Archivaria*. See 16 (Summer 1983): 5-25; 17 (Winter 1983-84): 286-308; 18 (Summer 1984): 241-47; 19 (Winter 1984-85): 185-95; 20 (Summer 1985): 149-57.

proud of the relative youth of their vocation. Now, however, a certain maturation has settled in, as the National Archives—the catalyst for many professional developments—and the SAA have both attained their half-century marks. While the National Archives has been somewhat shaken in recent years with the protracted debate about its administrative independence, the SAA has jelled into the dominant professional archival association with large and well-attended annual meetings, a quarterly journal that remains the main outlet for professional publication, a lengthy list of special publications, and a growing budget and professional staff. But questions remain about how cohesive archivists are. Is SAA's membership anywhere close to comprehensive in scope of the archival community?<sup>28</sup> What are the legitimate roles of the regional and state associations?<sup>29</sup> Is national professional leadership too divided among SAA and other associations such as the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA), the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), and the National Association for Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA)? Does the allegiance of many archivists to other professionals—for example, historians, records managers, and librarians—also weaken the professional archival community?<sup>30</sup> Are the resources of any of these profes-

sional associations really sufficient for the kind of advocacy necessary in the late 1980s? These issues are very important because archivists are “terribly isolated” in their work environments.<sup>31</sup> The tremendous social influence of groups like the American Medical Association and American Bar Association testify to the necessity of great cohesion in the strengthening of a profession.

Closely related to the above is the notion of professional culture, an attribute growing stronger among archivists. At one time individuals viewed work in archives as an alternative career for historians or librarians. Although this attitude is still evident in many circles,<sup>32</sup> an increasing number of people seem to become archivists as a first choice. The idea of what composes a professional culture is certainly subjective, but there is the concept of an archival calling and strong commitment to the mission of managing America's documentary heritage. Most individuals become archivists because they are somehow convinced the past is relevant to understanding the present and is a vital aspect of our lives, whether in a utilitarian way or simply for enjoyment. The only real impediment to the development of a professional archival culture in the past has been the reluctance of archivists to define or describe the nature of their work. Now, however, there are at least some descriptions of what archivists do, their

<sup>28</sup>Any quick scanning of a recent SAA membership directory reveals severe gaps among the personnel of the National Archives and state archives, the very groups that have shared (and continue to have) a tremendous responsibility for professional leadership.

<sup>29</sup>Patrick M. Quinn, “Regional Archival Organizations and the Society of American Archivists,” *American Archivist* 46 (Fall 1983): 433–40.

<sup>30</sup>Such obstacles can be overcome, as seen in the development of the American engineering profession; Robert Perrucci and Joel E. Gerstl, *Profession Without Community: Engineers in American Society*, Studies in Occupations and Professions (New York: Random House, 1969).

<sup>31</sup>Bearman, “1982 Survey,” 237.

<sup>32</sup>The development of public history during the past decade is the prime example. This movement grew out of the employment crisis of historians. Archival administration was co-opted because of its nonacademic employment possibilities and the relative weaknesses of archivists' own definitions and control over their field. For a more complete exploration of this subject, see Richard J. Cox, “Archivists and Public Historians in the United States,” *Public Historian* 8 (Summer 1986):25–41.



purpose, and an increasing degree of common language and technique.<sup>33</sup> Considering the relative youth and small size of the community, it has done as well in this area as the older and larger professions such as medicine and law.

Like the idea of professional culture, institutionalized altruism is difficult, at best, to measure within the archival community (or within any occupation for that matter). The strongest evidence of the altruistic motives of archivists has been their long-standing desire to make historical records accessible to the public. The tradition of articles on reference and arrangement and description and the development of a genre on archival materials in exhibitions, audio-visual programs, and public relations efforts<sup>34</sup> reveal the extent of an ingrained archival altruism. Efforts by associations such as the SAA and NAGARA to develop codes of ethics and statements of basic operating principles in key areas also reflect this urge.<sup>35</sup> As in many of the areas already discussed, however, the archival profession seems intent to rely upon persuasion rather than enforceable standards. The SAA's completely voluntary institutional self-evaluation is but one example of this attitude.<sup>36</sup> While excellent in content, this program's future

impact on the profession is debatable unless it is viewed as but the first step toward accreditation of archival institutions. Although there are rewards for altruistic behavior,<sup>37</sup> there are no penalties for activities that are not. The same attitude can be seen in the recent AASLH survey of the historical field: much of the great talk on increased professionalism has been rejected because of the perception of a lack of necessary resources and the inability of the ubiquitous "lone-arranger" to participate in or gain anything from professionalism.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, other professions, like medicine and law, rigorously patrol and discipline their practitioners.

Turning to the professionalization paradigm that uses "autonomy" as its linchpin, it becomes further evident that archivists have not realized their full potential as a profession or succeeded in the necessary image building. Although the American archival profession originated in the same Progressive climate as many other professions, it remained closely tied to the historical profession and larger local history field of historical societies, historic houses and sites, and museums.<sup>39</sup> Historical societies perpetuated the traditions of collecting and antiquarianism.<sup>40</sup> The relationship between

<sup>33</sup>Cf., "Final Report of Task Force on Standard Reporting Practice," *SAA Newsletter*, November 1983, 13-16; "Archivist: A Definition," *SAA Newsletter*, January 1984, 4-5; "Archives: What They Are, Why They Matter," *SAA Newsletter*, May 1984, 6-7.

<sup>34</sup>E.g., Gail Farr Casterline, *Archives & Manuscripts: Exhibits*, Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1980); and Ann E. Pederson and Gail Farr Casterline, *Archives & Manuscripts: Public Programs*, Basic Manual Series (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1982).

<sup>35</sup>"A Code of Ethics for Archivists," *SAA Newsletter*, July 1979, 11-15; and the NAGARA brochures, *Policy Statement Regarding the Preservation and Disposition of the Official Records of Governors* (1981) and *Principles for Management of Local Government Records* (1982).

<sup>36</sup>Task Force on Institutional Evaluation, *Evaluation of Archival Institutions: Services, Principles, and Guide to Self-Study* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1982).

<sup>37</sup>The SAA and regional archival associations provide a number of awards for leadership and achievements in the archival profession.

<sup>38</sup>Charles Phillips and Patricia Hogan, *A Culture at Risk: Who Cares for America's Heritage?* and *The Wages of History: The AASLH Employment Trends and Salary Survey* (Nashville: AASLH, 1984).

<sup>39</sup>The Progressive origins of archival administration need further investigation, but for some suggestive comments see William S. Price, Jr., "Plowing Virgin Fields: State Support for Southern Archives, Particularly North Carolina," *Carolina Comments* 29 (March 1981):41-47.

<sup>40</sup>The best account remains Leslie W. Dunlap, *American Historical Societies 1790-1860* (Madison, Wis.: privately printed, 1944), chapt. 6.



archivists and historians, despite many positive benefits,<sup>41</sup> restricted archivists in developing a unique body of theory, educational criteria, and their own professional identity. In the 1960s and 1970s as the writings of academic historians became increasingly monographic, indistinguishable from those of social scientists and indecipherable to the public, the public image of archivists suffered by association. The general public and even employers of archivists now seem to lack any real comprehension of the nature or importance of archival work.<sup>42</sup> At best it can be said that the reemergence of the issue of archival certification and accreditation and an increased concern for more productive archival advocacy are evidence of the laying of a better groundwork for archival professionalism. Still, these concerns are only beginning to be important to the archival community.

As a result of all these circumstances, archivists possess little autonomy from most clients or employing organizations. A sociologist classifying the archival occupation would probably call it a "semi-profession" or "mimic profession." Amitai Etzioni described semi-professions as follows: "Their training is

shorter, their status is less legitimated, their right to privileged communication less established, there is less of a specialized body of knowledge, and they have less autonomy from supervision or societal control than 'the' professions."<sup>43</sup> Forsyth and Dansiewicz have more recently coined the term "mimic professions" to cover occupations that lack autonomy: "The mimicry concept is borrowed from evolutionary theory that holds that principles of natural selection may explain the evolution of one animal species to *look* like another species having some vital advantage. Analogously, mimic professions may have a code of ethics and other trappings of professions, but they have no power. They have taken on the coloration but not the substance of profession."<sup>44</sup>

The importance of such professional issues for archivists becomes clearer in an examination of their librarian colleagues. Sociologists consider the library community a semi-profession,<sup>45</sup> and librarians, in a remarkable array of self-reflective studies, have generally agreed.<sup>46</sup> Most importantly, librarianship seems to lack a truly systematic body of knowledge, and its education is largely job-oriented. A full study of this subject

<sup>41</sup>Mattie U. Russell, "The Influence of Historians on the Archival Profession in the United States," *American Archivist* 46 (Summer 1983): 277-85.

<sup>42</sup>See Sidney J. Levy, "The Status of Virtue: Resource Allocators' Perceptions of Archives," *SAA Newsletter*, August 1985, 5-7.

<sup>43</sup>*The Semi-Professions and Their Organization: Teachers, Nurses, Social Workers* (New York: Free Press, 1969), v.

<sup>44</sup>"Toward a Theory of Professionalization," 64-65.

<sup>45</sup>"Cf., William J. Goode, "The Librarian: From Occupation to Profession?" *Library Quarterly* 31 (October 1961): 306-20; and William Joseph Reeves, *Librarians as Professionals: The Occupation's Impact on Library Work Arrangements* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1980). There have been some critiques of Goode's ideas, such as Michael F. Winter, *The Professionalization of Librarianship*, Occasional Papers, University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, no. 160 (July 1983).

<sup>46</sup>Among the more important essays are the following: Thomas Gwinup, "The Failure of Librarians to Attain Profession: The Causes, the Consequences, and the Prospect," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 48 (February 1974): 482-90; Lester Asheim, "Librarians as Professionals," *Library Trends* 27 (Winter 1979): 225-57; Mary Lee Bundy and Paul Wasserman, "Professionalism Reconsidered," *College & Research Libraries* 29 (January 1968): 3-26; and Ralph M. Edwards, "The Management of Libraries and the Professional Functions of Librarians," *Library Quarterly* 45 (April 1975): 150-60. Not surprisingly, there have also been objections to these views; see William F. Birdsall, "Librarians and Professionalism: Status Measured by Outmoded Models," *Canadian Library Journal* 37 (June 1980): 145-48; and Gardner Hanks and C. James Schmidt, "An Alternative Model of a Profession for Librarians," *College & Research Libraries* 36 (May 1975): 175-87.

concluded that over the past four decades, "education for library science, while marked by quantitative growth, has been characterized by intellectual confusion. . . . This confusion exhibits itself in the inability of library science educators to identify those unique problems which would create an independent scientific profession of library science. This confusion has sent the profession off in all directions, looking to other more established fields, always searching for itself as a subset of some other field such as history, management science, sociology, education or psychology."<sup>47</sup> The public does not really understand library work. A continuing complaint by librarians is that the public believes in libraries but not librarians. Many librarians think this results from the advocacy methods of library associations and attitudes among librarians themselves. Librarianship is completely subordinate to the clients' needs, fostering a clerical or routine work orientation at the expense of developing either a theoretical basis for practice or better management skills. Librarianship lacks the authority it needs to enforce job standards, license practitioners, and distinguish between professional, para-professional, or technical work.<sup>48</sup> In 1972 Christian Boissonnas wrote that "librarians are facing an identity crisis."<sup>49</sup> The crisis seems to have continued, unresolved.

Despite these admitted weaknesses,

librarians possess a number of significant advantages, further revealing the impoverished condition of the archival profession. Despite whatever problems might beset the librarians' educational standards, there is the notion of a core curriculum, bolstered by an accreditation process for library schools. Moreover, most librarians are aware of the need to strengthen significantly their educational foundations, as reflected in such efforts as the Conant Report.<sup>50</sup> Related to this is the fact that the M.L.S. has become the accepted ticket into the profession, although again many librarians acknowledge its weaknesses and need for significant revisions. An impressive array of journals and specialized publishers offers ample opportunities for the publication of theory and description of practice.<sup>51</sup> Librarians possess an extremely strong professional association experienced and adept at lobbying and pushing its goals into the public forum; the American Library Association supports a branch office in Washington, D.C., and has successfully held White House conferences on American libraries, putting librarians considerably beyond archivists in the public eye. When National Library Week rolls around, American citizens are literally bombarded by posters, the media, and other promotional efforts. Many of these achievements have been realized because librarians have been striving for profes-

<sup>47</sup>L. Houser and Alvin M. Schrader, *The Search for a Scientific Profession: Library Science Education in the U.S. and Canada* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 144, 146.

<sup>48</sup>For discussion of such concerns, see a special issue on library certification of *Library Journal* 102 (1 September 1977):1715-29.

<sup>49</sup>"ALA and Professionalism," *American Libraries* 3 (October 1972): 972.

<sup>50</sup>Ralph W. Conant, *The Conant Report: A Study of the Education of Librarians* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980). This was a controversial report, and it is difficult, as yet, to perceive its practical impact.

<sup>51</sup>Consider the range available in library journals. There are general journals (e.g., the *Drexel Library Quarterly*, *Library Quarterly*, *Library Trends*, and *Library Journal*), those catering to the needs of specific types of libraries (e.g., *Behavioral & Social Sciences Librarian*, *College & Research Libraries*, *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, *Medical Reference Services Quarterly*, *Online*, and *Special Libraries*), and those focusing on specific functions of librarians (e.g., *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, *Collection Management*, *Information Technology and Libraries*, *Journal of Library Administration*, *Library & Information Sciences Research*, *Library Resources & Technical Services*, and *RQ*).

sional standards twice as long as archivists. This older legacy has also enabled the establishment and acceptance of many basic technical standards in library administration that increasingly form the basis of distinctions between professional, para-professional, and technical support staff.<sup>52</sup>

### Archivists as Professionals: Why Does It Matter?

Archivists have long been concerned about professionalism whether they recognize it as such or not. Discussions about improved training, greater resources, and the validity of standardized practices all relate to what it means to be a profession and have sufficient power to accomplish such goals. Unfortunately, many archivists have reacted to the negative connotations of professionalism. In one of the few essays on archival professionalism, historian Howard Zinn characterized "professionalism" as a "powerful form of social control" and warned that archivists' attention to their improved status supported such a perverse society.<sup>53</sup> Equally unfortunate, however, has been the tendency of archivists to undervalue professionalism as simply a variety of activities that individual archivists can pursue in order to

become better archivists. Somehow to be more professional means only being better trained, able to acquire meaningful work experience and to participate in professional associations, and competent to contribute to scholarship.<sup>54</sup>

For a number of important reasons, archivists need to think more systematically about the issue of professionalism. First, the archival community lacks resources and authority partly because it fails to assert itself as a profession fulfilling an essential role in modern society. Second, the threats (and opportunities) of the advancing information age and the complexity of modern society have prompted some archivists either to argue for the redefinition of historical records as information sources and archivists as information specialists or to call for a stronger cultural role for archivists.<sup>55</sup> Regardless of one's predilections, archival work must make substantial accommodations to modern society just to maintain its role of documentation. Information scientists, although still attempting to define their own field, are quite willing to assume a larger role that either encompasses archives or forgets about the need to care for historical records.<sup>56</sup> One archivist has characterized his community as a "colorful mosaic of

<sup>52</sup>Allen B. Veaner, "Librarians: The Next Generation," *Library Journal* 109 (1 April 1984): 623-25.

<sup>53</sup>"Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest," *Midwestern Archivist* 2, no. 2 (1977): 15.

<sup>54</sup>Cf., Harold T. Pinkett, "Professional Development of an Archivist: Some Ways and Means," *Georgia Archive* 3 (Summer 1975): 107-15. A remarkable exception to this is Samuel S. Silsby, Jr., *Archives Standards and Professionalism*, Information Bulletin, no. 3 (Augusta: Maine State Archives, [1976]), which deserves broader reading and notice than it has received.

<sup>55</sup>For more on the growth of the information industry, see Anthony Debons, Donald W. King, Una Mansfield, and Donald L. Shirey, *The Information Professional: Survey of an Emerging Field*, Books in Library and Information Science, vol. 38, ed. Allen Kent (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1980). For various reactions by archivists, see Hugh Taylor, "Information Ecology and the Archives of the 1980s," *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984): 25-37, and "The Collective Memory: Archives and Libraries as Heritage," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982-83): 118-30; Kesner, "Automated Information Management: Is There a Role for the Archivist in the Office of the Future?"; F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," *American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981): 207-16; Terry Cook, "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85): 28-49, and "Clio: The Archivist's Muse?," *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977-78): 198-203; Wilcomb Washburn, "The Archivist's Two-Way Stretch," *Archivaria* 7 (Winter 1978): 137-43; and George Bolentenko, "Archivists and Historians: Keepers of the Well," 5-25.

<sup>56</sup>See, for example, Elaine Svenonius and Rutherford Witthus, "Information Science as a Profession," *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 16 (1981), 291-316.

archivists, records managers, manuscript curators, librarians, historians, and information specialists" unable to agree on stronger standards of self-regulation and definition.<sup>57</sup> Many of these groups are, in fact, actively working on stronger standards, whether archivists are or not.<sup>58</sup> Third, because of our increasingly complex society, buttressed by information technology, archivists' inability to document that society requires extraordinary efforts unlike those commonly employed in the past. Archivists can no longer afford to collect the records of individuals and institutions as if they represented isolated, autonomous agents. Our post-World War II society is characterized by a myriad of "complex relationships between institutions and individuals" plus new forms of record-keeping, which require new definitions, new partnerships, and new methods from archivists.<sup>59</sup> It is reasonable to assume that stronger archival credentials will be important assets; the credibility of the archivist is equally as important as the social utility of archives. Fourth, and finally, modern society and information technology have

brought an increased concern with deprofessionalization, "a loss to professional occupations of their unique qualities, particularly their monopoly over knowledge, public belief in their service ethos, and expectations of work autonomy and authority over the client."<sup>60</sup> In American society the ascendancy of professions has been challenged, according to a number of critics, by the proliferation of knowledge (again, especially information technology), the growth of bureaucratic institutions, and the spread of democratic ideas and ideals.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, a number of professions have seen the societal changes as opportunities for strengthening their ability to accomplish their missions.<sup>62</sup> If archivists are going to ensure the preservation and use of America's documentary heritage, they must guarantee that their mission is kept before the American public. This requires clarifying the definition of an archivist and strengthening the standards governing the archivist's occupation.

Thus the position of archival administration as an occupation and the changes

<sup>57</sup>Peter J. Wosh, "Creating a SemiProfessional Profession: Archivists View Themselves," *Georgia Archive* 10 (Fall 1982): 5-6.

<sup>58</sup>Records managers are a good case. See J. Michael Pemberton, "Library and Information Science: The Educational Base for Professional Records Management," *Records Management Quarterly* 15 (April 1981): 48-50, 52-53. There have even been rumblings among historical editors; see Thomas E. Jeffrey, "The Education of Editors: Current Status and Future Prospects," *Documentary Editing* 7 (March 1985): 12-16.

<sup>59</sup>Helen Samuels, "Who Controls the Past," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986): 109-24; Joan K. Haas, Helen Willa Samuels, and Barbara Trippel Simmons, *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology: A Guide* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1985); and Larry J. Hackman, "Historical Documentation in the United States: Archivists—and Historians?" *OAH Newsletter* 13 (August 1985): 17-18.

<sup>60</sup>Marie R. Haug, "Deprofessionalization: An Alternate Hypothesis for the Future," in *Professionalization and Social Change*, The Sociological Review Monograph 20, ed. Paul Halmos (December 1973), 197. See also Nina Toren, "Deprofessionalization and Its Sources," *Sociology of Work and Occupations* 2 (November 1975): 323-37; and Haug, "The Deprofessionalization of Everyone?" in *Libraries in Post-Industrial Society*, ed. Leigh Estabrook (Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryx Press, 1977), 67-84.

<sup>61</sup>Yarmolinsky, "What Future for the Professional in American Society?"; and Marie R. Haug, "Computer Technology and the Obsolescence of the Concept of Profession," in *Work and Technology*, ed. Marie R. Haug and Jacque Dofny, SAGE Studies in International Sociology, no. 10, (Beverly Hills, Cal.: SAGE Publications, 1977), 216-24.

<sup>62</sup>Cf., Brian Nelson, "Online Bibliographic Searching and the Deprofessionalization of Librarianship," *Online Review* 4 (September 1980): 215-24.

in modern society mandate that archivists seriously consider their status as a profession. Specifically, archivists must consider and resolve six issues.

*Archivists need to define and promote the social utility of historical records, regardless of format.* Without society's acceptance of the value of archives, archivists will never acquire the resources or the means to accomplish their mission. Archivists must demonstrate that the preservation of historical records contributes positively to society, as does the practice of law or medicine. If no documentation enabled research on contemporary problems and issues, guaranteed administrative continuity or protection of citizens' rights, allowed the study of the past, or educated or entertained the public about its history, what would society be like? Archivists need to continue to build upon the efforts of such bodies as SAA's Archives and Society Task Force, as well as to promote the study and discussion of this important subject in both professional and public circles.

*In promoting the social utility of archives, archivists and others must be careful to stress the importance of individual archivists in accomplishing the archival mission.* Archivists need to avoid the problem of gaining increased public recognition of archives but little appreciation for the necessity of archivists. As noted earlier, many librarians have complained about their own promotional

efforts having a similar result. If archivists expect to establish and maintain professional standards for individuals, such a problem cannot be allowed to develop. Employers of archivists especially must be able to distinguish between qualified archivists and those seeking archival positions who lack proper education and experience.

*Archivists need to develop a much stronger national voice for archival issues and concerns.* At present a strong, unified voice seems impractical because of the variety of national associations—SAA, NAGARA, ARMA, and AASLH—concerned with records and the generally limited resources of each association. These groups working together under national leadership could bring vital public attention to the deteriorating documentary heritage of the United States.<sup>63</sup> There are many examples of what has been and needs to be done in this regard. The National Archives' success in gaining political independence exemplifies the kind of national effort required, a linking of concerned professional associations and individuals in the political process.<sup>64</sup> Archivists know more about their profession than ever before. They need to build upon the various NHPRC-sponsored state assessment reports.<sup>65</sup> They need to issue regular national reports on the management of America's archives. To facilitate this, archivists need to develop better means of disseminating informa-

<sup>63</sup>Anna K. Nelson, "In Support of History," *AHA Perspectives* 22 (March 1984): 14–16; and Richard J. Cox, "Leadership and Local Government Records: The Opportunity of the Joint Committee on the Management, Preservation, and Use of Local Government Records," *Midwestern Archivist* 10, no. 1 (1985): 33–41.

<sup>64</sup>Charlene N. Bickford, *The Coalition to Save Our Documentary Heritage: An Important Lesson in Archival Advocacy*, MARAC Occasional Publication, no. 3 (n.p.: Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, 1983). Archivists might also study the movement that led to the creation of the National Archives; Victor Gondos, Jr., *J. Franklin Jameson and the Birth of the National Archives 1906–1926* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

<sup>65</sup>Cf., Edie Hedlin, "Archival Programs in the Southeast: A Preliminary Assessment," *Provenance* 11 (Spring 1984): 1–15; and Virginia Stewart, "Archives in the Midwest: Assessments and Prospects," *Midwestern Archivist* 10, no. 1 (1985): 5–16.



tion throughout their community and to the public.<sup>66</sup> The increased and improved profile of the newly-independent National Archives is essential to ensuring that this happens.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps not just a national voice but a national platform for archival administration is needed. As one commentator on the archival profession stated, "there is no national archival program. . . . But without some kind of larger plan, can any of us be fully satisfied that we are really working effectively?"<sup>68</sup>

*Archivists should strengthen their educational foundation, theory, and public profile by forming full masters-level archival administration programs.* American archivists need to deemphasize their heavy reliance upon apprenticeship in the education of professionals. Apprenticeship is most useful for only a limited range of archival activities that do not reflect the full variety of responsibilities an archivist encounters. Apprenticeship also "perpetuates the standards, and even more, the outlook of the dominant old hands,"<sup>69</sup> limiting severely the opportunity to learn about new theories and methods. Beyond the training of new professionals, archival education must also be a forum for the discussion and creation of archival theory that encourages practicing archivists to ask *why* and not just how they administer historical materials. Critics of archival education have noted that the present

system perpetuates the scenario of busy archivists with little time to consider the theory underlying their work.<sup>70</sup> This pattern could best be broken by an independent masters' program. Terry Eastwood, director of the only such program in North America at the University of British Columbia, has stated that the "first purpose of professional education . . . is to inculcate a body of general principles, a theoretical framework . . . which supports and guides the actual practice of the profession."<sup>71</sup> Without such a visible educational standard, archivists may never be in a suitable bargaining position for more resources or influence and may be unable to deal with the challenges of the modern information era. In an interesting commentary on the state of archival education, recent graduates of U.S. archival educational programs noted exactly such difficulties. Because of the fuzzy identity of programs, one student worried that "no one out there [is] promoting the archival profession and recruiting promising students into established programs." Another, criticizing the joint masters programs in history and library science, concluded, "we were pursuing neither careers in historical research nor careers in librarianship. We were caught in a no man's land, a void, between the two professions."<sup>72</sup>

*Archivists should develop systems for individual certification and institutional accreditation in order to support their*

<sup>66</sup>A preliminary conclusion of the NAGARA study on the feasibility of establishing an archival clearinghouse was that the "profession does not need more information but does need to organize and manage the information already available in ways that will make it more accessible and useful to the wide range of potential users." Unpublished report of Victoria I. Walch, 26 June 1985.

<sup>67</sup>See Robert M. Warner, "The National Archives at Fifty," *Midwestern Archivist* 10, no. 1 (1985): 25-32.

<sup>68</sup>Jeffrey Field, "The Impact of Federal Funding on Archival Management in the United States," *Midwestern Archivist* 7, no. 2 (1982): 81-82.

<sup>69</sup>Michael Cook, "Professional Training: International Perspectives," *Archivaria* 7 (Winter 1978): 28.

<sup>70</sup>Edwin Welch, "Archival Education," *Archivaria* 4 (Summer 1977): 49-59; Frank G. Burke, "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981): 40-46.

<sup>71</sup>"The Origins and Aims of the Master of Archival Studies Programme at the University of British Columbia," *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983): 40.

<sup>72</sup>Virginia Cain, ed., "Archives By Degree: Personal Perspectives on Academic Preparation for the Archival Profession," *Provenance* 2 (Fall 1984): 44, 47.



*education standards and broader mission in society.* During the debate about archival certification in the late 1970s, Trudy Peterson argued that archivists have “two fundamental responsibilities”: “to protect the general public from incompetent or unscrupulous practitioners” and “to assist members of the profession in securing employment commensurate with professional status.” She concluded that “a program of institutional and personal archival certification is the logical first step” toward meeting these responsibilities.<sup>73</sup> It is surprising that archivists have not moved more deliberately in this direction. Without certification and accreditation, the public identity of archivists will remain unclear, distinctions between professionals and nonprofessionals will always be uncertain at best, and the continued establishment of inadequate archival programs will continue, threatening the preservation of our documentary heritage.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, related disciplines are actively working in these areas.<sup>75</sup> The spectre of archivists being absorbed into another profession or severely weakened in the competition for resources is a very real possibility. Fears of limiting the size of an already small profession or further weakening poor institutions and programs must be weighed against the chances for strengthening the identity of archivists and their work in modern society.

*Archivists should not limit their quest*

*for increased professionalism by dwelling on their small numbers, but should concentrate instead on their potential for employment. They should realize that their efforts to improve professional standards can open up additional avenues for societal influences.* Nothing in the literature suggests that the degree of an occupation’s professionalism has anything to do with the number of its practitioners. Rather, it is the importance of the occupation’s mission and its ability to convince society of its importance that determines professional status and the successful pursuit of mission. Opportunities are great for archivists to seek influence and create employment, one example being within local governments. If only a small portion of America’s political subdivisions employed a professional archivist, the size of the archival community would expand significantly.<sup>76</sup> But archivists are not now in a position even to urge such proselytizing efforts. Without stronger standards that distinguish professional archivists, local governments will have little ability to hire the right individuals. Without more and stronger archival education programs, local governments will not have a qualified pool of applicants from which to recruit. The future of the archival profession really rests with archivists themselves.

With this agenda archivists will *make* the opportunities needed to strengthen

<sup>73</sup>Trudy H. Peterson, Patrick M. Quinn, and Hugh A. Taylor, “Professional Archival Training,” *American Archivist* 40 (July 1977): 315.

<sup>74</sup>On the latter matter, both archives and historical agencies face similar problems. See Dennis K. McDaniel, “In My Opinion: Stop Museum Proliferation!” *History News* 39 (March 1984) 31–32; and William L. Joyce, “Historical Records Repositories,” in *Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States*, ed. Lisa B. Weber ([Albany, N.Y.]: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1984), 44.

<sup>75</sup>Debra Shaw, “Accreditation and Information Science,” *ASIS Bulletin* 11 (April–May 1985): 13–14; Susan M. Bronder, “Gaining Professional Status: The Leadership Role of the Institute of Certified Records Managers,” *Records Management Quarterly* 18 (January 1984): 20–22, 24–26, 32; and Evelyn H. Daniel, “Accreditation,” *Library Journal* (1 April 1985): 49–53.

<sup>76</sup>There are an estimated eighty thousand political subdivisions; H.G. Jones, *Local Government Records: An Introduction to Their Management, Preservation, and Use* (Nashville: AASLH, 1980), x.

their position in modern society and enable them to fulfill their mission of documenting it.

### Final Thoughts: Archivists and Power

The essence of professionalism is having power within society. Discussion of such power brings up various negative connotations, but it is nevertheless the means by which any professional mission will be achieved. Archivists finally seem to be grasping that reality. Virginia Stewart has reminded her colleagues that to gain control over records, archivists need to recognize that success depends on more than just definitions of responsibilities and functions: "It is a power issue, involving both formal authority and informal mechanisms of implementation. Archivists may consider themselves most qualified to control records, but this claim is not widely shared."<sup>77</sup> A few years earlier, Frank Burke had similar thoughts: "The [archival] profession has been too lax too long in not protecting its own territory and fighting for its principles. We should be out on the ramparts struggling for recognition of our important role in society. . . ."<sup>78</sup> Instead, "archivists enjoy the status of virtue, not the status of power," according to the recent study by SAA on the attitudes of resource allocators toward archives and archivists.<sup>79</sup> If this continues, archivists will remain in basements, will acquire funding only when it is surplus from other more essential functions, and can only hope for a chance to document modern society rather than energetically pursuing that goal. In a recent article Ed Weldon captured the archival profession of the future:

I recently visited one of the world's most advanced research and development institutions, which spends millions of dollars each year collecting and controlling data. It employs some of the most sophisticated scientists and information managers. Yet its historical records are collected in old-fashioned file cabinets by a sole, dedicated consultant-historian with no training in archival administration and certainly without adequate institutional support. Because of space problems, he is planning to deposit the meager but rich records thus collected with a neighboring private university where they will be deprived of institutional context, divorced from related scientific records and information, and dependent ultimately upon private-sector funding. This is not an isolated experience.<sup>80</sup>

Professionalism is one route by which archivists can break away from such situations.

Two logical arguments can be expected in opposition to the recommendations of this essay. One is that somehow, despite whatever problems exist, archivists have managed to do a fairly respectable job gathering the materials needed for understanding the past. To this the answer is obvious. The changes in documentation of the late twentieth century demand that archivists fulfill new roles and develop new strategies. Documenting an event of 1975 is an exceedingly more complex process than documenting one of 1800. The second argument contends that the very changes of modern society, primarily its reliance on technology, are making professions as such obsolete.<sup>81</sup> Why, then, should archivists, or members of any oc-

<sup>77</sup>"Archives in the Midwest," 10.

<sup>78</sup>"Archival Cooperation," *American Archivist* 46 (Summer 1983): 303.

<sup>79</sup>Levy, "The Status of Virtue: Resource Allocators' Perceptions of Archives," 7.

<sup>80</sup>"Archives and the Practice of Public History," *Public Historian* 4 (Summer 1982): 50.

<sup>81</sup>Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (New York: Bantam, 1981) is an example of such projections.

cupation, waste their time trying to achieve professional attributes belonging to an outmoded system? This argument is not as easily refuted. The best response is to say that such discarding of professions is not guaranteed. The late Warren I. Susman cautioned against "technological determinism": "the acceptance of any technological innovation obviously

depends on the nature of the culture into which any proposed innovation is introduced. Even more significantly, the *form* such innovation takes is culturally shaped."<sup>82</sup> Archivists cannot afford to gamble on predictions, but should instead grasp the best means available for accomplishing their mission. That means is professionalism.

<sup>82</sup>*Culture As History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 253. For examples of fuller comments voicing such concerns, see Peter N. Stearns, "Forecasting the Future: Historical Analogies and Technological Determinism," *Public Historian* 5 (Summer 1983): 31-54; and "The Idea of Postindustrial Society: Some Problems," *Journal of Social History* 17 (Summer 1984): 685-93.

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