

Editor's Special Forum on Needs in Archival Research and Publication

An Analysis of Archival Research, 1970–92, and the Role and Function of the *American Archivist*

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AS EDITOR OF THE *AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*, I have been asked several times to discuss publishing in this journal; indeed, this essay is a slightly revised version of a paper I presented at the May 1993 meeting of the Midwest Archives Conference. Rather than discussing such matters as clarity of writing, use of style manuals, acceptable page lengths, or other such topics, I want to address the matter of *what* should be published in the *American Archivist* and, in such a context, the greatest need of the journal (and the profession).

The *American Archivist* publishes a fairly broad range of essay types. There are Case Studies, analyses of specific programs or projects. Perspectives are generally personal opinions or reflections of items of particular importance to the archival profession and archival science. There are Research Articles, studies based on primary sources or systematic gatherings of data in order to prove a hypothesis. The *American Archivist* also publishes reports of archival

activities in the International Scene; Project Reports, which are brief statements of grant-funded projects and their results; and Professional Resources, such as bibliographies and bibliographical essays. This essay examines archival research and its publication in the *American Archivist*.

In my estimation, the *American Archivist* has an important responsibility to the archival profession, one it has fulfilled only partly in its half-century. Although conveying opinions and reports of professional activities, case studies, and other such analyses is important, the *American Archivist* must also contribute more to systematic research about archival science and practice. Such research is essential to supporting the profession's continued improvement. It also contributes to the enhancement of the theoretical dimensions of archival work, an aspect crucial to the content of archival science and one we have been more prone to argue about than to roll up our collective sleeves and seri-

ously consider.¹ The *American Archivist*—along with *Archivaria*, its Canadian counterpart—has a responsibility to publish such work as it becomes available. These two journals, one quarterly and the other appearing semiannually, may be the best vehicles for publishing research in our field. If these journals do not support such work, who will?²

Recently, Mary Sue Stephenson of the University of British Columbia described the “wall” that had developed between those conducting research on archival topics and the majority of archival practitioners. Speaking to an audience of archivists, Stephenson had this to say:

in North America, thanks in large part to the general lack of the highly formalized and particularized graduate educational requirements found in librarianship, archival science has not yet managed to build that wall between the two cultures. The major writers, thinkers, leaders and researchers in the field have tended to be practitioners who have also contributed substantially to the education of members of the profession. Those few individuals who have been living mostly on the academic side of the profession have maintained excellent connections with both practitioners as a group and the microcosm of the workplace.³

¹The sense of argument can be seen in the essays responding to Frank Burke's “The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States,” *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981): 40–46. Frederick Stielow has made an effort to carve out the basis for an archival theory in his “Archival Redux and Redeemed: Definition and Context Toward a General Theory,” *American Archivist* 54 (Winter 1991): 14–26, while others such as Terry Cook have struggled to formulate the theoretical foundation for an archival function such as appraisal in essays such as “Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal,” in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor*, edited by Barbara L. Craig (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), pp. 38–70. Luciana Duranti, with her European archival education and perspectives, has attempted to draw on these older sources to produce a modern archival theory; see, for example, “The Archival Body of Knowledge: Archival Theory, Method, and Practice, and Graduate and Continuing Education,” *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 34 (Winter 1993): 8–24. But such individuals as Stielow, Cook, and Duranti have been rare in the field.

²I have not emphasized either *Archival Issues* or *Provenance* because of their support by regional associations. Both hopefully will publish research, but I don't believe this needs to be their primary responsibility to the profession. This is supported by a glimpse of the pattern of publication of research articles by these journals:

<i>American Archivist</i>	54
<i>Archivaria</i>	24
<i>Midwestern Archivist</i>	9
<i>Provenance</i>	1
Total	88

She then noted that as a profession we are at a crossroads, given the changing nature of graduate archival education and the likelihood of others entering the now small community of regular faculty in graduate archival programs. In a more recent essay, Stephenson described how research can and should be a vital part of the graduate education of future archivists; I am in total agreement with her assessment, and I believe that, until proved otherwise, the future source of research on archival matters will be the increasingly comprehensive graduate archival education programs in North America.⁴

But there is another “wall” existing in the archival field in North America, and it has severe implications for journals such as the *American Archivist*. There is virtually no substantial research going on in archival science. This void is partly a result of the present state of archival education, the lack

³Mary Sue Stephenson, “Deciding Not to Build the Wall: Research and the Archival Profession,” *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 149.

⁴Mary Sue Stephenson, “The Function and Content of Research Methods in Graduate Archival Studies Education,” *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 190–202.

of opportunities for undertaking such research, and the lack of reward mechanisms for those undertaking archival research. It is also, in part, a result of prevailing attitudes toward research held by a large number of archivists in the field. In this essay, I want to describe the research that has been published in the four major archival journals in North America since 1970 and to argue that one of the best mechanisms by which to get published is to engage in such needed research.

Given the dearth of research in archival science, I suspect a good place to begin is by defining what I mean by such research.

A Definition of Research in Archival Science

I believe archivists have tended to operate with some basic wrong assumptions about the nature of research in their field. Many archivists have tended to see research as something they have no time for and, even more problematic, as an activity not relevant to their needs. Other archivists have tended to see research as reading in their own journals (and occasionally in other fields) in preparation for a paper at a professional conference; it seems at times that a paper is labeled research because it has a long array of footnotes. There are many causes for such an unfortunate perspective.

By research I first mean an approach concerned with a problem or intending to prove or disprove a hypothesis. This element is essential to any research; without it, one finds it virtually impossible to evaluate what the author intended to accomplish in his or her research. In a very basic research primer, the author noted that every individual engaged in research "follows the same basic steps: the articulation of a problem, the establishment of hypotheses, the collection, the analysis and the interpretation of data, and the resolution of the

effort in terms of reportable conclusions."⁵ This definition eliminates a vast amount of the work that has been published in North American archival literature, which often tends to be a statement of perspective or a descriptive exposition of an activity. I do not mean to disparage such writings, some of which have been quite helpful to the archival field and have set new directions in thinking and even in research. But there are other needs as well.

A research design can be either quantitative or qualitative in nature. Some archivists have tended to see research as either one or the other. A major volume on qualitative methods in library science research suggests that the differences are as follows:

Qualitative research methods are less reliant on quantitative measurement and less likely to adhere to the scientific method of inquiry than are quantitative methods. Qualitative research methods focus on viewing experiences from the perspective of those involved and attempt to understand why individuals react or behave as they do. They tend to give more attention to the subjective aspects of human experience and behavior. In short, qualitative research takes a more natural approach to the resolution of research problems.⁶

Qualitative approaches are relevant for historical research, case studies, needs assessments, impact studies, systems analyses, and performance measurement. Even with quantitative methods the issue is not the use of numbers or statistics per se, but the relevancy of the methodology for answer-

⁵Paul D. Leedy, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1985), p. viii.

⁶Jack D. Glazier and Ronald R. Powell, *Qualitative Research in Information Management* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1992), p. xi.

Table 1. Research Agendas Published in North American Archival Journals

1978	2
1981	1
1983	1
1986	2
1987	1
1988	3
1991	1
Total	11

ing a particular question or proving or disproving a particular hypothesis. Only in such systematic approaches will we find the answers to our questions and be able to test our hypotheses about our work. At present, what we do is largely built on assumptions, which may or may not be true.

Even more of an issue is the fact that, regardless of what broad methodology it employs, the vast majority of research in archival science will be applied. We are, after all, a profession that encompasses theory, methodology, and practice. Our research will be directed to making decisions within our institutions or evaluating our services.⁷ Research on such basic questions will both test and expand our notion of the theoretical and knowledge-based dimensions of our practice. Michael K. Buckland, who has done this type of analysis for library services, has argued that archivists should do the same; however, the unevenness and paucity of our own research literature has severely limited our ability to

do such analyses.⁸ It has also minimized our ability to make discoveries about our work. June Goodfield's book on scientific discovery has shown how creativity and free-ranging ideas best operate in the more systematic efforts to conduct research on a particular problem.⁹ Archivists are missing a lot by failing to be more rigorous in their research or to encourage and support the conduct of such research.

And, besides, archivists have spent the better part of the past decade calling for more and better research to be done.

Research Agendas and Archival Science: Needs and Prospects

We have had no lack of published research agendas for the archival community's consideration and use (see table 1). Taken as a group, these agendas have touched on virtually every subject and every basic archival function. The creation of such agendas has had at least two high points. The publication in 1986 of a plan for the profession led to the commissioning of three papers for the 1987 Society of American Archivists conference on management, appraisal, and reference and use; these papers were subsequently published in a 1988 *American Archivist* issue.¹⁰ Although these articles are frequently cited, it is at best debatable whether their calls for additional research have been followed. (In a more cynical vein, one might suggest

⁷Examples from library science include Robert Swisher and Charles R. McClure, *Research for Decision Making: Methods for Librarians* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1984); and F. W. Lancaster, *The Measurement and Evaluation of Library Services* (Arlington, Va.: Information Resources Press, 1977).

⁸*Library Services in Theory and Context*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1988).

⁹*An Imagined World: A Story of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982).

¹⁰Richard J. Cox and Helen W. Samuels, "The Archivist's First Responsibility: A Research Agenda to Improve the Identification and Retention of Records of Enduring Value," *American Archivist* 51 (Winter-Spring 1988): 28-42; Lawrence Dowler, "The Role of Use in Defining Archival Practice and Principles: A Research Agenda for the Availability and Use of Records," *American Archivist* 51 (Winter-Spring 1988): 74-86; and Paul H. McCarthy, "The Management of Archives: A Research Agenda," *American Archivist* 51 (Winter-Spring 1988): 52-69.

that archivists have talked about research more than actually doing it.) The other highlight was the 1991 conference on research on electronic records, which led to a full report on this topic and an article in the *American Archivist*.¹¹ The prospects for results seem better here since the National Historical Publications and Records Commission has made funding of such research a priority. In addition to these two high points, calls for additional research have appeared in the mainstream North American archival journals on the topic of archival theory, conservation and preservation, reference and use, archival history, and financial analysis of archival functions.¹² Other research agendas have also been published in journals and monographs on other topics.¹³

Although the appearance of such research agendas has been relatively spotty,

archivists who examine them can see many questions begging for systematic research. In the management of archival programs, we need to know more about the costs of archival work; how programs have developed and why their design varies; archival competencies; why society and its institutions are interested in preserving archival records; and so forth. In appraisal, archivists need to consider such basic areas as the relationship between activities, organizational structures, information technology, information flows, decision making, and documentation; the nature of new forms of documentation created by electronic information technology; and where and how archivists can intervene at critical points in the development of new information systems. Archival preservation calls out for additional work in both the scientific and technical aspects of conservation and the effectiveness of the education and training of conservators and preservation administrators. Microscopic examination of every aspect of use and reference has been called for. The only areas in which we have not had systematic assessments of needs for additional research are in arrangement and description and promotion and outreach, but immense needs nevertheless exist in these functions as well. Archivists have not really examined the success of the increasing standardization in arrangement and description. Neither have they thoroughly evaluated the results of our increasing activity in outreach programs. Research agendas could easily be constructed for these functions.

The weakness of the effectiveness of these research agendas in promoting new and needed research can be seen in an examination of the articles published in the *American Archivist*, *Archivaria*, *Midwestern Archivist*, and *Provenance* since 1970 (an arbitrary date but one that will provide a sense of the degree and depth of archival research).

¹¹*Research Issues in Electronic Records* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society for the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1991); and Margaret Hedstrom, "Understanding Electronic Incunabula: A Framework for Research on Electronic Records," *American Archivist* 54 (Summer 1991): 334-54.

¹²Frank G. Burke, "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981): 40-46; Carolyn Clark, "The Status of Research and Techniques in Archival Conservation," *Midwestern Archivist* 3, no. 1 (1978): 13-24; Paul Conway, "Facts and Frameworks: An Approach to Studying the Users of Archives," *American Archivist* 49 (Fall 1986): 393-407; Richard J. Cox, "American Archival History: Its Development, Needs, and Opportunities," *American Archivist* 46 (Winter 1983): 31-41; Bruce W. Dearstyne, "What Is the Use of Archives? A Challenge for the Profession," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 76-87; William J. Maher, "The Importance of Financial Analysis of Archival Programs," *Midwestern Archivist* 3, no. 2 (1978): 3-24; and Maher, "The Use of User Studies," *Midwestern Archivist* 11, no. 1 (1986): 15-26.

¹³As examples I refer only to my own: "On the Value of Archival History in the United States," *Libraries & Culture* 23 (Spring 1988): 135-51; my chapter on research in archival education in *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1990), chapter 6; and "Researching Archival Reference as an Information Function," *RQ* 31 (Spring 1992): 387-97.

Research in North American Archival Journals, 1970-92

This brief examination of archival research literature will consider three aspects: first, the frequency (and quantity) of the appearance of research articles; second, the topics of research; and third, the sophistication of research methodology used by archivists conducting research.

Frequency and quantity of research.

The frequency and quantity of research articles is easy to characterize. Although we have had a fairly regular diet of research articles over the past twenty years, the overall quantity is generally meager. (I identified 88 such articles.) In our four journals, we are averaging fewer than four research articles a year, hardly a substantial lot for any profession. The frequency and quantity aspects appear even more bleak if one considers that I included in my analysis everything in this research category, regardless of sophistication or quality.

Topics of research. The topics of research are no more heartening. The larger quantity of research on management and professional issues is very telling, constituting nearly two-thirds of the total (54 of 88; 61.4%). The largest quantity of research studies in general occur within this broader category of management and professional management issues. These are histories of archival institutions and programs¹⁴ or biographies of archival person-

ages¹⁵ (totaling 28 of 54—51.9%—of this category and 31.8% of all the identified re-

more, 1729-1979," *American Archivist* 42 (July 1979): 281-92; Richard J. Cox, "Public Records in Colonial Maryland," *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 263-75; Barbara Craig, "Records Management and the Ontario Archives, 1950-1976," *Archivaria* 8 (Summer 1979): 3-33; Jean E. Dryden, "The MacKenzie King Papers: An Archival Odyssey," *Archivaria* 6 (Summer 1978): 40-69; Patrick A. Dunae, "Promoting the Dominion: Records and the Canadian Immigration Campaign, 1872-1915," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85): 73-93; Jacqueline Goggin, "Carter G. Woodson and the Collection of Source Materials for Afro-American History," *American Archivist* 48 (Summer 1985): 261-71; Carolyn Gray, "Business Structures and Records: The Dominion Power and Transmission Company, 1896-1930," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85): 152-61; Milton O. Gustafson, "The Empty Shrine: The Transfer of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to the National Archives," *American Archivist* 39 (July 1976): 271-85; Robin G. Keirstead, "J. S. Matthews and an Archives for Vancouver, 1951-1972," *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986-87): 86-106; Edward W. Laine, "'Kallista Perintoa—Precious Legacy': Finnish-Canadian Archives, 1882-1985," *Archivaria* 22 (Summer 1986): 75-94; Donald Macleod, "Our Man in the Maritimes: 'Down East' with the Public Archives of Canada, 1872-1932," *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84): 86-105; Macleod, "'Quaint Specimens of the Early Days': Priorities in Collecting the Ontario Archival Record, 1872-1935," *Archivaria* 22 (Summer 1986): 12-39; Donald R. McCoy, "The Crucial Choice: The Appointment of R.D.W. Connor as Archivist of the United States," *American Archivist* 37 (July 1974): 399-413; Trudy Huskamp Peterson, "The Iowa Historical Records Survey, 1936-1942," *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 223-45; Morris L. Radoff, "The Maryland Records in the Revolutionary War," *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 277-85; Bill Russell, "The White Man's Paper Burden: Aspects of Records Keeping in the Department of Indian Affairs, 1860-1914," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85): 50-72; Paul G. Sifton, "The Provenance of the Thomas Jefferson Papers," *American Archivist* 40 (January 1977): 17-30; Bruce G. Wilson, "Bringing Home Canada's Archival Heritage: The London Office of the Public Archives of Canada, 1872-1986," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985-86): 28-42; Ian E. Wilson, "'A Noble Dream': The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982-83): 16-35.

¹⁵Carolyn J. Mattern, "Lyman Copeland Draper: An Archivist's Reappraisal," *American Archivist* 45 (Fall 1982): 444-54; Rodney A. Ross, "Ernst Posner: The Bridge Between the Old World and the New," *American Archivist* 44 (Fall 1981): 304-12; Ross, "Waldo Gifford Leland: Archivist by Association," *American Archivist* 46 (Summer 1983): 264-76; Jane

¹⁴Jay Atherton, "The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897-1956," *Archivaria* 8 (Summer 1979): 35-59; Chester W. Bowie, "The Wisconsin Historical Records Survey, Then and Now," *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 247-61; Joan Champ, "Arthur Silver Morton and His Role in the Founding of the Saskatchewan Archives Board," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 101-13; J. Frank Cook, "The Blessings of Providence on an Association of Archivists," *American Archivist* 46 (Fall 1983): 374-99; Henry Bartholomew Cox, "A Nineteenth-Century Archival Search: The History of the French Spoilation Claims Papers," *American Archivist* 33 (October 1970): 389-401; Richard J. Cox, "The Plight of American Municipal Archives: Balti-

search articles). There are relatively few efforts to conduct and publish broader historical analyses.¹⁶ Even rarer than these studies are efforts to examine important professional issues in any rigorous manner, such as providing a comprehensive profile of American archival institutions or considering the status of any particular group within the profession.¹⁷ Studies to evaluate

the effectiveness of such basic activities as education are virtually nonexistent, and, when added together, they do not provide anywhere near a comprehensive picture of education in our field.¹⁸ Yet, here, archivists are in better shape than other areas.

Think of what has been neglected. Despite a significant continuing concern with professional and societal image, we possess one study of the image of archivists in a literary genre.¹⁹ Despite two decades of federal and other external sources of funding, the profession lacks substantial analyses of the impact of such funding; we possess one essay on "trends."²⁰ Despite our apparent reliance on automation, little has been published as a result of any kind of systems analysis for the use of computers for archival administration.²¹ The transformation of the basic nature of documentary sources has also led to little consideration of the content of archival legislation.²²

F. Smith, "Theodore R. Schellenberg: Americanizer and Popularizer," *American Archivist* 44 (Fall 1981): 313-26; Marcia D. Talley, "Morris Leon Radoff: The Man and the Monument," *American Archivist* 44 (Fall 1981): 327-40.

¹⁶William F. Birdsall, "The Two Sides of the Desk: The Archivist and the Historian, 1909-1935," *American Archivist* 38 (April 1975): 159-73; M. T. Clanchy, "Tenacious Letters: Archives and Memory in the Middle Ages," *Archivaria* 11 (Winter 1980-81): 115-25; Jacqueline Goggin, "That We Shall Truly Deserve the Title of 'Profession': The Training and Education of Archivists, 1930-1960," *American Archivist* 47 (Summer 1984): 243-54; Michele F. Pacifico, "Founding Mothers: Women in the Society of American Archivists, 1936-1972," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987): 370-89; James M. O'Toole, "Herodotus and the Written Record," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92): 148-60; and Robert R. Simpson, "Leland to Connor: An Early Survey of American State Archives," *American Archivist* 36 (October 1973): 513-22.

¹⁷Marjorie Rabe Barritt, "Adopting and Adapting Records Management to College and University Archives," *Midwestern Archivist* 14, no. 1 (1989): 5-12; Nicholas C. Burckel and J. Frank Cook, "A Profile of College and University Archives in the United States," *American Archivist* 45 (Fall 1982): 410-28; Paul Conway, "Perspectives on Archival Resources: The 1985 Census of Archival Institutions," *American Archivist* 50 (Spring 1987): 174-91; Richard J. Cox, "American Archival Literature: Expanding Horizons and Continuing Needs, 1901-1987," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987): 306-23; Mabel E. Deutrich, "Women in Archives: A Summary Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in the Archival Profession," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975): 43-46; Deutrich, "Women in Archives: Ms. Versus Mr. Archivist," *American Archivist* 36 (April 1973): 171-81; Frank B. Evans and Robert M. Warner, "American Archivists and Their Society: A Composite View," *American Archivist* 34 (April 1971): 157-72; David Levine, "The Management and Preservation of Local Public Records: Report of the State and Local Records Committee," *American Archivist* 40 (April 1977): 189-99; William J. Morison, "The Best of Both Worlds: University Archivists and Dual Appointments," *Midwestern Archivist* 3, no. 1 (1978): 25-37; Don C. Ske-

mer and Geoffrey P. Williams, "Managing the Records of Higher Education: The State of Records Management in American Colleges and Universities," *American Archivist* 53 (Fall 1990): 532-47.

¹⁸Judith E. Endelman and Joel Wurl, "The NHPRC/Mellon Foundation Fellowship in Archives Administration: Structured Training on the Job," *American Archivist* 51 (Summer 1988): 286-97; Elizabeth Eso and Robin G. Keirstead, "A Survey of Students of the Master of Archival Studies Programme at the University of British Columbia, 1981-88," *Archivaria* 29 (Winter 1989-90): 104-27; Constance B. Schulz, "Analysis of the Marketplace for Educated Archivists: State Archives as a Case Study," *American Archivist* 51 (Summer 1988): 320-29.

¹⁹Peter Gillis, "Of Plots, Secrets, Burrowers and Moles: Archives in Espionage Fiction," *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979-80): 3-13.

²⁰Michael F. Kohl, "Trends in Funding Archival Programs: An Analysis of Proposals Submitted to the NHPRC," *Georgia Archive* 7 (Spring 1979): 27-35.

²¹Richard M. Kesner and Don Hurst, "Microcomputer Applications in Archives: A Study in Progress," *Archivaria* 12 (Summer 1981): 3-19; Kesner, "Microcomputer Archives and Records Management Systems: Guidelines for Future Development," *American Archivist* 45 (Summer 1982): 299-311.

²²George Bain, "State Archival Law: A Content Analysis," *American Archivist* 46 (Spring 1983): 158-74.

The area of specific archival functions brings forth an even bleaker portrait of the state of research in our field. What, for example, have we seriously studied about appraisal and acquisition, probably our most crucial function? The profession possesses a modest number of surveys on how archival programs have appraised or acquired certain kinds of records.²³ There are only two studies focused on the changing nature of recordkeeping in certain kinds of institutions.²⁴ A few published studies have addressed internal institutional assessments of the effectiveness of appraisal and acquisition programs, but even these have tended primarily to describe the research process rather than report on the actual research results.²⁵

The state of research on arrangement and description is extremely poor, given the frenetic activities of the past decade to develop more standardized methods for

conducting such work. Two experimental studies, one in 1979 and the other in 1986, have focused on any aspect of such work; although both efforts have been extremely influential, both also beg to be replicated.²⁶ Beyond these two seminal essays, archivists have some work on processing costs,²⁷ some historical assessments of the development of archival arrangement and description,²⁸ and an internal analysis of the potential for automating arrangement and description.²⁹ Although the preponderance of the archival literature has tended to focus on this functional area, there is virtually no research.

The range of research on archival preservation and conservation is also spotty. There are a few of the experimental or scientific technical studies one would expect to see,³⁰ and the typical surveys and his-

²³R. Joseph Anderson, "Public Welfare Case Records: A Study of Archival Practices," *American Archivist* 43 (Spring 1980): 169-79; Gregory Kinney, "Federal Land Records in State Repositories: The Experience in the Old Northwest," *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 152-64; Grant Mitchell, "Canadian Archives and the Corporate Memory," *Archivaria* 28 (Summer 1989): 48-67; Dennis F. Walle, "The Deposit Agreement in Archival Collection Development," *Midwestern Archivist* 10, no. 2 (1985): 117-27.

²⁴Barbara L. Craig, "Hospital Records and Record-Keeping, c. 1850-c. 1950; Part I: The Development of Records in Hospitals," *Archivaria* 29 (Winter 1989-90): 57-87; "Part II: The Development of Record-Keeping in Hospitals," *Archivaria* 30 (Summer 1990): 21-38; Peter J. Wosh, "Bibles, Benevolence, and Bureaucracy: The Changing Nature of Nineteenth Century Religious Records," *American Archivist* 52 (Spring 1989): 166-78.

²⁵Bryan Corbett and Eldon Frost, "The Acquisition of Federal Government Records: A Report on Records Management and Archival Practices," *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84): 201-32; Judith E. Endelman, "Looking Backward to Plan for the Future: Collection Analysis for Manuscript Repositories," *American Archivist* 50 (Summer 1987): 340-55; Gloria A. Thompson, "From Profile to Policy: A Minnesota Historical Society Case Study in Collection Development," *Midwestern Archivist* 8, no. 2 (1983): 29-39.

²⁶Richard H. Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: I. Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Winter 1980): 64-75; "II. Report of an Experiment Comparing Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *American Archivist* 43 (Spring 1980): 191-207; Avra Michelson, "Description and Reference in the Age of Automation," *American Archivist* 50 (Spring 1987): 192-208. For example, the Michelson study was conducted in the early stages of the development and use of the US MARC AMC format; with nearly an additional decade of experience with the format, it is critical to determine if we are being more consistent in our indexing methodologies.

²⁷Terry Abraham, Stephen E. Balzarini, and Anne Frantilla, "What Is Backlog Is Prologue: A Measurement of Archival Processing," *American Archivist* 48 (Winter 1985): 31-44.

²⁸Patricia L. Adams, "Assessing the Historical Value of the Historical Records Survey," *Midwestern Archivist* 12, no. 1 (1987): 5-12; Robert D. Reynolds, Jr., "The Incunabula of Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: J. C. Fitzpatrick's *Notes on the Care, Cataloguing, Calendaring and Arranging of Manuscripts* and the Public Archives Commission's Uncompleted 'Primer of Archival Economy,'" *American Archivist* 54 (Fall 1991): 466-82.

²⁹Richard M. Kesner, "The Computer's Future in Archival Management: An Evaluation," *Midwestern Archivist* 3, no. 2 (1978): 25-36.

³⁰Helen D. Burgess, Stephen Duffy, and Season Tse, "The Effect of Alkali on the Long-Term Stability of Cellulosic Fibres," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91): 218-23; Klaus B. Hendriks and Brian

Table 2. Research Methodologies in North American Archival Journals, 1970-92

Qualitative	
Historical	42
Systems	6
Experimental	5
Literary	2
Legal	1
<i>Subtotal</i>	56
Quantitative	
Survey	22
Citation/bibliometric	8
Financial analysis	2
<i>Subtotal</i>	32
Total	88

torical essays.³¹ The major study on this topic is Paul Conway's profile of archival preservation activity in the United States.³²

Perhaps the most promising amount of research in recent years has been devoted to the area of reference and use. Over the past decade, archivists have had a growing number of user studies, now totaling six in

our major journals.³³ In addition to these studies, we have a few focused on the legalities of access and definition of records³⁴ and one on the perceptions of researchers about how we run our reference rooms.³⁵ We could add, of course, two research studies on the topic of public programs and outreach.³⁶

Sophistication of research methodology. Finally, turning to the last aspect I shall consider here, the nature of research methodologies reveal the weaknesses of the archival profession's commitment to and activities in research. These weaknesses become evident if one divides the 88 articles into qualitative and quantitative approaches (see table 2). Two-thirds of the

Lesser, "Disaster Preparedness and Recovery: Photographic Materials," *American Archivist* 46 (Winter 1983): 52-68; William K. Wilson, Mary C. McKiel, James L. Gear, and Robert H. MacClaren, "Preparation of Solutions of Magnesium Bicarbonate for Decacidification," *American Archivist* 41 (January 1978): 67-70.

³¹Clifton Dale Foster, "Microfilming Activities of the Historical Records Survey, 1935-42," *American Archivist* 48 (Winter 1985): 45-55; Barbara Sawka, "Audio Preservation in the United States: A Report on the ARSC/AAA Planning Study," *Midwestern Archivist* 16, no. 1 (1991): 5-10; Sandra Wright and Peter Yurkiw, "The Collections Survey in the Federal Archives and Manuscript Divisions of the Public Archives of Canada: A Progress Report on Conservation Programme Planning," *Archivaria* 22 (Summer 1986): 58-74.

³²Paul Conway, "Archival Preservation Practice in a Nationwide Context," *American Archivist* 53 (Spring 1990): 204-22.

³³Diane L. Beattie, "An Archival User Study: Researchers in the Field of Women's History," *Archivaria* 29 (Winter 1989-90): 33-50; Paul Conway, "Research in Presidential Libraries: A User Study," *Midwestern Archivist* 11, no. 1 (1986): 35-56; Clark A. Elliott, "Citation Patterns and Documentation for the History of Science: Some Methodological Considerations," *American Archivist* 44 (Spring 1981): 131-42; Jacqueline Goggin, "The Indirect Approach: A Study of Scholarly Users of Black and Women's Organizational Records in the Library of Congress Manuscript Division," *Midwestern Archivist* 11, no. 1 (1986): 57-67; Fredric Miller, "Use, Appraisal, and Research: A Case Study of Social History," *American Archivist* 49 (Fall 1986): 371-92; Don C. Skemer, "Drifting Disciplines, Enduring Records: Political Science and the Use of Archives," *American Archivist* 54 (Summer 1991): 356-68.

³⁴Roland M. Baumann, "The Administration of Access to Confidential Records in State Archives: Common Practices and the Need for a Model Law," *American Archivist* 49 (Fall 1986): 349-69; J. Frank Cook, "Private Papers of Public Officials," *American Archivist* 38 (July 1975): 299-324; Raymond H. Geselbracht, "The Origins of Restrictions on Access to Personal Papers at the Library of Congress and the National Archives," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986): 142-62; Alice Robbin, "State Archives and Issues of Personal Privacy: Policies and Practices," *American Archivist* 49 (Spring 1986): 163-75.

³⁵Barbara C. Orbach, "The View from the Researcher's Desk: Historians' Perceptions of Research and Repositories," *American Archivist* 54 (Winter 1991): 28-43.

³⁶James Boylan, "How Archives Makes News," *Midwestern Archivist* 10, no. 2 (1985): 99-105; Ann E. Pederson, "Archival Outreach: SAA's 1976 Survey," *American Archivist* 41 (April 1978): 155-62.

articles are qualitative in nature (56 of 88; 63.6%), and most of the qualitative articles employ fairly standard historical methodologies (42 of 56; 75%). Perhaps this is not unexpected, given archivists’ strong orientation to the historical discipline and access to and experience in using archival and historical manuscripts collections. But the historical profession does not have the problem; it has long employed cliometric and other social science-oriented methodologies. Of the qualitative articles in our field, nearly all employ survey methodologies (21 of 32; 65.6%). The remainder of other research approaches have been largely untapped by the archival community.³⁷

A major explanation, besides attitudes and other perceived priorities, may be the sources of the published essays (see table 3). The majority of the research articles published in the literature provided no indication of whether they were first presented as conference papers, but of those that provided such information, most were the product of preparation for a presentation or the result of work conducted on behalf of some professional association. A very small number (18; 20.4%) were the products of formal course work, dissertation research, funded research, or the Bentley Fellowship program at the University of Michigan. In other words, as more than a few critics have noted before, the archival profession lacks a sufficient infrastructure for supporting or encouraging needed research. This is an issue for another occasion, but it is obvious that we need research and development units in larger archival programs, stronger graduate archival edu-

Table 3. Sources of Research Articles in North American Archival Literature, 1970–92

Conference papers	12
Funded	7
SAA committees	6
Institutional projects	4
Bentley Fellows	4
Doctoral dissertations	4
Master’s-level courses	3
No source provided	48
Total	88

cation programs with a research component, sabbatical opportunities for professional staff, and more funding to sustain and nurture research and other opportunities to foster research in our field.

How to get published: Conduct quality research. The best way to get published in the *American Archivist* is to conduct research. More important, we as a field desperately need research. The previously published research agendas have discussed these needs, as I noted above, but let me conclude with a few final remarks about research and the *American Archivist*. This is meant only to provide some additional incentives.

I am *not* saying that the *American Archivist* will publish *only* research. (The journal would go out of business.) I am, however, hopeful some readers of this journal will see an opportunity to engage in some research or, having already conducted research, will write it up for publication in journals like the *American Archivist*. A stronger research literature is essential to better practice (to help tell us *how* well we are doing what we are doing) and to a better knowledge base (to enable us to reconsider *why* we are doing what we are doing). As an applied science, archival science needs fully formed theory, methodology, and practice. In fact, there is strong evidence that a fully “mature” discipline would do the following: (1) “inte-

³⁷In addition, my inclusion of many of the articles as research in my analysis was generous. For instance, the element of a selective survey on a particular topic led me to identify a particular essay as research even if the survey was flawed or not the primary means of gathering data for the publication. The more rigorous application of criteria for research would have produced far less than 88 articles.

grate diverse sets of variables in an attempt to solidify a paradigm or a set of paradigms," (2) "use multiple [research] methodologies," and (3) "focus on explaining phenomena through hypothesis testing."³⁸ Archivists should not focus on whether their discipline is mature or not, but they should endeavor to shore up their research

and strengthen their field. We as a field badly need research that

- explores all archival functions.
- is replicable.
- is well-designed from a research methodology perspective.
- builds on and refines earlier research.
- draws on relevant research in other fields.

The *American Archivist* stands ready to provide a vehicle for disseminating your research.

³⁸Myun J. Cheon, Varun Grover, and Rajiv Sabherwal, "The Evolution of Empirical Research in IS: A Study in IS Maturity," *Information & Management* 24 (1993): 109.