Historians and Archivists: Educating the Next Generation

Toward Better Documenting and Interpreting of the Past: What History Graduate Programs in the Twenty-first Century Should Teach About Archival Practices

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MANY GRADUATE HISTORY PROGRAMS TODAY are flourishing. This time of growth, following a fifteen-year slump, offers an opportunity to undertake a serious review of graduate history education, including training in research skills. In July 1992, a small team of historians and archivists gathered at the Bentley Historical Library of the University of Michigan to consider these issues. The participants in this team research project were Page Putnam Miller, director of the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History; Gerhard Weinberg, professor of history at the University of North Carolina; David Thelen, professor of history at Indiana University and editor of the *Journal of American History*; Gregory Hunter, associate professor, Palmer School of Library and Information Science at Long Island University; and Edwin Bridges, director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Their work was supported by the Andrew J. Mellon Foundation, with assistance from the Organization of American Historians; the Joint Committee on Historians and Archivists of the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and the Society of American Archivists; and the National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History. The following report is a summary of the discussions of this group.

As we considered the research training needs of graduate history students, our team recognized that major changes are taking place in both the historical and the archival professions. We believe these changes warrant a rethinking of the practical ways to teach archival research, the missions of the two professions, and the connections between them. We have therefore attempted to address both conceptual and practical aspects of graduate history training. We will address these issues by looking at the following: historians and archivists—a rationale for cooperation; the present state of teaching research skills; necessary research competencies for graduate history students; strategies for developing research competencies; and creation of new structures for broader professional cooperation.

Historians and Archivists: A Rationale for Cooperation

In recent decades a series of interrelated events has eroded our confidence in universal rules for preserving and telling stories about the past. No longer do people agree within the historical and archival professions that certain principles will ensure good history and good archival practices. Amid the disagreements and debates, both professions are reassessing their role in society.

The purpose of this paper is to consider how work with archives does and should affect today's graduate history education. Historians recognize that knowing how to use archives has been and will continue to be a basic part of historical research. At a fundamental level, the issues and concerns challenging historians and archivists today appear to have many common characteristics. Both professions may therefore benefit from shared analyses of those challenges, and perhaps from common efforts to address them.

There is a natural partnership between those who decide what evidence will be available and those who decide how to interpret it. We believe that the kind of history that historians now do would be enriched by renewing the partnership that once existed between historians and archivists. And we believe that the work of archivists would be strengthened by a serious reengagement with the historical community as they grapple to redefine their mission in the new electronic environment. By exploring these new challenges together, historians and archivists may recover the support that each had received from the other in what was once a concerted enterprise.

A shared past. A common perspective on the past fostered a partnership between historians and archivists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at the time when both professions began to assume their modern shapes. Both agreed that the objective of history was to find out what really happened in the past. In this view, actors created events and in the process left evidence in the form of documents that reflected what they did and why. Historical knowledge depended on collecting as many of those documents as possible to compile the "full record" of an event and on analyzing the documents with "scientific" techniques to present an accurate view of the past. For archivists, the challenge was to collect and preserve as many historically significant documents as possible. For historians, the challenge was to examine those documents, fill in holes in the overall story of the past, and correct inaccurate or incomplete versions of stories from the past.

Historians and archivists shared general assumptions about which events were worthy of attention and which documents were worthy of collection. History, they agreed, was primarily the story of how leaders created the political structures and rules within which people lived their everyday lives. The representations of the past that presumably mattered were written on paper, usually by white men with official titles.

Common challenges. Within the last thirty years, challenges to traditional interpretations of the past have shaken archival and historical practices and have left these two professions to deal with today's challenges in isolation from each other. The challenges are familiar: the content or story of the past has widened dramatically to include new voices and new activities. Social, political, and intellectual movements of the past generation have insisted that historians' and archivists' presentations of the past should include peoples from all backgrounds, the way they lived and worked and played, and what they did and said in their most intimate moments. As historians try to put previously marginalized groups back into history, they often establish linkages between these groups' personal worlds and the developments and movements of the larger world. Within the professions of history and archives, it is simply no longer possible to rely on old ways of viewing the content and voices of the past.

Developments in literary criticism, anthropology, philosophy, and other fields have led historians to rethink how they read and examine sources. Some say that "texts" can no longer be read confidently as guides to what happened. Confidence in "scientific" methods of determining accuracy has been eroded by assertions that texts can be read in infinite ways. Our representations of the past are not retrieved, fully formed,

from the past. Instead, psychologists now argue that memories, indeed all representations of the past, are constructed in the present—albeit with raw materials from the past—to serve immediate needs. Most historians no longer contend that views of the past that are constructed today, or even documents created contemporaneously with past events, are final statements. We see these representations as products that reflect the political and personal dynamics of the society in which they were created. The analysis of the context of sources has become more significant as a key to understanding.

Historians have begun not only to look at sources in new ways but also to look for new ways to document the past. Archival sources have widened beyond written records to include such items as photographs, oral histories, videotapes, computerized statistical files, laboratory data, wiretap transcriptions, architectural drawings, and electronic records. Yet the issue is not only the inclusion of many new types of sources in archival repositories but also the reconsideration of older sources in light of their relationship to new sources. Historians' increased use of the methodological skills of other disciplines has also widened the base of sources on which historians traditionally have drawn.

The resulting explosion in the volume of sources has buried both archivists and historians under a sheer mass of records making claims to be preserved and used. For archivists, one of the most pressing issues is to develop criteria for judging which records in that mass best document their society. Every four months the federal government produces a stack of records equal to all those produced in the 124 years from the presidency of George Washington to that of Woodrow Wilson.[1] In the United States, there are 83,000 local government entities, over 3 million corporations, 6,800 hospitals, 3,300 colleges and universities, and 20,000 radio and television stations, all of them creating records.[2] Similarly, historians are buried under a mountain of scholarship making claims to be read and engaged. For example, 450 journals publish articles from which the *Journal of American History* compiles its lists of recent scholarship on the United States, and the same journal reviews 600 books each year. For historians, a most pressing task is to sort through the huge mass of scholarship to identify the most significant issues to frame future research. In a recent "Point of View" article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Patricia Nelson Limerick recalls that Jasper Rose, her first history professor, gave her some memorable advice: "Cataracts and cataracts of books," he announced in the first lecture, "are flooding off the presses. Pick any field you like, duckies, but you will never catch up." Limerick urges scholars to make a collective, open admission of their inability to keep up with all the new monographs and articles being published.[3]

The mass of both primary and secondary sources contributes to a dilemma, growing ever more desperate, that centers on the users of historical materials. On the one hand, archival theory and historical interpretation pay more attention to users than they did in the past. Archival theory has encouraged archivists to reassess practices with a focus on the perspectives of users. On the other hand, as records increase in quantity and complexity faster than archi-

[1]Donald A. Ritchie, "Oral Historians May Help Scholars Plow Through the Rapidly Accumulating Mass of Federal Paper," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2 November 1988, p. A44.

[2]David Bearman, "Archival Methods," *Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report*, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 7.

[3]Patricia Limerick, "Point of View," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 29 July 1992, p. A32.

val resources, archives are forced to allocate fewer resources to reference service. More than ever before, faculty and graduate students need training in archival principles to become more independent and skillful in their research. The custodians of modern records are likely to have less time, and often less subject expertise, to assist researchers than did their predecessors, whom an earlier generation of scholars gratefully acknowledged in the prefaces to their books.

The new intellectual world is more one of stories and interpretations, and less a record of objective and knowable realities. Earlier historians tended to concentrate on relating the past "as it really happened"; historians today increasingly emphasize originality of interpretation. The recognition that both historians and participants are interpreters with their own perspectives has reinforced demands that history be inclusive. The desire to include many perspectives has shaken confidence among archivists about which records have historical value and among historians about which topics and questions might become cores of historical inquiry. If archivists want to document Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), for example, they must choose whose perspectives and what kinds of data to collect and how much of their total space AIDS documentation deserves. How important is AIDS compared with voting, housing, transportation, crime, political debates—or, for that matter, other issues of public health? Academic historians face analogous issues when they decide which definitions of the problems and whose perspectives to adopt for their research and when they decide what to include in, for example, survey courses in American history.

To answer these diverse claims and accommodate the explosion in volume, historians and archivists have turned to specialization of content, perspective, and function. The consequence has been greater fragmentation within fields, greater uncertainty about how to define relationships with people outside their professions, and an erosion of confidence in a common core that defines the practice of history and archives. One symptom of that erosion is the simultaneous indifference and disagreement within history departments about whether to offer an introductory graduate methodology course and what could be included in it that would be applicable for all specializations. Historians of differing specializations have become more isolated from each other, and archivists have moved away from history and toward the information sciences in search of the technical training necessary for their work. In response to these divisions and doubts, historians and archivists need more than ever to work together on a shared agenda for better documenting and interpreting of the past.

These challenges, both singularly and collectively, have sparked fierce and remarkably comparable debates within the communities of archivists and historians. Sadly, the two communities have carried on these comparable debates in isolation, with little regard for one another's ideas, interests, or strategies. We believe that historians can gain fresh perspectives to bring to their debates about evidence and interpretation by participating in debates among archivists about how to document societies and how to decide which records have historical value. Likewise, archivists who grapple with the development of documentation strategies and new ways of preserving and servicing records in an age of mounting quantities and decreasing resources can gain insights from the debate among historians, who confront polarization and uncertainty in their profession. The task remains for archivists and historians to expand and accelerate their conversations about how best to document and interpret the past.

The Present State of Teaching Research Skills

The training of graduate history students has the potential for providing a critical area of common ground for the historical and archival professions. However, nothing better illustrates both the uncertainty about teaching archival principles and the inadequacy of historical and archival cooperation than the state of graduate history courses in research methodology.

In developing background information on this issue, the Joint Committee of Historians and Archivists, at the initiative of the Organization of American Historians, gathered information on the research methods component of graduate history education programs.[4] In the spring of 1992, the Joint Committee conducted a survey of the history departments in 143 Ph.D.-granting institutions in the United States. Well over half of the departments responded, with participation from a balance of private and public universities from all parts of the country.

The survey results indicate that the practice most widely used in the profession is the "topical model" of a research seminar, as opposed to the "general methods model" of a generic research methods course. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents indicated that the seminar course, which centers on a specific historical topic and which incorporates research methods, is the primary way that their new historians are taught to do research. Asked to indicate a second choice for the best way of training graduate students to do research and use sources, the responses were nearly equally divided among seminars, research methodology courses, introductory courses, and tutorials (see fig. 1).

The survey also sought to determine the emphasis in the research courses (whether in the general methodology course or in the research seminar) by asking respondents to rank five skills: familiarity with bibliographical guides to sources; use of archival materials; use of cataloging systems; use of computer databases and electronic finding aids; and quantitative techniques. Most respondents chose "familiarity with bibliographic guides to sources" as their first choice, with the "use of archival materials" a close second (see fig. 2).

Although the survey results indicated some attention to training in the use of archival materials, the sample syllabi provided by some survey respondents revealed that indeed the major emphasis was on bibliographic tools and that few courses provided an in-depth exploration of archival practices and methods. In fact, a detailed examination of over two dozen syllabi for methodology courses reflected great variety in this fundamental area of research training. One conspicuous similarity in the courses was a relative inattention to the complexities of how records are created and organized and the nuances of archival finding aids.

This disparity between what history departments say and what they do is an indication of the lack of agreement about how to train students in the necessary competencies and the lack of attention given to this issue. Despite current practices that rely primarily on topical seminar courses for teaching research methodologies, most respondents indicated a preference for a general methodology course to increase graduate student proficiencies in finding and using historical sources. Although fewer than one-third of the departments reported having broad methodological courses, over half favored the broad course when asked the question, "Should students be trained to do research mainly in terms of individual field interests or in a more general and broad way?" (see fig. 3).

[4]John R. Dichtl, "Training Graduate Students to Do Research," internal report of the Organization of American Historians, July 1992.

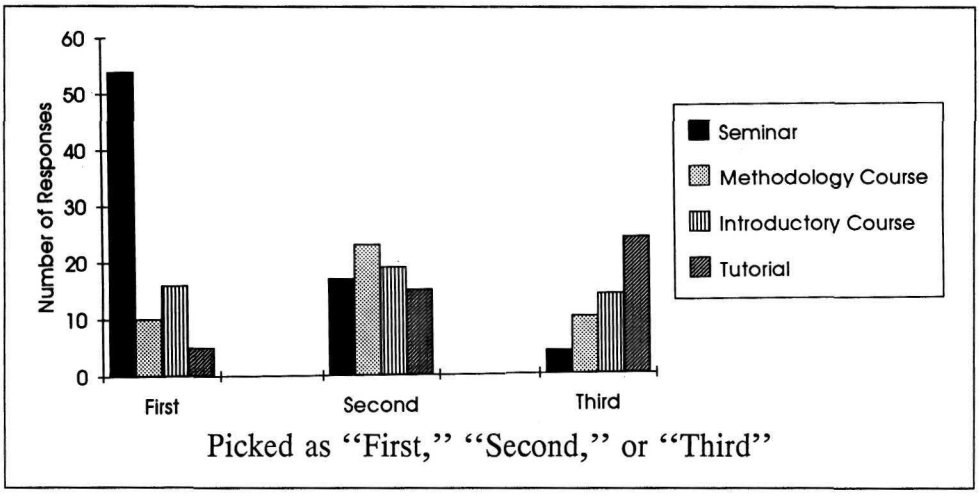

Figure 1. How does your department train graduate students to do research and use sources?

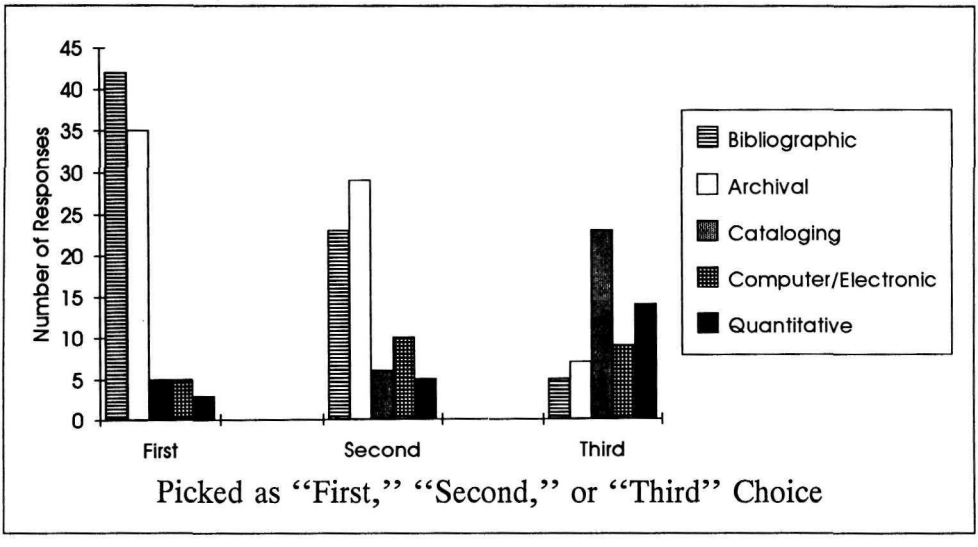

Figure 2. What kind of training is emphasized in these courses?

The real problem is that the historical profession no longer has a core understanding of research principles and practices that are essential for graduate students. This problem is more basic than whether topical seminars or methodology courses are "better" for teaching research skills. Increased interaction between historians and archivists in exploring their respective understandings of evidence and records could assist history departments as they consider the core components of students' training in research skills. The Joint Committee survey found in response to the question, "Are specialists in library and archival science used in training graduate history students?" that only slightly more than one-third of history departments systematically

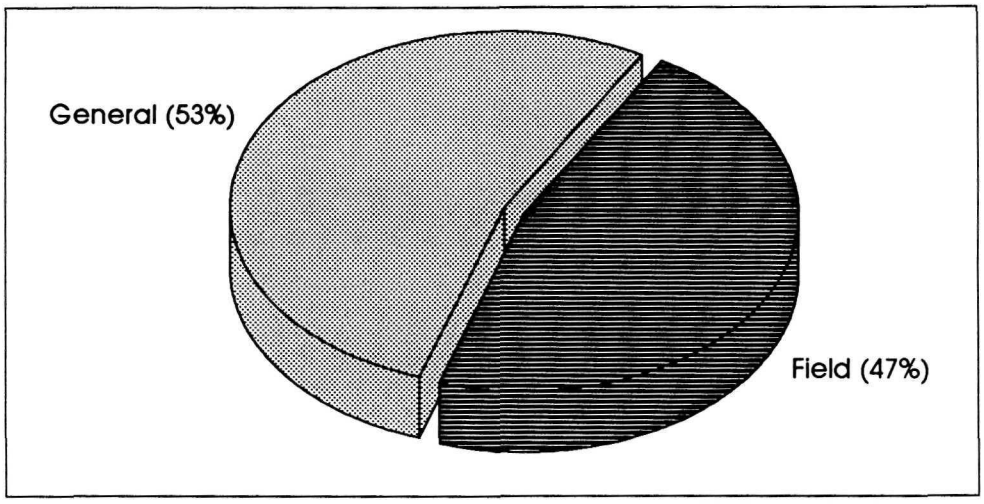

Figure 3. Should students be trained to do research mainly in terms of individual field interests or in a more general and broad way?

involved library or archival specialists. In some departments, students visited the library or archives for special minicourses; in others the librarians or archivists were guest lecturers or conducted workshops (see fig. 4).

Some might look at these survey results and become discouraged. On the contrary, we believe that the changes in the way we study and make sense of the past create new opportunities and new needs for historians and archivists to cooperate. Our continued common indifference to these common concerns can only hurt both professions. A fresh examination of the teaching of research skills to graduate history students offers both professions an opportunity for mutually beneficial reassessment.

Necessary Research Competencies for Graduate History Students

Graduate history students need to master certain research competencies in order to function effectively as professionals over the course of their careers. Many of these research competencies involve work with archivists and archival materials. In current practice most graduate students acquire archival research skills—to the extent they do acquire these skills—not as a part of graduate training but through time-consuming and expensive exercises in trial and error. We prefer a more systematic view of competencies and have organized those relating to archival research into four broad areas: developing a research strategy; an overview of archival principles and practices; understanding archival principles and practices as a means of locating evidence; and understanding the nature and use of archival evidence.

Developing a research strategy. The development of a research design involves both the intellectual challenge of framing the question for the historical inquiry and the construction of a process for locating and ordering the data that can address the question in a persuasive manner. The evolving refinement of the design is crucial, as students constantly consider the interaction of the question with the available sources. How, for example, should the question be recast in light of an awareness of previously unknown sources?

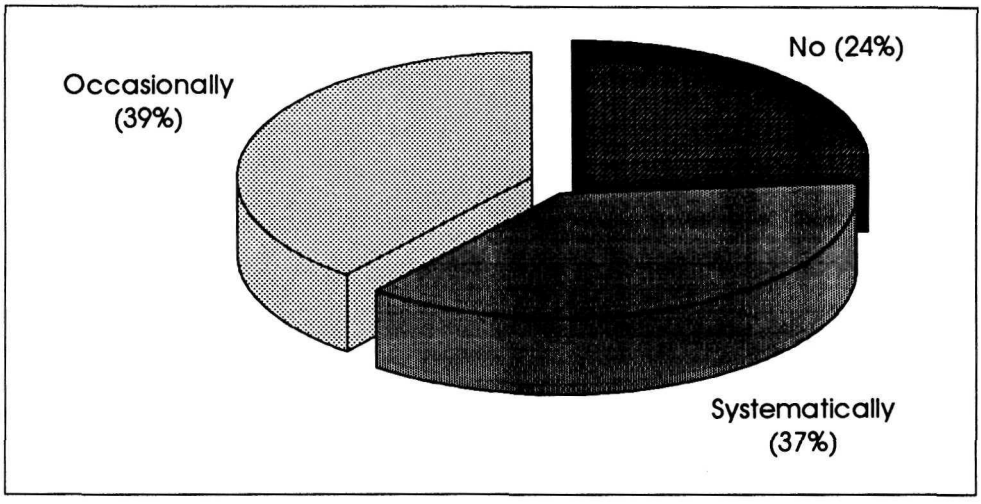

Figure 4. Are specialists in library and archival science used in training graduate history students?

A competency that historians almost take for granted is the ability to develop a viable and efficient research strategy. Archivists report that the lack of a strategy by researchers of all types is one of the major impediments to effective use of archives. With small archival collections, researchers may be able to wander through the material waiting for significant elements in the collections to reveal themselves. In modern bulky collections, such existential wandering is likely to lead not to nuggets of gold but to dissipated energy and frustration. While a certain amount of free-form exploration of sources may be informative, researchers can easily be overwhelmed by the quantity and variety of material and can lose sight of their larger purpose.

Sound research involves not only a goal for the research and a thesis to guide it but also a strategy for efficiently locating and effectively integrating a wide variety of evidential sources. Students develop skills in this area in two ways: by critiquing research strategies (either real or imagined) created by others, and by designing their own research strategies and testing their suitability. Throughout their training in this process, students need the advice of a faculty member seasoned in archival research. Not so obvious is the possible assistance of an archivist knowledgeable in the subject area of interest. Helping students to design effective research strategies is a key area in which historians and archivists can work together more closely in the future.

Both students and faculty often underestimate the value of conversations with archival specialists, many of whom possess extensive knowledge of the records as well as familiarity with current historical scholarship. Although many archivists are generalists, most research institutions have on their staffs subject matter specialists who have highly developed skills in determining which search techniques may be most useful for a specific set of issues and with particular record groups. These archivists have the ability to perceive researchers' needs, to steer them to appropriate research paths, and to prod them to ask and explore new research questions and possibilities.

Ideally there is a continuing refinement of both the research strategy and the research thesis in the interplay between the researcher's expanding knowledge and his or her reflection on the significance of that knowledge. The construction of a research

design formally raises many issues concerning this interplay, such as how to deal with biased and contradictory data, how to handle gaps in the sources, and how to use analytical models from other disciplines. It also helps with decisions about which leads, out of the many available, the researcher should pursue most aggressively. A formal research design forces a higher level of consciousness about these decisions and should be of use not only in the research process but in future refinements of the study results. In developing a research design, many historians today incorporate components of research methodologies from related disciplines. A healthy respect for the complexity of advanced-level interdisciplinary research should be a part of all graduate history education.

An overview of archival principles and practices. Although most researchers recognize that archival materials differ from the published books and serials usually housed in libraries, they may not appreciate fully the implications of these differences. Since many university libraries house collections of personal papers, the archives of the university, and even the records of other organizations, the distinctions between library and archival material, and the differing systems for managing these diverse materials, may often appear blurred. The following overview of archival principles and practices may help illustrate aspects of these differences.[5] This overview is also intended to underscore concepts that should help historians understand how archival repositories function.

- **Uniqueness.** Archival materials are "one of a kind" sources. In most cases they are not available elsewhere in such a complete form. The uniqueness of archival holdings dictates many aspects of their management, including their appraisal, arrangement, and description. Moreover, the uniqueness of archival materials requires reference policies and procedures not normally found in other research settings. These policies and procedures may affect substantially the character of the research that historians can do in an archives.
- **Provenance.** Archival records are arranged according to office of origin; the records of different creators are not intermingled. This guiding principle affects all subsequent research into the collection. A researcher must realize, for example, that records about a particular subject or activity may be found in several offices within an agency or even within several agencies; the archivists will not have assembled these scattered records by subject. Similarly, a researcher looking for a document written by one person may have to look in the files of the person who received the item. By using the principle of provenance, archivists also preserve the ability of researchers to see and understand the evidential link of the records to the acts that caused their creation.
- **Functions.** Archival material was created and maintained by an individual or institution in the course of carrying out some function or activity. The archival record is a unique result or by-product that survives that function or activity. A full understanding of the record may require an understanding of the character, interests, and purposes of the record's creators. Researchers may also need to understand the specific activity that was being performed in the creation of the re-

[5]In this section we have built on the framework developed by Mary Jo Pugh and Nancy Bartlett, who have served as reference archivists at the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan, to explain the nature and function of archival records to users of the collection.

cord, as well as any special circumstances that may have affected the process of the record's creation.

- **Original order.** Archival agencies seek to maintain records in the order used by the creating institution or individual. This practice preserves the organic nature of the records and provides evidence on the functioning of the agency. It is also cost effective; archives can stretch their limited resources by not rearranging records that are in a serviceable original order. The "original order" of the records may in itself tell something about the operation of the office and the circumstances of a particular record's creation. Such issues as the level of organizational skill of the office or the concepts used in structuring subject files may in their own right be of interest to a researcher.
- **Collections.** Archival records are appraised, arranged, and described in the aggregate. The bulk of modern collections precludes item-level (and, sometimes, even folder-level) descriptions. The volume and complexity of records also presents a challenge to researchers, who must become proficient in using archivists' products of collective description. In addition to reflecting the work and perspectives of the offices in which they were created, records in archives also reflect, at least to some degree, the perspectives of those who collected the records and may have weeded and/or arranged the records. Although archivists seek to mitigate any impositions of their judgment by following the concepts of provenance and original order, the nature of the process of preserving some records while destroying others entails personal judgments that cannot be avoided. Researchers may also need to understand how the archival selection and/or weeding processes occurred and how these processes may have skewed the view of the past presented by the records with which they are working.
- **Context.** Archival records are organic. They flow from the life of the institution and reflect the institution's need to transact some business. The records, therefore, fit into a context within the institution and the institution's recordkeeping system. An understanding of the broad context of the record, which is made possible by the archives' adherence to the principles of provenance and original order, is necessary for a full understanding and appreciation of any individual document. Removing a record from its context can lead to invalid conclusions about its meaning and significance.
- **Connectedness.** Not only is one archival collection connected to other collections within the same archives, archival collections are related across institutional and even national boundaries. To understand the AIDS epidemic, for example, a historian of the future will need to follow a trail of interrelated archival collections across institutional and national boundaries. Individual archives and manuscript repositories express their role in the larger system through "collecting policies" that make clear their acquisition interests and priorities.

The above are broad archival concepts, not universal truths. A quick review of the topics discussed at recent annual meetings of the Society of American Archivists will confirm that archivists are constantly seeking to refine and adapt the ways in which they implement these broad principles. The fiscal constraints facing many archives, along with the advent of computers (which raises issues about the preservation of elec-

tronic records and the possibilities of computerized finding aids), have propelled the archival profession into a period of introspection and long-range planning. Often-discussed archival issues are documentation strategies (efforts to ensure that the records needed to document significant activities and developments are being preserved), and descriptive strategies (coordinated plans to develop the most effective ways to deliver information about records to the public).

Historians, both faculty and students, can enhance their personal research objectives by becoming more familiar with archival principles. Additionally, by becoming aware of current issues facing the archival profession and by participating with archivists as they deliberate, for example, on documentation and descriptive strategies, historians can assist archivists by providing a researcher's perspective. In the long run, such a partnership will have significant benefits not only for the graduate students of the future but also for both professions.

Understanding archival principles and practices as a means of locating evidence. One obvious reason historians need to understand archival principles and practices is to help them find the evidentiary material they will need. Historians who know how archival systems work should be able to gain access more efficiently and fully to archival collections.

Because of the quantities of material they manage and the inadequacy of their resources, archivists usually do not create the type of detailed, item-level cataloging that librarians use for published material. Through generations of experience, archivists have developed their own systems and shortcuts for managing collections. Especially in modern governmental records, where holdings may total hundreds or even thousands of boxes for just one series of records, archivists cannot be expected to provide item-level indexing. A page or two of a descriptive inventory may be the only finding aid available to summarize holdings that total millions of sheets of paper. Finding specific information in large collections using brief descriptive data often will require a fairly sophisticated understanding of archival principles and practices.

Archives serve an administrative function for the organizations of which they are a part. For many archives, this administrative function—identifying, storing, and providing access to key, long-term records of the parent organization—is more important than supporting outside historical research. Partly because of this administrative responsibility, archival control systems reflect the structure and functions of the organization that created the records. In addition to understanding the archival practices employed, researchers may also need to understand the structure and functions of the organization that created the records in order to make full use of the collection.

An example may help illustrate the complexity of the modern recordkeeping systems for a researcher. To find information about crime in the United States, for example, a researcher is faced with a variety of institutions and a complex web of recordkeeping systems. Many of the records are found in voluminous paper files: case files stored in courthouse basements; prisoner files found in state records centers; investigative and prosecutorial records found in district attorneys' offices; and central and field office files created by police agencies. Other records exist in digital form in computer systems: parole records; fingerprint files; criminal history files; accounting and financial records of prisons and other criminal justice institutions; and even many juvenile court, educational, and social service agency records.

Not only is information located in many different files and formats under the custody of many different agencies, the records, especially the electronic records, present a complex maze of interrelation-

ships and overlapping interests. State criminal-history files regularly draw on federal and even international systems. Parole records are related to prison files, as well as to record systems of other institutions, such as the courts. Still other information systems, such as those of social welfare and child-care agencies also relate to criminal justice issues. The ability of a researcher to locate specific information about the criminal justice system—or even more challenging, to assess the entire system—will depend in part on the ability of the researcher and the assisting archivist to understand the operations of the organizations that created the records.

Archival finding aids are the bridge between the records and researchers. Thus historians can strengthen their research skills by understanding the ways archivists create and use finding aids. Archival finding aids have evolved over time and vary widely from institution to institution. They range from card files with index listings by name and subject (usually a product of work earlier in this century) to guides that describe in general terms the holdings of different repositories that are members of some type of thematic grouping. Finding aids may also include calendars of official issuances, registers listing all incoming and outgoing correspondence, transcriptions of file folder headings, and general summary descriptions of series or collections. In some instances, the careful researcher may even need to use the index or file system used by the originating agency or individual in order to locate key records.

In recent years, especially as archivists have tried to prepare for computerized systems of information exchange and access, there has been an unprecedented (for archives) move toward greater standardization of finding aids. USMARC-AMC (*ma*chine *r*eadable *c*ataloging for *a*rchives and *m*anuscripts *c*ontrol) has now become the standard format used by most repositories in the United States to catalog their holdings. This format uses precisely defined "fields" for each descriptive element. All the fields taken together may provide much of the information a researcher wants to know about the records. There are, for example, fields for the identity of the person or office that created the records, the dates when the records were created, information about the person or office that created the records, the quantity of the records, the format and physical condition, the scheme of arrangement, and information about other closely related records. The number of fields and subfields available in the MARC-AMC format reaches into the hundreds, though no archives will use all fields for any one record series. Having an idea about what information is available in the different MARC-AMC fields and how to gain access to this information can be of great value for a researcher.

The MARC-AMC format also provides fields for subjects and names referenced in the collection. These access terms may vary substantially in their application from one repository to another, though many repositories rely on the Library of Congress subject heading system. Historians who understand how to use that subject heading system, especially as it applies to their particular areas of research, have at their disposal a valuable research tool. The precise wording of a computer query may mean the difference between a successful search and failure. Returning to the example of criminal justice records, is the proper subject term *murder* or *homicide*? To be most successful in their research efforts, historians need to understand and use the tools that archivists themselves use in selecting index terms. They should also understand the vagaries and varieties of archival applications of these terms so they can know how heavily to rely on these subject word-searching techniques and when to use other research strategies.

Computers and computerized finding aids present new searching possibilities that might

have been difficult even to imagine a generation ago. Yet the Joint Committee survey of graduate history departments reveals that very few of the research methods courses currently attempt to acquaint students with the use of computer databases and electronic finding aids. The Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), for example, now provides on-line access to descriptive entries for over 400,000 archival or manuscript collections from repositories across the nation. The number of these RLIN records grows daily by hundreds and sometimes thousands of new descriptive entries.

In addition to traditional queries by subject term, name, or provenance, the descriptive records in RLIN can be searched by strategies that archivists are in the process of developing. One of these strategies is by the "function" performed by the records creator, such as "imprisoning" inmates. This strategy of searching by function is a particularly useful tool for searches through multiple government series. Another strategy is to search by the "form of the material," where the form is standardized, such as with "professional certifications" or "annual reports." The full potential of these computer systems begins to be exploited when research strategies are developed using combinations of elements to scan a broad set of records and then limit the final list to those materials most directly relevant to the researcher's interest.

Archival finding aids also can provide other useful information for a researcher, such as information about access or usage restrictions that may apply to materials the researcher seeks. Material donated by private individuals, for example, may be closed to research use during the donor's lifetime. Many contemporary governmental records are restricted to protect the privacy interest of individuals referred to in the records or, in the case of federal records, national security interests. The use of other records may be limited by copyright restrictions. Advance knowledge of these restrictions may spare researchers a great deal of frustration by helping them avoid travel to a repository for records that will not be open for use. This information may also help researchers in initiating the proper steps to obtain access to normally restricted records.

Archivists serve as brokers between such competing demands as the right to know and the right to privacy. The way archivists try to achieve a balance of these rights is through the restrictions on records. Archivists accept restrictions, not to make research more difficult, but to make research possible; without reasonable restrictions, many records creators would opt for destruction rather than preservation. An appreciation of the function of access restrictions in archival collections can also enhance a researcher's ability to create a realistic research design.

Finally, the archival mission goes beyond acquiring records and making them available for research: preservation is a key part of the archival responsibility. Once again, archivists are involved in a balancing act. Making records available for research can shorten their life; yet, preserving records in the ideal way means that records would never leave their climate-controlled vault. Sensitivity to the dual archival functions of preservation and access will prepare history students for the most common archival compromise—the requirement of using microfilm copies in lieu of the original documents.

Advance knowledge of restrictions imposed for preservation reasons may also aid researchers by letting them know what records are available and in what format. Many repositories, for instance, will make microfilmed copies available for purchase at a nominal charge, usually far less than the costs of travel. Some repositories may even make their microfilm available through interlibrary loan agreements. Finding aids often provide information about the avail-

ability of records in these alternative formats.

Historians do not need to understand and use archival finding aids with the same level of proficiency employed by reference archivists who work with these systems on a daily basis. Historians should, however, have a basic understanding of the record systems of the people who created the records, of the principles archivists use in managing archival collections, and of the range of specific tools archivists use for describing their holdings. Without this knowledge, researchers are almost wholly dependent on either the footnotes of others who have already discovered the records or on the knowledge, skill, and energy of the reference archivists they may happen to encounter. Effective research is a complex and difficult job at best. The more historians understand the archival systems relating to the material with which they are working, the greater will be their chances of locating the information they need.

Understanding the nature and use of archival evidence. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on Her Diary 1785–1812*, provides a wonderful illustration of how previously ignored evidence can be a gold mine of information. Many historians knew of the existence of the Ballard diary in the Maine State Library but had been unable to make any effective use of the terse, somewhat mundane, diary entries. Ulrich, however, was able to use the Ballard Diary as a touchstone for developing an intriguing and powerful account of everyday life in the Kennebec River community in the postrevolutionary period. The richness of *A Midwife's Tale* emerges from the manner in which Ulrich links the diary with many other diverse sources, including wills, court records, tax lists, town meeting records, personal papers of local doctors, medical treatises, and novels. From this array of seemingly disjointed sources, Ulrich pieces together a moving account of men's and women's work and skillfully analyzes the transformation of health care from a female-centered to a male-focused profession. Clearly an appreciation of the many dimensions to the problems involved in understanding the nature and use of evidence enabled Ulrich to write a book that could well serve as a model for those trying to hone their research skills.

To use documentary evidence proficiently, students must learn the way that documentary evidence may have been written to achieve—or conceal—a certain purpose. A record may have been deliberately created to make a certain impression on the recipient at the time. Even the most obviously objective data, like dates and names, can be in error by accident or intent. The possibilities for distortions or inaccuracies in evidential records are as varied as the human imagination. Not every fact used in historical research can be or needs to be triangulated and confirmed by multiple independent sources. Nevertheless, the historian who undertakes serious research without continued and thoughtful consideration of the nature and accuracy of the evidence does so at his or her peril.

Although historians tend to rely most heavily on textual records, the increasing use of other kinds of evidence, such as photographs, requires additional sensitivity to the ways evidence may mislead. Robert Wolfe, an archivist at the National Archives, tells of a "news" photograph at Casablanca in which the French generals, Charles de Gaulle and Henri Giraud, were sitting with Roosevelt and Churchill. While it appears from the picture that everything is amicable, Wolfe notes that Roosevelt's adviser, Harry Hopkins, recorded in his notes the difficulties involved in convincing the disgruntled generals to sit for a photograph.[6] The inferences that documents and

[6]Guy Lamolinara, "History with a Grain of Salt: LC

other forms of the record suggest, and the interpretations that may be safely based on them, are best when grounded in an understanding of the broader functions, as well as the technical office procedures, of the individual or organization that generated or kept the materials a historian uses.

With the new emphasis on construction, one of the most basic questions about evidence is the problematic one of when an item becomes a "document." Does the "document" begin with an official's annotation on another's memo or a consumer's letter of complaint, or does it begin with the first draft that is circulated to get reactions from others? Does it include reactions from others which the author ultimately decides to reject, or only those he or she accepts? Does it include changes in argument or presentation in the document's construction? All of these are questions a historian needs to consider.

A knowledge of archival principles and practices can aid researchers substantially in evaluating their evidence. For many archival records, there is a rich, analytical interplay possible between an examination of original records and a study of the archival systems that describe the records. The continuing exploitation of this analytical interplay can deepen the researcher's understanding of the evidence with which he or she is working, as well as suggesting other related sources to be considered.

Strategies for Developing Research Competencies

An overview of some current practices. The Joint Committee survey of graduate history departments revealed many different techniques and methods now in use for developing competencies in historical research. Some research skills are taught in classroom settings, others in nonclassroom field experiences. We urge history faculty members to debate the best structures for training students in research skills and, in so doing, to consider how greater cooperation between the historical and archival professions could enhance work in each field.

Some history departments use the general methods course to familiarize students with the principal bibliographic tools used by historians. These bibliographic tools include the print catalogs of the U.S. and other national libraries; biographical handbooks; such guides to the professional literature as *Historical Abstracts* and dissertation listings; on-line catalogs; and the specialized bibliographic tools of the student's general area of anticipated research. Some of these courses acquaint students with style manuals and offer opportunities to obtain practice in the process of designing research questions in a manner that will lead to effective research strategies. Some methods courses also teach students ways of creating, organizing, and maintaining research notes to ensure both their usability and accuracy. In addition, general courses provide an opportunity for students to become acquainted with the pitfalls of poor research designs and the need for evaluating evidence for authenticity, accuracy, and meaning in terms of its creation, context, and significance.

Professors across the country are experimenting with various ways to train students in research skills. One professor creates a scenario in which a wealthy alumnus of the university wants a history of the institution. To apply for a contract to write the book, students must submit a sample chapter dealing with the history of the university in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The assignment calls for students to devise a step-by-step research plan: how to focus the chapter, which documents to seek, how to locate needed sources, and how to pres-

Speaker Provides Caveats on 'Historical Documents,' " *LC Information Bulletin*, 6 April 1992, p. 149.

ent the evidence. Another professor seeking to acquaint students with the possibilities and pitfalls of using different types of sources has an exercise on the use of census data. Each student is asked to develop a sample of approximately one hundred individuals from the 1910 census from any town in the state. Students select a research question and then use census data to construct a social portrait of the sample.

In many topical graduate history courses, professors give special attention to training in the use of primary sources. In some graduate seminars, the common focus is not on a topic or country but on the use of unpublished materials integrated with published evidence for the preparation of a seminar paper. One professor, for example, uses the introductory sessions of the seminar to undertake two types of exercises: one to familiarize students with types of original sources and the other to introduce students to archival finding aids. Students examine copies of individual documents from modern archives in order to become familiar with the technical commonalities, such as filing systems, telegram numbers, receipt stamps, coding and decoding marks, initials, and distribution indicators. Students also study samples of the types of finding aids they will find at the National Archives and other research institutions. These preliminary exercises lead to discussions about the nature, appearance, and location of modern records in archives and the concept of provenance as the major organizing principle of modern archives.

Individual conferences frequently are the occasion for discussions with graduate students about practical research considerations, such as whether local research institutions provide microfilm of needed source material. To help students design a research project, this professor created another exercise that required each student to analyze how two scholarly articles, in journals related to the students' general area of research, combine information from new archival sources with previously published documents and secondary material.

Visits to university and nearby archives have proven an effective way for introducing graduate history students to archival institutions. Through site visits, students can see for themselves the way in which archives differ from libraries, as well as get an overview of the practices archivists follow in acquiring, organizing, and making available their collections.

Possible new efforts. The evolution of new technology and new finding aids has both facilitated historical research and made it more complex. There is a need for instructional tools that provide step-by-step illustrations of how to move from finding aids to documents in different types of archival settings. These instructional tools might include such new techniques as computer tutorials and video instructions. For example, a video could indicate the way a researcher moves from specific finding aid notations to locating nineteenth-century letters in bound volumes, as contrasted with documents filed in folders or packages.

Another way of improving research skill would be to develop special summer programs for faculty and graduate students. These programs could focus on research techniques, improved understanding of archival systems, and analyses of the ways archival materials both reveal and obscure the human experiences they represent. Archivists might also consider setting up training programs to teach students in a more formal way how to conduct research in their collections, as recommended in the recent National Historical Publications and Records Commission-sponsored *Historical Documents Study.*[7] Ways could also be

[7]Ann D. Gordon, *Using the Nation's Documentary Heritage*, (Washington, D.C.: National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1991), 8.

found to foster the sharing of experiences in the actual use of archives. More informed discussions about research interests and issues could aid both students and faculty in improving research proficiency. Both the history and archival professions have much to gain from dialogue on both the substance of research findings and the processes of research. All historians, faculty and students alike, would profit from increased communication with archivists on these issues.

The Creation of New Structures for Broader Professional Cooperation

The Bentley team recognized that as each profession works through its own concerns, the changes it undertakes will redefine its relations with the other profession. To ensure effective coordination between historians and archivists, it is important to establish opportunities for formal and informal cooperation between the two professions. Some of these cooperative efforts may relate to the education of graduate students in research strategies and methods; others may involve efforts to make knowledge of the past accessible to the present and future.

Recent partnerships between academic historians and historical professionals outside the academy provide examples of the rich intellectual rewards that could flow from increased interaction between historians and archivists. The excellent program of internships for graduate history students offered by the National Museum of American History of the Smithsonian Institution, for example, has made the theory and practice of museum administration important to the study, presentation, and understanding of cultural history. In much the same way, oral historians have worked with archivists in developing oral history as a new form of documentation that helps to fill in gaps in knowledge created by the use of direct person-to-person communications, rather than letters or memoranda.

Both archivists and historians can benefit from improved cooperative efforts to devise systems for ensuring the preservation of an adequate documentary record of our society. We can envision conferences and studies in which historians and archivists might consider better ways of documenting such diverse themes as gender relations, environmental quality, and aesthetic values. We can imagine historians and archivists together exploring how and why certain groups kept particular records, and why some records and perspectives are more worthy of preservation than others. We also need more theoretical work on the relationship of surviving documentation to the past and to our contemporary understanding of the past.

During the last few decades, archivists have often served as adjunct faculty members in history departments, usually teaching courses in archival administration. This practice should continue, but there are also other ways to increase archival interaction with history faculties. There could be a fellowship program that enables archivists to return to the academy for a semester to conduct research as full members of the faculty. History faculty members could receive one-semester fellowships to work in archives, perhaps providing historical input into archival appraisal decisions. Many history departments have placed graduate students in archival jobs as a source of income and professional historical experience. Such efforts should expand in ways that more closely link the archival experience with the students' graduate education. To improve this work experience, history faculty members and archivists should establish frameworks for dialogue about the education process and the archival component of the history curriculum.

The opportunities for interaction are limited only by our imagination and our energy. The opportunities extend beyond the traditional and occasionally successful joint advocacy of increased federal and state

funding for archival institutions and historical programs. We have identified collaborative ventures that can serve as worthy models of cooperation.

Some ventures are specifically related to the teaching of history in the schools. Building on informal networks of historians and archivists at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, archivists at the Gerald R. Ford Library developed an "America Since Hoover" documents packet that served as background material for students in a course in modern U.S. history. In Alabama in 1990, historians and archivists formed a coalition that prepared recommendations for a State Department of Education committee that was reevaluating the social studies curriculum for the classes from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The coalition was successful in fostering improvements that will strengthen the study of history and make it the unifying discipline of the social studies. And in New York State, archivists worked with historians to create units of study that made the use and evaluation of primary sources a more important component of history courses in middle and secondary schools.

Other collaborative ventures have focused on the training of historical professionals. From 1971 to 1982 the Newberry Library Family and Community History Center's summer institute in quantitative methodology played a major role in training faculty members and graduate students in the use of new methods and materials. Innovations in teaching quantified analysis, computers, and the new social history stimulated the institute's program of providing historians with new research skills and insights into the potential uses of family- and local-history records. That program might be a useful model for developing interdisciplinary training and evaluation of documentation issues.

Some very impressive collaborative ventures have grown out of efforts to preserve large bodies of historical records. In the mid-1950s, on the initiative of the American Historical Association (AHA), a group of historians and archivists screened, selected, and microfilmed documents of historical value found in the large deposits of captured German documents then located in Alexandria, Virginia, and Whaddon Hall, England. The prospective return of the documents to Germany spurred the AHA to seek and receive grants from several foundations for the project. Under the supervision of the AHA Committee for the Study of War Documents, an unprecedented project began that involved not only the microfilming of documents but also the preparation of guides and catalogs. Historians, working with archivists, prepared descriptions of the records that appear at the beginning of each reel of film. In 1957 the committee reported in the AHA annual proceedings that the first 1,050,000 frames of microfilm had been photographed and deposited with the National Archives. "There is enough material here," the report stated, "to keep our scholars, graduate students, and research centers occupied for a great many years and to furnish many valuable studies on Weimar and Nazi Germany and on World War II."[8]

Another large endeavor that required cooperation was the more recent Penn Central/Conrail Railroads Records Project.[9] In 1976, when eight large bankrupt railroads were reorganized by national legislation into Conrail, historians and archivists became concerned about what would happen to the records of the railroads. The Hagley Museum and Library, in Delaware, initiated a review of the records of the bankrupt com-

[8]American Historical Association, Committee for the Study of War Documents of the American Historical Association, *Proceedings—1957*, (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1958), 40–43.

[9]Michael Nash and Christopher Baer, *Final Report of the Penn Central Railroad Appraisal Project* (Greenville, Del.: Hagley Museum and Library, 30 January 1987).

panies, of which Penn Central was the largest. The report of this review led to negotiations about preserving significant records. A key problem was the size of the collection. The Penn Central records alone comprised more than 350,000 linear feet. In 1980, historians and archivists learned, through informal networks, that Conrail had started to destroy its older records. The Hagley Museum and Library joined forces with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and they negotiated with representatives of the railroad companies and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) about the records. To ensure systematic records disposition, the project expanded to include nine archival repositories. The group subsequently received an NHPRC grant to review, appraise, perform preliminary arrangement, and facilitate the transfer of historical records from Conrail to the depositories in the coalition.

The Conrail project team included specialists in business history as well as archives. In developing methods for the analysis and appraisal of records, the team drew heavily on Alfred D. Chandler, Jr.'s *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, and on the work of Joanne Yates, a business historian at the Sloane School of Management at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who has pioneered the study of how the increased complexity of business structures has affected the organization and use of company records.

A somewhat comparable attempt to preserve extensive records began in the mid-1970s, when the Massachusetts court system undertook a study of the state's massive accumulation of judicial records, many of them dating back to the colonial period. The study sought to set up a system for determining which records, among the vast files continually created by the courts, deserved long-term retention. The study team, composed of archivists, historians, judicial officials, and social scientists, produced a landmark report that continues to influence other organizations seeking to address similar issues of records retention.[10]

Archivists and historians have also collaborated to improve access to records. The American Historical Association is sponsoring a collaborative historical and archival project to compile a new electronic database. The database will serve as an electronic finding aid to all manuscript collections dating to 1900, concerning or originating in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean, and housed in the U.S. repositories. Although these materials constitute a potentially invaluable source for the study of the Hispanic experience, they are scattered in thousands of small collections across the country. Without a comprehensive finding aid, they remain largely inaccessible to most scholars and are little used by them. A historian will serve as the director of the project and an archivist as the deputy director. When completed, the database will provide an indispensable aid for all scholars studying the Hispanic presence in the New World.[11]

One of the most successful of all joint history–archives efforts was the campaign in the early 1980s to remove the National Archives from the unsupportive control of the General Services Administration and to reestablish it as an independent agency. In that effort archivists and historians were able to develop a case for archival independence and the need for an energetic effort to preserve accurate and representative documentation of the work of the federal government.

[10]Michael Stephen Hindus, Theodore M. Hammet, and Barbara M. Hobson, *The Files of the Massachusetts Superior Court, 1859–1959: An Analysis and a Plan for Action* (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1979).

[11]For the background and framework of the project, see Lawrence A. Clayton, ed., *The Hispanic Experience in North America: Sources for Study in the United States* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1992).

Conclusion

The history and archival professions appear to be in a period of profound stress and change. Despite the importance of the changes for both professions, there has been little systematic or structured effort to address the process of change. One aspect of the changes now under way appears to be a blurring of professional boundaries at the larger discipline level, along with an increase in specialized tools and skills at the operational level. As both professions rethink their larger strategic roles, each can benefit from a knowledge of what the other is doing. Even more important, as each assesses its role as either preservers or interpreters of historical documentation, both need to recognize the fundamental interconnectedness of these two enterprises. Contemporary changes in the nature of documentation and in modes of understanding require greater cooperation between the two professions if either is to be truly effective.

An intermediate-term strategic goal for the two professions should probably be the creation of more effective formal structures to begin addressing these issues of common concern. Meanwhile, we need to seek other practical ways of forging new partnerships between the historical and archival professions. We believe that increased communication and collaboration can greatly enhance the teaching of research skills to graduate students. In the longer run, improved cooperation will result in better documenting and interpreting of the past.