Archival Education: Two Fables

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WHEN DECIDING ON THE title of this talk, "Archival Education: A Fable," it did not occur to me that one fable may not be enough. Whether this second fable will prove to add depth or merely add to its length, I will leave up to you. The first fable, from Aesop, is titled "The Man and the Satyr":

> A Man and a Satyr became friends, and determined to live together. All went well for awhile, until one day in wintertime the Satyr saw the Man blowing on his hands. "Why do you do that?" he asked. "To warm my hands," said the Man. That same day, when they sat down to supper together, they each had a steaming hot bowl of porridge, and the Man raised the bowl to his mouth and blew on it. "Why do you do that?" asked the Satyr. "To cool my porridge," said the Man. The Satyr got up from the table. "Good-bye," said he, "I'm going: I can't be friends with a man who blows hot and cold with the same breath."[1]

The second fable, also from Aesop, may be more familiar to you:

> A Lioness and a Vixen were talking together about their young, as mothers will, and saying how healthy and well-grown they were, and what beautiful coats they had, and how they were the image of their parents. "My litter of cubs is a joy to see," said the Fox; and then she added, rather maliciously, "But I notice you never have more than one." "No," said the Lioness grimly, "but that one's a lion."[2]

Fables are fictitious stories that generally feature talking animals. They often relate myths and legends, and frequently, they are used for didactic purposes. That is my intent in recounting these stories, and I hope their application to my subject will become apparent in the course of this presentation.

In the past few years there has been a remarkable surge of interest and concern for the manner in which we educate ourselves for careers as archivists, and main-

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[1] *Aesop's Fables*, trans. V. S. Vernon Jones, with introduction by G. K. Chesterton and illustrations by Arthur Rackham (New York: Avenel Books, 1975), facsimile of a 1912 edition, 86–87.

[2] *Aesop's Fables*, 91.

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tain competence throughout our professional lives. This concern has always been characteristic of our profession, but the gradual graying or aging of the profession in recent years seems to have sharpened the awareness that our identity is ill formed. We do not have widely recognized credentials, and our academic allegiance is not precisely focused in any given discipline. We are defensive whether we do in fact constitute a profession, or whether our work is grounded in theory or is merely an accretion of practice.[3]

There are many observable signs of this concern for professional education and identity. There have been many sessions on archival education and professional development at recent SAA annual meetings; at the New York annual meeting, there were sessions such as ''Archival Training and Higher Education,'' which concentrated on the role of higher education in archival training, the development of a curriculum, and the role of ''extra-educational institutions'' in archival training. Another session at that same meeting was titled ''Education and Training for the Archival Profession: The Roles of Academic Programs, Archival Agencies, and Archival Education Institutes.'' A third session was titled ''Education and Training for the Archival Profession: The Role for National and Regional Organizations.'' Other sessions addressed such varied, but related topics as ''Education for Preservation Personnel,'' ''The Education of an Archives Manager,'' ''Educating Administrators,'' and, finally, ''The M.L.S. and Employment: Perspectives from the Accreditation Team, Conservation, and Rare Books and Manuscripts Fields.''

There is ample additional evidence of interest in the broad topic of educating archivists and the available means for achieving it. Ten years after the original formulation, the Committee on Education and Professional Development has revised the ''Guidelines for Graduate Archival Education Programs.'' A subcommittee of that group has begun drafting an education plan for the profession that will attempt to link specific constituencies with appropriate education programs. For example, the plan might identify programs for groups as diverse as those seeking graduate education for careers as archivists, or midcareer archivists seeking to update their expertise in specific subject or topical areas, or entry-level archivists whose training has not equipped them to fulfill the archival responsibilities they have been employed to meet.[4]

Yet another initiative, likely a joint effort between the Education Committee and the SAA office, will concentrate on representing SAA on teams that accredit the schools and departments in which graduate archival education programs are located. To this end, we are making modest progress on the library science front, and have developed contacts with the ALA Committee on Accreditation, after having been represented in a study funded by the Department of Education that reviewed and revised the accreditation process for library education programs. SAA participation on accreditation teams that visit history departments as part of the regional accreditation of institutions of higher education generally is more difficult to achieve and will require patience before we will be able to make an impact on the regional accred-

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[3]There have been several recent essays on the history and development of the archival profession: Frank G. Burke, ''The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States,'' *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981): 40–46; Jacqueline Goggin, ''That We Shall Truly Deserve the Title of 'Profession': The Training and Education of Archivists, 1930–1960,'' *American Archivist* 47 (Summer 1984): 243–54; Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983); Richard J. Cox, ''Professionalism and Archivists in the United States,'' *American Archivist* 49 (Summer 1986): 229–47. See also ''Individual Certification,'' *SAA Newsletter*, August 1986, 3–9; William L. Joyce, ''The SAA Certification Program: A Report to the Profession,'' *SAA Newsletter*, May 1987, 8–9; ''What Is An Archivist?'' *SAA Newsletter*, March 1982, 3.

[4]''Proposed Guidelines for Graduate Archival Education Programs,'' *SAA Newsletter,* May 1987, 10–12; ''Conference Launches Education Initiative,'' *SAA Newsletter*, May 1987, 1, 4–5.

itation process.

Still another important development has been the grant awarded to SAA a few years ago by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and matched by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. These awards have enabled the Society to plan basic archival education packages for interested organizations, as well as to develop specialized courses designed to "go beyond the basics." These grant-funded activities, together with the Society's commitment to fund, out of its own treasury, an education officer to plan, coordinate, and develop a wide variety of archival education activities, indicate the Society's intention to provide leadership and continuity in its archival education initiative.[5]

Another measure of the seriousness of the Society's commitment to education is the recent vote by Council to proceed with a program of certification for archivists. There is already evidence that certification will have an impact on archival education programs. One proposal is that graduates of archival education programs be permitted to take the certification test immediately upon completion of their program. The job experience requirement would be waived in such cases. There are, of course, many practical problems that would need to be worked out, chief among them *which* programs would be eligible to allow their students to take the certification examination *without* first satisfying the job experience requirement.[6]

Out of all this ferment concerning archival education, a consensus is emerging. At long last, archivists are beginning to take the steps necessary to create a community of professional authority and competence, and to commit themselves to developing further graduate level training programs at "masters and doctoral levels in related fields or fully independent graduate programs in archival administration," in the language of the revised graduate guidelines. In addition, there is interest in formalizing the role of the regional archival associations in archival education, in trying to accommodate the needs of entry-level archivists with insufficient training, and in serving midcareer archivists who seek to upgrade their skills with continuing education offerings. The importance of this consensus cannot be overemphasized. It should be applauded, indeed celebrated, and like the lion in the fable, we need to take *pride* and work tirelessly to achieve quality in *all* of our education programs, as we appear to have achieved consensus regarding the purposes of such programs. It is time that we consolidate our energy and focus our efforts on translating that consensus into strong education programs. It should be our highest priority.

How do we account for the recent appearance of a consensus regarding archival education? About five years ago, the Committee on Education and Professional Development recognized that the Society was, if only out of default, becoming the profession's "educational arm." Several archival education institutes had either been discontinued or had suffered declining enrollments, faltering leadership, or both. At the same time, the committee was becoming increasingly interested in midlevel or advanced professional opportunities. It was, in fact, at this juncture that the idea of a grant to encourage the Society in its newly perceived role of planning, coordinating, and developing archival education activity was actively pursued.

The creation of a formal community of authority and competence is central to the very survival of archivists, as it is to any profession. Without that sense of community, and the authority that stems from it, we risk falling prey to the claims of the

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[5]"Request for Proposals," *SAA Newsletter*, July 1987, 10–11; "SAA Announces New Education Officer," *SAA Newsletter*, January 1987, 1, 3; "SAA Awarded Mellon Grant," *SAA Newsletter*, March 1980, 1–2.

[6]Joyce, "SAA Certification Program: A Report," 8–9; "Individual Certification," 3–9.

information scientists, historians, and others, who assume that their credentials, standards, and knowledge are appropriate to meet the needs of archivists. Without that community of authority and competence, we do indeed risk losing our identity. And yet, we have much to offer the historians on one side, and the information scientists on the other. Ironically, as we nurture our own identity, we can strengthen those colleague disciplines with whom we share so much of our work. In the balance of my remarks, I will attempt to address these and other issues that make the challenge of achieving a professional identity (i.e., that elusive "community of the competent") as difficult as it is essential.

Among the more prominent of these issues is that of clarifying whether we are members of an autonomous profession or whether we are specialized practitioners in the information community. Hugh Taylor, Mary Jo Pugh, Richard Berner, and others think that our calling warrants autonomous programs that promote our profession as separate and distinct. Still others, Fran Blouin, Bob Warner, and Larry McCrank among them, see our future as being in the information science continuum, noting that the inevitable "convergence" of library and archival studies should prompt us to plan integrated programs. Technology is the driving force that has broadened the concept of information so that it "blends," in this view, books, manuscripts, and other formats into a heterogeneous but unified whole.[7]

As one ponders the choices—seeing the archival profession as autonomous or seeing it as a specialization on the information continuum—one wonders whether the choice is as draconian as it appears. In the medical professions, there are more than thirty specialized programs accredited through the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation. Despite the profusion of accredited programs for distinct professional specialties, we tend to think of "medicine" as a single interrelated, if complex, community. So it is with information. As archivists, we can achieve a separate professional identity with our own community of competence, and still regard our profession as being broadly related to the diverse information community generally.

We need to avoid the mistake of the uncomprehending satyr in the fable. Contradictory or ambiguous appearances sometimes belie an inner coherence. Just as the man's breath might blow hot and cold and serve his needs in both respects, archivists can seek autonomy in their professional identity and still serve the information community as specialized practitioners, thereby also serving a dual need.

There has been extensive debate whether archivists have developed a fund of knowledge sufficient to support the claim that we do indeed constitute a profession. There have been calls to strengthen the theoretical base of archival work by devising laws that can predict and govern our work. Others believe that basic archival knowledge stems from historical evolution and the study of

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[7]Mary Jo Pugh, "Archival Education: Promise and Performance" (Paper delivered at the Forty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Austin, Texas, 1 November 1985); Richard Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice*, 100–10; Hugh Taylor and Edwin Welch, "Association of Canadian Archivists: Guidelines Towards a Curriculum for Graduate Archival Training Leading to a Master's Degree in Archival Science, 1976," *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983): 44–52; Lawrence J. McCrank, "The Impact of Automation: Integrating Archival and Bibliographic Systems," in Lawrence J. McCrank, ed., *Archives and Library Administration: Divergent Traditions and Common Concerns* (New York: Haworth Press, 1986), 61–98; Francis X. Blouin, Jr., "The Relevance of Archival Theory and Practice for Library Education: An Argument for a Broader Vision," in McCrank, ed., *Archives and Library Administration*, 155–66; Robert W. Warner, "Librarians and Archivists: Organizational Agenda for the Future," in McCrank, ed., *Archives and Library Administration*, 167–76.

[8]Terry Eastwood, "The Origins and Aims of the Master of Archival Studies Programme at the University of British Columbia," *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983): 40.

documents in context, while yet others doubt that archival work can in fact develop any theory at all. As Terry Eastwood has put it, we should all be paying far more attention to the ''why'' of our work than the ''how.'' Presumably, the cultivation of more theoretical aspects of our work will not only strengthen the intellectual foundation of our work, but that of all information professionals, a point to which I shall return.[8]

Several topics might be investigated by archivists to promote further the elusive why of archives. The life cycle concept of records is one example of a uniquely American contribution to archival theory. The life cycle concept links records and archival management in an effort to shape not only the content of the record, but its form and disposition even before it is created. By relating the record to the purposes and function of the institution that creates it, the archivist can meet his or her responsibility. Developed in its fullest sense, this concept necessarily entails an understanding of records in society, their purposes and functions, and demonstrates how contextual knowledge serves archival purposes. The life cycle concept thus can integrate a number of important elements into an organizing principle that advances both archival theory and practice.

Another perspective that might be better integrated into archival knowledge is that of the social scientists, especially the historical sociologists concerned with the evolution of institutions over time. Archival work entails understanding the activities and functions documented in historical records and the institutions that generate those records. Accordingly, the work of Max Weber, for example, is germane to the work of archivists, and there is a new generation of social scientists who are returning to the grand theorizing models of their predecessors. In an age dominated by institutions,

we should pay more attention to the scholarship of those who study institutions, their structure, and their functions.[9]

There is at the heart of this interest in theory a very powerful claim being made by some archivists. It is that, by virtue of their understanding of the sources they manage and their understanding of the institutions that generate those sources, archivists can offer an integrated view of historical records that is at the heart of information theory. As Fran Blouin writes,

> . . .this particular discipline [i.e., the archival discipline] and its corresponding record of experience has much to contribute to emerging programs in information studies. The thrust of this contribution rests on archives as an alternative model for the organization of information. The further one moves from a format-based notion of what constitutes information to a more abstract notion, the more relevant the archival model becomes.[10]

Archivists attempt to preserve the organic relationship between the activity generating the record and the record itself. If one understands the activity, its institutional context, and the purpose for which the activity was undertaken, then one can interpret the content of the record itself. This is the heart of the provenance-based approach to organizing information, and, by treating institutions as coherent systems, it is also most congenial to the systems theories that are so central to the expanding field of information studies. Thus, Blouin's ''archival alternative'' itself helps form an important element of information theory and offers a major conceptual contribution to the evolution of information studies generally.

[9]Michael A. Lutzker, ''Max Weber and the Analysis of Modern Bureaucratic Organization: Notes Toward a Theory of Appraisal,'' *American Archivist* 45 (Spring 1982): 119–30.

[10]Blouin, ''Relevance of Archival Theory and Practice,'' 163.

By emphasizing and developing further the provenance-based approach to organizing information, archivists derive other benefits as well. The theoretical emphasis on understanding function is quite congenial to studying what Schellenberg called the "enumeration of the attributes of the record," or what was more traditionally described in historical methodology as internal and external criticism. Methodology courses are rarely taught in history departments (or anywhere else for that matter) and paleography and diplomatics courses have become rarer still. Perhaps by reemphasizing the theoretical importance of the attributes of the record in its fullest historical context, we might redirect interest toward understanding the sources themselves.[11]

(By so doing, we might avoid the embarrassment that was the lot of prominent historians examining the bogus Hitler diaries, or we might elude the fate that befell a variety of specialists who examined the forgeries now associated with the infamous Mark Hofmann. Both cases illuminate the importance of careful textual criticism and study of other attributes of historical source materials.)

We also need to avoid being unduly directed by the technological imperative, and we recall Andrea Hinding's sensitive evocation of the importance of paper records. While ever faster and more powerful modes of technology may well be in our future, we must also respect the existing centrality of historical records in more traditional formats.[12]

In order to affirm the importance of records in traditional formats, we need to ensure that our educational programs cover appropriately what I shall designate the three "eras" of historical records: the first is the age of *hand-produced documents*, beginning with the first recorded documentation, a stylus recording numbers in a clay tablet, and continuing to the present, but largely eclipsed in institutional settings by the middle of the nineteenth century; the second is the age of *mechanically produced documents,* beginning in earnest around 1850 and still very much with us in the form of documents produced on electric typewriters, in what is called "near-print formats" or in what is described as "grey literature"; the third is the age of *electronically produced documents*, beginning in our own time and extending to who knows when.

We cannot allow the seduction of technology to blind us to the volume of records now already in our trust, challenging us to preserve and manage them effectively. In the same way that educational programs need to analyze the "convergence" of library and archival methods, we cannot blind ourselves to the reality of our existing holdings and the responsibility to train archivists in their effective management of those holdings. There is still very much a need to continue to train at least some of our colleagues in paleography and in the role of record keeping in a variety of historical areas as we anticipate the glorious revolution that may or may not accompany the aquarian age of technology.

Despite our centrality to information theory and the intellectually stimulating and rigorous task of contextual analysis, there are several pragmatic limitations to the vitality of our graduate archival education programs. First, we must recognize that our educational programs will never be very large, and that enrollments will necessarily be limited. It follows that faculty positions will be equally limited. It is unlikely that our programs will ever constitute separate

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[11]T. R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 119–43; Phillip Brooks, *Research in Archives: The Use of Unpublished Primary Sources* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), esp. 83–92.

[12]Andrea Hinding, "In a Slightly Different Voice, or Perspectives," *American Archivist* 48 (Winter 1985): 22–25, esp. 23.

administrative units in institutions of higher education, and it is such units for which funds are budgeted and lines are authorized. Archival education programs will have to seek support within larger units, whether it be the school of library and information studies or the history department or even as small autonomous programs.

This places an additional burden on archival educators who will have not only to develop a curriculum and attract students, but also to persuade educational administrators that our programs complement the purposes of the larger unit, can attract students, and place them in jobs after they have completed the program. Another limitation is that we must seek full-time archival educators aggressively, but recognize the obstacles entailed. The revised guidelines call for a full-time educator who will teach several courses, administer a program, counsel students, serve on committees, and perform other duties normally requested of faculty. Despite some recent encouraging developments, our record in creating such positions for archival educators is modest indeed. If we are to support programs, encourage their growth, and ask educators to develop archival theory, we will all need to assist the small number of full-time archival educators by helping develop our archival literature and its theoretical foundation.

In defining and creating a structured "community of the competent," we will need to create some enforcement mechanisms as well. In facing this, we must recognize that we will be making choices that will affect some of our members adversely. As we continue to develop education programs and try to improve our profession generally, a good many of our number may not agree with or be able to meet the new criteria, or may simply disagree with the

purposes the new criteria are designed to meet. In short, we need to work diligently to ensure that the creation of a community of the competent does not destroy a community of diversity and deprive us of some of the differences in interest and perspective that have brought us vitality and what Martin Luther King once referred to as "creative tension."

Finally, we must recognize that whatever high-minded rhetoric we speak or hear, we need to know that graduates of archival education programs can in fact find jobs as archivists. In our society, we see steadily rising faith in the vitality and expansion of a market-driven economy. There is precious little evidence, however, of what the employers of archivists really want in the way of education for prospective archivists. If we believe in our profession and in its future, we have no more urgent task than to work with the prospective employers of archivists to learn their needs and to make them aware of the purposes and benefits of our education programs. There is little future for a community of the competent if there are no jobs for those designated as competent.

Our determination to create a "community of the competent" through strong education programs is cause for celebration. We need now to transform our determination into specific actions and accord them the priority and resources they must have. As I have indicated, there are conceptual and administrative challenges to be met as we work together to achieve our goal. By embracing our calling confidently, by pursuing excellence in our education programs, and by following the inner coherence of our own professional needs, we can respect the instruction of the fables and realize our identity in a vital community of professionals.