

## Historians and Archivists: Educating the Next Generation

### Editor's Note:

These reports are the product of two working groups supported by fellowships from the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan. The reports have been published separately by the Joint Committee on Historians and Archivists of the American Historical Association, Organization of American Historians, and Society of American Archivists. An abbreviated version of the second report was published in a recent issue of the *Journal of American History*. The importance of the reports has led the editor of the *American Archivist* to request their full publication in this journal for their use, discussion, and debate by the archival profession.

Many individuals contributed to these reports. Their names and professional affiliations are as follows: Frank Boles, university archivist, Central Michigan University; Edwin Bridges, director of the Alabama

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## Historians and Archivists: Educating the Next Generation

### Introduction

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HOW TO ENCOURAGE AND facilitate cooperation among archivists and historians is the essential goal in the following two reports.

In the academic world, we have too often established exclusionary rather than comprehensive definitions of appropriate professional behavior. Consequently, areas of specialization, fields of concentration, standards for instruction and accreditation, and the parameters of discrete disciplines define our limits. The positive results of this practice have included in-depth research, exquisitely crafted insights, recognized lines of competence sustained by tailor-made reward structures, and a hierarchy of practitioners—faculty and staff—who know their obligations and regularly display their excellence.

These tangible benefits are also accompanied by other, less happy consequences. We have become, like much of modern humanity, alienated from one another. Separated by educational requisites, functional boundaries, assumptions about our own and others' responsibilities and jurisdictions, and even inertia, we have sacrificed synthesis, coordination, and easy interaction without always recognizing the resulting loss. To employ a poignant contrast, we have strayed from an important turn-of-century model, J. Franklin Jameson.

Unrestrained by current impediments of professional domain, Jameson took his Ph.D. in history from the Johns Hopkins

University in 1882 and proceeded to integrate his love of historical research and documentary preservation. He mobilized the American Historical Association (AHA) and the Carnegie Institution of Washington in a lifelong campaign to locate and maintain historical documents. A charter member of the AHA in 1884, Jameson chaired its Historical Manuscripts Commission in 1895, edited the *American Historical Review*, and served as AHA president in 1907. At the Carnegie Institution he was director of the Department of Historical Research from 1905 to 1928. Jameson lobbied Congress and the White House incessantly for what became the National Archives of the United States, and the National Historical Publications Commission (both created in 1934). Finally, he was chief of the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress from 1928 to 1937, the year he died. Few of us can match Jameson as a Renaissance person. We can, however, strive for greater breadth and collaboration among archivists and historians. This will enrich our careers and enhance the training and opportunities that we provide to our successors.

One instrument to promote interaction among those who study society's records and those who preserve and manage them has been the Joint Committee on Historians and Archivists, established in the late 1960s by the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the Society of American Archivists. The committee has sought for the past two decades to identify mutual interests and responsibilities and has proven to be one of the salutary examples of cooperation within

the academy. The committee's role was especially important as advocate and consultant for the campaign that produced congressional and presidential approval for establishing the National Archives and Records Administration as an independent federal agency in 1985.

More recently, the Joint Committee has focused its attention on the seeming discontinuities in the professional preparation of historians and archivists, discontinuities that leave both groups less able or inclined to collaborate thereafter. The committee decided to forego mere exhortation and to emphasize instead the basic elements of graduate and professional education that define the career performances of future historians and archivists. The hope was that new patterns of training would offer each a fresh awareness of what the other does, an easy comprehension of shared concerns, and a basis for enhanced collaboration in serving their overlapping constituencies.

The Joint Committee, then chaired by F. Gerald Ham (former state archivist of Wisconsin), obtained funds from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Fellowship Program and support from the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library. Two investigative teams, each composed of archivists and historians, met separately at the Bentley: in July 1991 to explore the role of history for archival education, and in July 1992 (headed by Page Putnam

Miller, director of the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History) to identify the function of archival studies in the preparation of historians. What follows are the results of those two conferences.

Neither archivists nor historians operate in a vacuum. The findings of the two Bentley projects have implications beyond these two professions. Ideally, the recommendations will serve as models for further cooperation among historians, archivists, librarians and information specialists, other humanists and social scientists, museum curators, and philanthropic organizations within the academy and a range of public and private agencies beyond. After all, such groups generate documents, have their own priorities and codes of conduct that need to be more widely understood, and regularly initiate policies and programs that affect others.

Just as the Bentley projects identified important points of intersection between archivists and historians, similar ventures with other groups could open constructive possibilities for our students as professionals-in-the-making. Further refinements in graduate and professional education can help to ensure that tomorrow's practitioners will be ready to function comprehensively in the world of learning, to stand as active contributors to as well as eager recipients of what that world has to offer.