

## *European Archives in an Era of Change*

# From the Editors

MARJORIE BARRITT and NANCY BARTLETT

THE INTEREST IN EUROPEAN ARCHIVES among archivists in the United States is longstanding. Already at the turn of the last century, a few American archivists acted upon their curiosity by joining the important international gathering of archivists in Brussels in 1910 and by taking part in the efforts of the Public Archives Commission to describe the holdings related to the United States in European archives. Throughout this century, principles adapted from European archival practice have raised our professional standards and enriched our vocabulary so that many can claim a foreign language proficiency extending at least as far as *respect des fonds* and *registraturprinzip*. We have known Sir Hilary Jenkinson and the Dutch trio of Muller, Feith, and Fruin through their publications, and some of our contemporaries have been fortunate enough to have benefitted directly from the teachings of the influential educator Ernst Posner, who emigrated from Germany to Washington, D.C. in 1939.

The interest in European archives has been heightened as we witness the profound transformations taking place on that continent. This special issue, *European Archives in an Era of Change*, was conceived as a tribute to European archival theories and practices, past and present. It recognizes and honors archivists throughout Europe who are meeting today's challenges with insight and creativity. It also acknowl-

edges important contributions of American archivists to European archives holding records as old as the Vatican's medieval documents and as new as electronic databases. It is appropriate to present this special issue in 1992, a year of economic, political, and archival beginnings in Europe. The year 1992 also brings four major archival conferences offering great opportunities for the exchange of ideas and experiences, not only between North American and European archivists, but also with archivists from other areas of the world. Within two busy weeks in September, Montreal will be host to these four conferences, including the annual conferences of the Society of American Archivists, the Association of Canadian Archivists, the Association des archivistes du Québec, and the XIIth International Congress on Archives.

In his elegant introduction to the issue, **Jean Favier** characterizes European archives as bearing the weight of centuries. He asserts that archivists, whose tasks have not changed since the Middle Ages, must allow traditional experiences to coexist with the innovations brought on by political and technological changes. He is optimistic that solutions will be found from within the profession, as archivists develop a parallelism to strengthen the richness based on diversity which is the nature of European archives and *archivistique*.

Richness based on diversity is a recur-

ring theme of the issue. After his disclaimer that there is no such entity as "European Archives," **Michel Duchein** describes the development of archives in Europe and delineates divergent histories and practices. **Ole Kolsrud** probes the distinctions between appraisal theories in Europe and North America.

One of the great tasks before the European archival community is the search for a means to harmonize traditions in order to document the European Community adequately. **Eric Ketelaar** discusses the challenges of coordination between national archives and the archives of EC institutions. **Inge Bundsgaard** and **Michael Gelting** describe the impact of administrative change on the state and grassroots archives of Denmark. They suggest that the Danish experience may be significant evidence of problems to be expected from the administrative restructuring on the larger scale of the European Community.

In January 1993, economic barriers and borders between EC countries will be lowered. The impact on the European archival community could take many forms. **Paule René-Bazin** and **Eckhart Franz** discuss whether there should be harmonization of archival education and training and what forms such harmonization might take.

Nowhere is change more dramatic than in Germany, Middle Europe, eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union. The impact of these changes on the administrative structure of archives, and on archival theory, policies, and practice, is discussed by **Friedrich P. Kahlenberg** of Germany and **Imre Röss** of Hungary. The dissolution of the Soviet Union has far-reaching implications both for archivists and for researchers. **Patricia Grimsted** addresses the many questions of access and use in her description of archival developments in the former Soviet Union during 1991. **Natalya Basovskaya** introduces the new home for archival education in Russia, the Russian State University for the Humanities. She

prepared her article for publication while in Ann Arbor, Michigan, working steadfastly through the harrowing days of the August coup.

Earlier international disruptions continue to remain without final resolution for archives in Europe. **Charles Kecskeméti** gives historical background to the current problems of replevin. **Alfred Lemmon** traces the complicated provenance of Spanish colonial Louisiana records and efforts over the past two centuries to improve intellectual access to them.

More insidious, but perhaps no less dramatic in the long run, is the effect of the technological revolution of electronic communication. **Margarita Vázquez de Parga** and **Pedro González** give an overview of national and European electronic records projects and describe the very ambitious project to apply new technology to the management of Spanish archives. **David Bearman** brings together the tradition of European diplomatics and the creation of electronic records to construct a new, synthetic analysis of organizational behavior. Articles by **Francis X. Blouin, Jr.** and **Elizabeth Yakel** discuss the Bentley Historical Library's Vatican Archives Project and its implications for improving researcher access to other European collections.

Several articles share common topics such as the problems caused by the bulk of bureaucratic records, the diminishing financial support for archives, the difficulties of replevin following war and other political dislocations, jurisdictional disputes over archives, and the search for professional identity. These issues have brought archivists together in a wide variety of international working groups, expert meetings, and symposia. The editors, **Marjorie Barritt** and **Nancy Bartlett**, report on the most ambitious of these symposia during 1991, the Maastricht meeting entitled "Europe and Archives Without Boundaries," sponsored by the Royal Society of Dutch Archivists.

The editors owe a great debt to many individuals and institutions. The authors have been most generous with their time, support, and expertise. The issue rests on the dedication and goodwill of the authors who produced original articles of introspection, reflection, and analysis. The translators volunteered both skill and enthusiasm. They include Mary and Rudolf Arnheim, Renee Blahuta, Brian Carey, Sylvie Gervais, Andrée Lavoie, Andrew Rodger, Johanne Simard, Klaus Tappe, Guy Tessier, and Esperanza B. de Varona. Their efforts were carried out from Alaska to Coral Gables, in Ottawa as well as in Ann Arbor. We are also appreciative of the Archives d'Architecture du Vingtième Siècle, archivist Gilles Ragot, and artist Francis Martinuzzi for allowing the use of the cover illustration, *La Descente aux Archives*. University Microfilms International provided the funding for the cover. Joan van Albada, editor of the ICA's journal *Janus*, was helpful in allowing us to publish an English version of the article by Eckhart

Franz and the speech of Comfort Ukwu. Many of the papers presented at the symposium "Archives and Europe Without Boundaries" will be published in an issue of *Janus* to appear in 1992. We had enthusiastic support from the staff of the Society of American Archivists. The Bentley Historical Library provided moral, financial, and staff support. Funding for travel came from the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies and the Office of the Vice President for Research at the University of Michigan. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the tremendous help of many individuals on two continents, among them, Mary Arnheim, Francis X. Blouin, Jr., Hendrik ten Boom, Teresa Brinati, Tom Connors, Anne Diffendal, Henrik Didier Gautier, Diane Hatfield, Erzsebet Horvath, David Klaassen, Peg Kusnerz, Darwin Matthews, Kim Mayer, Mike McReynolds, Fred Pernell, Paule René-Bazin, Joan Schwartz, William K. Wallach, and Susan Wyman.

"European Archives in an Era of Change" is the culmination of almost six years of editing the International Scene section of the *American Archivist*. As we end our term as editors we are grateful for the warm working relationships we have had with editors Julia Young and David Klaassen and managing editors Bill Burke and Teresa Brinati. SAA executive directors Donn Neal and Anne Diffendal have given us their strong support. We could not have carried out this responsibility without the encouragement and backing of Fran Blouin, Bill Wallach, and the entire staff of the Bentley Historical Library. Finally, what has made this a most meaningful endeavor for us has been our work with the seventy authors from twenty-one countries who entrusted us with their writing. We thank you all.

## European Archives in an Era of Change

# Introduction

JEAN FAVIER

*About the author: Jean Favier, Membre de l'Institut, is Director General of the Archives of France and President of the International Council on Archives. For an expanded introduction see the Gallery of Contributors at the end of the issue.\**

WHAT CHARACTERIZES THE ARCHIVES of European countries is above all the weight of the centuries. The majority of institutions which today bear the responsibility of conserving and developing public archives were established some six to eight centuries ago. The fact that these institutions have changed in accordance with the transformation of political regimes does nothing to alter the fact that centuries of archival record series constitute their pride and that the traditions transmitted from one generation to the next are both a richness and an encumbrance for the archives. It is worth emphasizing that the official acts which were used to define archivists in the Middle Ages could, with few exceptions, be repeated in the new definitions of the function of archives. The documents have changed, the public as well, but what still matters, just as it was said at the beginning

*CE QUI CARACTÉRISE LES ARCHIVES des pays européens, c'est avant tout le poids des siècles. La plupart des institutions qui assument aujourd'hui la conservation et la mise en valeur des archives publiques ont été fondées pour la première fois il y a six ou huit siècles, et le fait que les institutions ont suivi la mutation des régimes politiques ne change rien au fait que des séries pluri-séculaires constituent leur fierté et que des traditions transmises de génération en génération sont pour elles à la fois une richesse et un embarras. Il faut bien le dire, les actes officiels qui désignaient les archivistes du Moyen Age pourraient, à peu de chose près, être recopiés dans les nouvelles définitions de la fonction d'archives. Les documents ont changé, le public aussi, mais il s'agit toujours, comme on le disait au début du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle, de réunir, mettre en ordre, conserver en sûreté et retrouver rapidement ce qui est nécessaire à la vie de la collectivité et à celle de chacun.*

*De cette longue tradition résulte une très réelle difficulté à faire cohabiter dans les esprits d'irremplaçables expériences avec*

\*This introduction was translated from the French by co-editor Nancy Bartlett, with assistance from Sylvie Gervais of the National Archives of Canada.

of the fourteenth century, is to reunite, organize, preserve in security, and retrieve expeditiously that which is necessary for the life of all and for the life of each one.

The result of this long tradition is a very real difficulty in making unique experiences coexist with the necessities of innovation. Almost all of the European systems were conceived of as a functional response to the political and administrative organization of the last century. The grand intellectual fields are still often those which occupied the men of Europe's Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. This difficulty is particularly evident in the area of procedures and educational programs for archivists as researchers and technical personnel. The basis of European *archivistique* rests on the erudition of the nineteenth century, and those who are most ardent about introducing new requirements in the formation of these procedures and programs are also the first to hope that any such renewal is not to the detriment of disciplines and methods which have proven their value.

The principal consequence of this long history is a stratification of problems, both in the areas of research as well as in technical and administrative issues. To wipe the slate clean of the past is inconceivable when the past is embedded time and again in the archival fonds cited in historians' works, in the ongoing work of generations of erudites, and in methods reliant upon the very slow elaboration of classification systems and research tools. The coherence across the centuries is accompanied by successive adjunctions, which weigh down the apparatus. The number of types of research tools does not cease to grow, just as the number of entities generating archives does not cease to diversify. The domaine of the archivist does not alter, but rather becomes more complicated. And Europeans cannot dream of setting up from one day to the next a new *archivistique* for entirely new archives.

*les nécessités de l'innovation. Presque tous les systèmes européens ont été conçus en fonction de l'organisation politique et administrative du siècle dernier. Les grands chantiers intellectuels sont encore bien souvent ceux qu'ont ouverts au XVIIIe siècle les hommes de l'Europe des Lumières. Cette difficulté est particulièrement évidente quand il s'agit des procédures et des programmes de formation du personnel scientifique et technique. La base de l'archivistique européenne demeure l'érudition du XIXe siècle, et les plus ardents à introduire les nouvelles nécessités de la formation dans ces procédures et ces programmes sont également les premiers à souhaiter qu'un tel renouvellement ne se fasse pas au détriment de disciplines et de méthodes qui ont fait leurs preuves.*

*La principale conséquence de cette longue histoire est une stratification des problèmes, aussi bien scientifiques que techniques ou administratifs. Faire table rase du passé est impensable quand celui-ci se traduit par des fonds d'archives maintes fois cités dans les travaux des historiens, par des entreprises érudites auxquelles chaque génération a apporté son labeur mais dont nul ne sait quand elles prendront fin, par des méthodes que l'on ne saurait bouleverser au cours de cette très lente élaboration des cadres de classement et des instruments de recherche. La cohérence à travers les siècles s'accompagne donc de successives adjonctions propres à alourdir le dispositif. Le nombre des types d'instruments de recherche ne cesse d'augmenter, comme le nombre d'organismes générateurs d'archives ne cesse de se diversifier. Le domaine de l'archiviste ne se renouvelle pas, mais se complique, et les Européens ne peuvent rêver d'instaurer du jour au lendemain une nouvelle archivistique pour des archives entièrement nouvelles.*

*Les nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la documentation sont venues depuis un demi-siècle contraindre à l'in-*



For the last half century, new information and documentation technologies have forced innovation. Innovation in new types of documents has been limited only by the indispensable compatibility with other historic veins. This was not the case for technologies which were devised to treat documents of a traditional type. But even there, it was not possible to make a *tabula rasa* of the past. That would have obligated archivists of today and tomorrow to assume the burdensome task of a complete reprise of the work that has already been achieved.

Let us not forget the intervening changes in political systems. These are not unique to European countries, but they have shaken certainties more firmly anchored in Europe than elsewhere. The transition of strongly centralized agencies to a decentralization which maintains a unity has been experienced differently by countries which have had no other choice. The transition from authoritarian regimes to democracy has suddenly presented the problem of access to fonds which by their nature were not intended for the widest availability. The opening towards liberalism of strongly controlled systems has made apparent other distortions, even in the conception and the juridical nature of archives.

Recent history has brought its share of ethical problems, with the extraordinary diversity of views resulting from collective attitudes about human rights, individual rights, rights of access, and privacy rights for individuals and families. One must remember that the Second World War did not have the same after-effects for all, since for some it was accompanied by a civil war or a civic division, for others it resulted in suffering through discrimination or denunciation. One might as well say that it is difficult to generalize here, and that a unanimity will not be feasible until after the disappearance of those who have suffered personally from one or another of these crises.

*novation. S'agissant de nouveaux types de documents, l'innovation n'était limitée que par l'indispensable compatibilité avec les autres gisements historiques. Il n'en allait pas de même pour les technologies qui s'offraient afin de traiter les documents de nature traditionnelle. Mais là encore, on ne pouvait faire table rase du passé. Cela eût mis à la charge des archivistes d'aujourd'hui et de demain le travail écrasant d'une reprise complète des traitements déjà réalisés.*

*N'oublions pas les changements intervenus dans les systèmes politiques. Ils ne sont pas le propre des pays européens, mais ils y ont ébranlé des certitudes plus fermement ancrées qu'ailleurs. Le passage d'organisations fortement centralisées à une décentralisation qui maintient cependant l'unité a été différemment vécu dans les pays qui en ont cependant éprouvé la nécessité. Le passage de régimes autoritaires à la démocratie a subitement posé le problème de l'accès à des fonds que leur nature même ne vouait pas à la communication la plus large. L'ouverture au libéralisme de systèmes fortement dirigistes a fait apparaître d'autres distorsions dans la conception même des archives et de leur nature juridique.*

*L'histoire récente elle-même a apporté son lot de problèmes éthiques, avec l'extraordinaire diversité qui résulte des attitudes collectives devant les droits de l'homme, devant les droits de l'individu, devant le droit à l'information ou devant le droit au secret des vies privées et des destinées familiales. Faut-il le rappeler, la Seconde Guerre Mondiale n'a pas laissé les mêmes séquelles dans les esprits selon qu'elle s'est accompagnée d'une guerre civile ou d'une division civique, selon qu'elle a ou non fait souffrir un peuple de la discrimination ou de la dénonciation. Autant dire qu'il est ici difficile de généraliser, et que l'unanimité des attitudes ne sera réalisable qu'après la disparition de ceux qui ont souffert personnellement de l'une ou de l'autre des crises.*

Because they were opened very early for historical research, the archives of European countries have endured for a longer time the jolts in the evolution of research. There are entire fonds for which the classification or the inventories were adapted to a certain pattern of inquiry, which makes their use today a challenge for researchers with a different approach. Consider those series which on account of their scarce factual information have been condemned to eliminations and samplings that render them improper for aggregate research. Think, too, of those archives which were not at all prepared for a type of research which would not have been imagined in an earlier time.

The advent of Europe as an economic reality, and then as a political reality, follows long after the understanding of Europe as an intellectual reality rich in one common heritage. But the legal rapprochements which are needed for the construction of the European Community lead one to hope not for a uniformity in either *mentalités* or in documents but for a relative parallelism which would permit the curiosity of the researcher to ignore legislative and statutory borders. It is no longer acceptable in the world of research that the same type of documents are conserved here, but discarded there, or that the same type of records are accessible at once in one country and available only much later in another. However, it is quite obvious that each country has had its reasons for establishing the legal conditions of its own *archivistique*. The effort at rapprochement will undoubtedly be long and hard.

One sees that the richness of the archives of Europe is based on diversity and that the archivists of Europe are strong in their tradition. What creates their unity is the shared nature of the difficulties they have encountered. The Europe of archivists is not opposed to the rest of the world. It is opposed rather to the Europe of an earlier era. Is it necessary to point out that countries with ancient civilizations share at least part of this difficulty with Europe?

*Parce qu'elles se sont ouvertes très tôt à la recherche historique, les Archives des pays européens ont subi plus longuement les secousses dues à l'évolution de la recherche. Il est des fonds entiers dont le classement ou dont les inventaires ont été adaptés à une certaine problématique, en sorte que leur utilisation est aujourd'hui délicate pour des recherches d'un tout autre ordre. Pensons à ces séries que leur faible contenu en informations événementielles a condamnées à des éliminations et à des échantillonnages qui les rendent désormais impropres aux recherches sérielles. Pensons, aussi, à ces archives qui n'étaient nullement préparées à ce qu'on fasse porter sur elles des recherches hier encore inconcevables.*

*L'avènement de l'Europe comme une réalité économique, puis politique, suit de loin la compréhension de l'Europe comme une réalité intellectuelle riche d'un patrimoine commun. Mais les rapprochements juridiques que suggère la construction européenne conduisent à souhaiter, non une uniformisation qui ne correspondrait ni aux mentalités ni aux documents, mais un relatif parallélisme qui permette de ne plus opposer des frontières législatives ou réglementaires à une curiosité intellectuelle qui ignore les frontières. Il n'est plus acceptable pour le monde scientifique que le même type de documents soit ici conservé, là éliminé, ou que le même type d'actes soit communicable sur le champ dans un pays et longtemps plus tard dans un autre. Or il est bien évident que chaque pays a eu ses raisons pour fixer le cadre juridique de son archivistique. L'effort de rapprochement sera sans doute long et difficile.*

*On le voit, la richesse des archives de l'Europe est faite de sa diversité et les archivistes de l'Europe sont forts de leur tradition. Ce qui fait l'unité, c'est plutôt le caractère commun des difficultés rencontrées. L'Europe des archivistes ne s'oppose pas au reste du monde. Elle s'oppose souvent à l'Europe d'hier. Faut-il dire que bien des pays de très ancienne civilisation par-*

I would like to conclude these comments by noting the fundamental element of an optimism for our era. Ever since countries have assumed the responsibility of the memory of their own times, they have recognized the value of archives yet they have imparted no kind of advice to the archivists. But we must remark that all innovations in the *métier* of the archivist have come from within the profession, from archivists well aware of the expectations placed upon them and fully capable of finding solutions. When a profession knows to face the changes in the world, it will find its place in the world of tomorrow, no matter what the challenges are. After six or eight centuries of experience, archivists who are capable of reading papyrus and parchments are those who invent software. Guardians of memory, they are also the organizers of the memory of tomorrow.

*tagent avec l'Europe tout ou partie de cette difficulté?*

*J'aimerais, pour conclure ce propos, laisser voir l'élément fondamental d'un réel optimisme. Depuis que les pays d'ancienne tradition doivent assumer la mémoire de leur temps contemporain, on n'a ménagé aux archivistes aucun conseil. Mais force est de constater que tous les renouvellements de leur métier sont venus des archivistes eux-mêmes, pleinement conscients de ce qu'on attend d'eux et tout à fait capables d'imaginer les solutions. Quand une profession sait à ce point faire face au monde qui change, c'est qu'elle aura sa place dans le monde de demain, quelles qu'en soient les exigences. Après six ou huit siècles d'expérience, les archivistes capables de lire les papyrus et les parchemins sont les mêmes qui inventent les logiciels. Gardiens de la mémoire, ils sont aussi les organisateurs de la mémoire de demain.*