

Chatting Up the Archivist: Social Capital and the Archival Researcher

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Abstract

Historians are expert researchers who use a variety of methods to locate primary research material in archives, including consulting the archivist. This article suggests that historical researchers deliberately establish relationships with archivists to tap into their in-depth knowledge about archival resources. The relationship with the archivist is the social capital of historical researchers because through it they are able to gain access to this specialized knowledge. This article examines the strategies undertaken by historical researchers to establish these relationships and their evaluation of the relationships in terms of finding resources. It also examines the difference in access to the archivist between established historical researchers and PhD students and speculates on how the availability of archival resources and finding aids on the World Wide Web might affect the relationships between researchers and archivists.

Historians, one of the traditional users of archives, are seen as experienced, expert researchers. They rarely visit an archives without having read secondary literature and having mined the resources of the library. They are skilled users of archives, and their ability to access archival resources depends upon their contextual knowledge, the quality and level of detail of the finding aids, and the knowledge of the archivist.¹ The ability to access the knowledge of the archivist is the most complex of these factors because it involves a large social component. In fact, access to the knowledge held by the archivist is the social capital of the historical researcher as it often depends on the relationship the historian has built with the archivist. Nan Lin defines *social capital* as the resources people have access to through their

¹ Wendy M. Duff and Catherine A. Johnson, "Accidentally Found on Purpose: Information Seeking Behaviour of Historians," *Library Quarterly* 72 (October 2002): 472–96.

relationships.² The resources can be material goods such as money or a car, or less tangible goods such as influence or information. People with better access to these resources, that is better social capital, have a greater ability to achieve desired goals.³ People deliberately build social networks by undertaking strategies to establish relationships with those who have the resources they seek. Historical researchers may deliberately establish relationships with archivists to tap into their in-depth knowledge about archival resources. This relationship is the social capital of the researcher through which he or she gains access to specialized knowledge. This article proposes that historical researchers are aware of the advantages to be gained from establishing a relationship with an archivist and that they take deliberate steps to foster such relationships. But how do historians establish these relationships and how do they vary according to a historian's experience? How has the availability of archival resources and finding aids on the World Wide Web affected the relationships between researchers and archivists?

Literature Review

While historians are traditional users of archives, they are by no means the largest user group. Other significant archives users include genealogists, freelance writers, museum staff, teachers, and government employees.⁴ Historians, however, are an important user group because the publications that result from their archival research are a key means of disseminating archival information to the general public and the academic community.⁵

The most important research activity of historians is locating relevant primary sources since these sources are at the heart of what historians do.⁶ Numerous scholars suggest that historians, like other humanities scholars, tend to work alone,⁷ though Donald Case found that interacting with colleagues plays

² Nan Lin, "Building a Network Theory of Social Capital," in *Social Capital: Theory and Research*, ed. Nan Lin, Karen Cook, and Ronald S. Burt, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2001), 3–29.

³ Lin, "Building a Network Theory of Social Capital."

⁴ Ann D. Gordon, *Using The Nation's Documentary Heritage: The Report of The Historical Documents Study* (Washington, D.C., 1992), 19.

⁵ Ian Anderson, "Are You Being Served? Historians and the Search for Primary Sources," *Archivaria* 58 (Fall 2004): 81–129.

⁶ Donald Case, "The Collection and Use of Information by Some American Historians: A Study of Motives and Method," *Library Quarterly* 61 (January 1991): 61–82.

⁷ Sue Stone, "Humanities Scholars: Information Needs and Uses," *Journal of Documentation* 38 (December 1982): 292–312; Stephen E. Wiberley, Jr. and William G. Jones, "Patterns of Information Seeking in the Humanities," *College & Research Libraries* 50 (November 1989): 638–45; Robert Delgadillo and Beverly P. Lynch, "Future Historians: Their Quest for Information," *College & Research Libraries* 60 (May 1999): 245–59.

an essential role in the formulation of research questions.⁸ Historians tend to eschew general reference staff, though they rely heavily on archivists and special collection librarians. Robert Delgadillo and Beverly Lynch's research suggests that instructors and advisors encourage students to build relationships with subject bibliographers and archivists because of the importance of the bibliographers' expertise.⁹ In a study conducted in the 1960s, Walter Rundell found that the relationship between historians and curators and archivists was excellent, though some historians had difficulty using church archives, especially if the church had been involved in controversy.¹⁰

Recently there has been an increased interest in studying how historians locate archival material. Wendy Duff, Barbara Craig, and Joan Cherry's study of historians teaching in Canadian universities and colleges reveals that they use both formal and informal sources to locate information with the majority of respondents rating archival sources (93%), finding aids (93%), footnotes (89%), archivists (83%), and colleagues (75%) as either *Very Important* or *Somewhat Important* sources for becoming aware of and locating sources.¹¹ Helen Tibbo found that 66 percent of the respondents in her study contacted archivists directly prior to their visit to the archives through e-mail, telephone, or regular mail for information. Of those who did not contact the archives directly, over 50 percent visited the institution's Web site prior to making their on-site visit.¹² In a similar survey of British historians, Ian Anderson found that they wanted descriptions with information about the content of the records and wanted more descriptions at the folder-level.¹³ A study by Margaret Steig Dalton and Laurie Charnigo found that archivists were not a popular resource for finding information for historians. Rather, finding aids, footnotes, catalogs, and archival sources were mentioned much more frequently.¹⁴

Duff and Johnson developed a model of the information-seeking behavior of historians based on interviews with those in mid-career. The model included

⁸ Case, "The Collection and Use of Information by Some American Historians."

⁹ Delgadillo and Lynch, "Future Historians: Their Quest for Information," 252.

¹⁰ Walter Rundell, Jr., "Relations Between Historical Researchers and Custodians of Source Material," *College & Research Libraries* 29 (November 1968): 466–76.

¹¹ Wendy Duff, Barbara Craig, and Joan Cherry, "Historians' Use of Archival Sources: Promises and Pitfalls of the Digital Age," *Public Historian* 26 (Spring 2004): 7–22.

¹² Helen Tibbo, "Primarily History in America: How U.S. Historians Search for Primary Materials at the Dawn of the Digital Age," *American Archivist* 66 (Spring/Summer 2003): 24–26.

¹³ Anderson, "Are You Being Served?"

¹⁴ Margaret Stieg Dalton and Laurie Charnigo, "Historians and Their Information Sources," *College & Research Libraries* 65 (September 2004): 400–25.

four different types of information-seeking behaviors: orienting to an archives or archival system, building contextual information, looking for relevant information, and seeking known items. They suggest that finding aids are highly valued by historians who consult them to gain familiarity with a new collection, to provide context and background information for their research area, to reduce uncertainty when using a new archives or a new collection, and to facilitate the identification of relevant documents. The study also found that historians rely heavily on archivists to orient them to a new archives, to identify information not easily accessible, and to discover the research value of particular collections.¹⁵ In addition to acknowledging the importance of archivists for finding relevant sources, historians also described the strategies they follow to gain access to this knowledge. They indicate that access to an archivist is not a foregone conclusion, and that, indeed, some had better access than others.

These studies provide insights into how historical researchers seek information. While most of these studies acknowledge the importance of the archivist in the information-seeking process, none has investigated the relationship between historical researchers and archivists in any depth. The study reported here is an exploration of this relationship.

This article examines the relationship between the researcher and the archivist using the concepts of social network analysis and social capital. Social network analysis provides analytical tools that focus on the relationships between individuals. Social network analysts either identify the social networks of individuals, called personal networks, or they examine relationships within a network that is delimited by a predetermined physical boundary—all the members of a high school class or employees in a corporate department, for instance. They analyze the relationships between individuals in the network by asking questions about frequency of contact, emotional closeness, work relationships, or kinship relationships, among other things.¹⁶ Because the studies we report on were not originally designed to examine social networks, we did not specifically ask the respondents questions that would measure the strength of their relationships with archivists. However, it became clear during the interviews that these relationships did exist, with the respondents often indicating their own perceptions of how strong the relationships were, along with the benefits to be gained from establishing them. Since the in-depth collection knowledge possessed by the archivist is not often available through any other of the archival reference tools, the relationship the historical researcher is able to establish with the archivist is vital to his or her ability to tap into this knowledge.

¹⁵ Duff and Johnson, "Accidentally Found on Purpose."

¹⁶ A good introduction to the methods and concepts of Social Network Analysis can be found in John Scott, *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 2000).

Methodology

This article draws on two studies that investigated the information behavior of academic historical researchers, including ten historians and ten PhD students. The semistructured interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to one hour, and the respondents were asked to describe a specific research experience in the archives. In addition, nine of the PhD students kept diaries that detailed their research experience while in the archives and were interviewed after we had read the diaries. While the small size of this sample prevents us from generalizing to the larger population of historical researchers, the interviews gave us rich insights into the information-seeking behaviors of the respondents—particularly their use of archivists—that flesh out some of the findings of previous surveys.¹⁷ The study is exploratory in that it attempts to understand the historical researchers' motivations for engaging with archivists, a subject that has not previously been investigated but is becoming more important as the World Wide Web increasingly removes historical researchers from face-to-face interaction with archivists. It is important to emphasize that we are only interested in the historical researchers' strategies to find information, and we did not interview archivists to understand their impression of their relationships with historical researchers. The point of view of archivists will be taken up in future research.

Recruitment

Participants for both studies were recruited using a convenience sample. From the history department Web sites of two Canadian universities, we identified the names of historians at either the assistant or associate professor level. The principal investigator approached historians individually, asked if they were currently conducting archival research, and invited them to participate in the study. None of the historians approached was personally known by either investigator. Thirteen professors were contacted and ten agreed to be interviewed. The PhD students were recruited by circulating a brief description of the project via e-mail to doctoral candidates at a number of Canadian universities. The description was also circulated to archives with the request that archivists distribute it to PhD students doing research in their archives. In

¹⁷ As Philip Schatz points out, "The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size." The participants for this study were chosen because they were heavy users of archives and consulted archivists in a number of different types of archives. The interviews and diaries yielded rich data about their relationships with archivists and their feelings about using archives. See Philip Schatz, *Sampling in Research*, <http://schatz.sju.edu/methods/sampling/sampling.html>.

addition, history professors known to the investigators were contacted and asked to distribute the description of the project to their PhD students. Finally, one of the participants contacted the investigators after being informed about the project by a friend who was taking part in the study. In all, fourteen students agreed to take part, but only nine completed the diaries. Another student was interviewed but did not complete a diary. The diaries were collected from January 2001 until fall 2003. During this time, four participants dropped out of the study and new students were recruited to replace them. A few of the students traveled to foreign archives to collect their data, and therefore the time between beginning and completing their diaries spread over many months.

The participating historians were specialized in a variety of research areas, including one each in political, legal, aboriginal, intellectual, and cultural history, four in social history (including three in women's history and one in religious history), and one in the history of material culture. These historians had used national and provincial archival institutions in Canada and Britain, church archives in Canada, local history archives in the United States and Britain, and a private archives in Britain. While some of the historians interviewed used French language sources, all interviews were conducted in English. On the whole, the historians were experienced researchers. Nine participants had spent more than ten years researching in archives, while one had spent six to ten years using archives. Eight of the historians in this study were very confident in their ability to use finding aids, while two were only moderately confident. Eight out of the ten historians had also used archival finding aids on the World Wide Web. The participants tended to be active researchers. Five had visited more than ten archives within the last five years, two had visited six to ten archives, and three had visited two to five archives. In the previous twelve months, one participant had been using archival materials daily, five were using materials one to three times per month, and four historians used them less than once a month. The majority of historians (six) were over forty-six years of age.

The participating PhD students came from four different universities. Their research areas varied, with six studying topics related to Canadian history, two of which focused on Nova Scotia. One student specialized in Scottish history, while another student's topic related to German history. Finally, two students were in communication studies. The participants had limited archival experience, with one student having used an archives less than one year, six students having used archives one to five years, and one having used archives for six to ten years. Two students did not answer this question. At the time of the study, they were frequent visitors to archives with most of them visiting at least once a month. The students were at different stages of their doctoral work: some had just begun their research, some were in the middle of the process, one was in the process of writing up his or her research, and one had completed her dissertation but not yet defended. All participants had used archival finding aids

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on the Web, though their confidence in using these tools varied, with only one person stating that he was confident in their use, while five participants were moderately confident, and two were not confident at all. Two of the participants did not answer this question. The majority (seven) of the participants were between twenty-six and thirty-five years old, and one between forty-six and fifty-five.

Not surprisingly, the PhD students were younger and more frequent users of the archives than the historians. All of the participants except for two of the historians had used finding aids on the World Wide Web. Both groups had used archives in Canada, Europe, and the United States. There was, however, a marked difference in their confidence in using archival finding aids, with only one PhD student expressing confidence compared with eight of the historians.

The Knowledge of the Archivist

What is the knowledge of the archivist? From the interviews, we were able to identify the types of knowledge held by the archivist that the historians valued. These included the scope of the records or their content, as well as the recordkeeping system and the provenance of the records. Archivists also had knowledge of records that were not yet described in the published finding aids or held by other institutions. Furthermore, they were able to explain to junior historians, the PhD students, how the archival system works. The historians in our study mentioned as well that the archivists knew of other researchers working in similar fields with whom they were able to put the respondents in contact.

Through their years of experience working with the records of specific collections or in a particular area, archivists build up an intimate knowledge of these sources. Because they have this knowledge, they are able to direct historians to sources that they would not have thought of on their own. For example, one historian told us about an archivist who recommended that he consult the papers of the wife of the deputy minister because, as the archivist explained, "She is the one who collected the material. Don't look at her husband['s], he was too lazy to put things in order." (IS5) Another researcher, who was working on "widowhood," explained how she was led to government-generated records which, she explained, she "would never have thought of on my own." The historians indicated that access to this knowledge was a key element in their ability to do research because without it they would not have known about the sources. For instance, a historian working in the federal archives explained:

XXXXX used to be there in the military section of the federal archives. If you didn't ask XXXX, you were up the creek because XXXX knew everything

about it. I mean she had worked in those records for over 20 years. The same could be said about religious groups and the like, each seems to have an archivist that focused in on a particular area and you had to trust their expertise in the records. (IS4)

This was not peripheral information that supplemented the historian's research, but was essential knowledge the historian believed could not be found elsewhere, even with the availability of good finding aids.

Furthermore, when finding aids are not available, the archivists' knowledge is absolutely essential. Archivists may be able to give historians access to records that were being processed and not yet recorded in the catalog or finding aids. In fact, a few of the historians pointed out that the knowledge of the archivist was more up-to-date than the finding aid. One historian noted:

And then the other thing, of course, that happens is sometimes these finding aids don't always get kept up to date 100 percent, so something might be microfilmed but they haven't got around to, or they forgot to do, to put that on, so there's that kind of practical information he has. And then, he can tell you if something new has come in because he's been actually getting it on the shelves. (IS11)

These historians thought that the archival cataloging system, unlike the library's, was not always current, and if they relied on the available finding aid system alone, important sources would be missed. The historians believed that there was a motherlode of important documents that were only as far away as the archivist. Some of the respondents gave the impression that these documents were hidden from them and that if only they could discover the key to the vault they would gain access: "... he knows so much about what's upstairs and back there. He's the big gatekeeper, so you always have to talk to him."

Archivists also point historians to records held in other institutions and recommend other archivists to whom they should talk. They are knowledgeable about the government records that their archives hold: they know where these records are and understand their filing systems, their provenance, and who held them before they got transferred to the archives.

What XXXX knew in my instance was that there has been, according to him, after many years of looking at RG-10, and organizing the material is that there has been nine separate re-organizations of the federal filing system, and that goes right across the board. And so what happens is that files will be added to, and their numbers will be changed, but it's possible for documents in a file to date from the late 1800's well down to the 1900's and still not be a closed file, and therefore, still not declassified. What he told me was you should know that there are still volumes and volumes of materials that are parked, that's the way he talked about them. These volumes are parked. That means they are still held by Indian Affairs in Hull. You should ask for these records to be declassified. (IS2)

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The archivist was able to explain to this historian the very complicated record-keeping procedure that may have taken years for the historian on his own to understand. It could be inconceivable to many researchers working in the archives that records dating back to the 1800s would still remain closed. Not only did the archivist explain how this was possible, but he also suggested how the historian could gain access to these records. Three of the historians in this study noted that they received advice on gaining access to records that had not yet been declassified.

The archivist also plays a central role in connecting historians to other historians working in the same field. In small archives, in particular, archivists know who else is working with the same records and who is working in a similar field. While aware that they may be overstepping confidentiality requirements, four of the historians in this study appreciated the archivist's efforts in helping them build their research network. One archivist told a historian, "Did you know that so and so's doing a PhD project on this or that. . .' I don't know, maybe he's breaching confidentiality somehow, but everybody seems to like it." (IS11)¹⁸

Archivist as Gatekeeper

Archivists not only control access to the knowledge stored in their heads, they also control access to the records stored in the archives. The respondents sometimes expressed their dissatisfaction with the archivists and felt that a less-than-good relationship with them might affect their ability to get access to some archival materials. Only four of the ten PhD students had positive things to say about their relationship with the archivist. One PhD student talked about "stumping" the archivist, while others stated they had felt "intimidated" or "frustrated" with their interactions. Moreover, the five historians and the one PhD student who used church archives mentioned specifically the necessity of gaining the trust and cooperation of archivists of these organizations before they could get access to the records. Some of the reluctance of the church archivists to allow open access to their material was based on their previous experience when research had resulted in lawsuits and other negative revelations about their institutions. Three of the historians characterized their attitudes toward the church archivists with the following phrases:

I'm at their mercy. (IS3)

He'll invite you to lunch and will gossip and talk and have a grand old time, but nevertheless, he still chooses. (IS3)

¹⁸ Since the respondents used mainly Canadian archival institutions, we are not suggesting that this practice is common in larger archives or archives in other countries.

I was scared off archivists when I started using some of these Quebec archives. (IS6)

Someone on the desk who was the guard dog, and they were no help whatsoever (IS6)

The seminaries are a little different. . . . When you work at Catholic archives sometimes you can have real difficulty. (IS2)

The PhD student who was conducting his research in a church archives described his feelings when he first started using the archives. Although he did not claim that the archivist would have prevented him access, he nevertheless felt that the archivist had the power to deny him access and that the parent organization would support this decision:

I could say it wouldn't have been such a big deal if I wasn't so much dependent on XXX allowing me access. Like I really, I have a strong suspicion, or I felt that, not that XXX would have done this, but if XXX just decided, "No, I don't like you, you can't access my archives," XXX could have said that and the organization which XXX works for would have backed XXX up. . . . (PHD2)

His ability to finish his dissertation, he believed, was based on the archivist's "good will," and without it he was "out in the cold, basically, and in serious trouble." Although this is only the PhD student's impression and may not have been true in fact, he went out of his way to develop a strategy to gain the archivist's good will. This strategy involved engaging the archivist in conversation about professional matters that were of common interest and with which the student could commiserate and, perhaps, assist. The difficulties reported by this junior historian illustrate the importance with which historians regard the establishment of a good relationship with the archivist. Many of the more experienced historians commented that once they gained the trust of the archivist, they received exceptional follow-up service. One historian noted, "He gave me everything he had and that includes things he sent me afterward by mail from XXXX, which he thought of after I had left and photocopied for me." (IS3)

Establishing the Relationship

Evidence from the interviews indicates that the historians established relationships with archivists in two ways. Some historians fell into relationships with archivists because of the frequency of contact made possible by working every day in the same place, and others made deliberate efforts to establish a relationship knowing the benefits that would accrue. Some historians talked about "chatting" as a strategy, not only to maintain the relationship but also to tap into the archivist's knowledge. One historian described the relationship as "utilitarian," while others claimed it was "friendly and personal."

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The relationships established between the PhD students and archivists usually came about because of the proximity of working in the same place and the frequency of contact. While establishing the relationship does not appear to have been deliberate on the part of the students, they eventually came to realize its value. For instance, two of the historians talked about how their relationships with archivists developed during their PhD research. Although one historian did not seem to regard his relationship with the archivists as utilitarian initially, its usefulness soon became apparent:

but as times go by, and especially when you are . . . going back everyday, working in a concentrated way[on] the subject, I really did come to see how incredibly helpful they can be, that this is someone who eventually you get talking to and you say “I found this kind of stuff in these boxes, it’s interesting, I’m wondering about this, this or that” and they can say “Hey, yeah, you know I catalogued these things. If you are interested in such and such, they are there” or the kind of information, the kind of exchange that comes out between the archivist who has actually worked with the papers and the researcher who is there everyday is really important.

A PhD student who had just completed writing her thesis described how her relationship with archivists developed during the course of her research:

. . . one thing that I noticed was that . . . the more time I spent there, the more rapport I built with archivists, the more useful they became. Being human beings [laughing], you know, they sort of knew me and, you know, we would say hello to each other in the mornings, and . . . they became almost . . . colleagues and that was really helpful and it helped me a lot and even in terms of asking questions about stuff that was sort of outside the realm of what was there in particular. (PHD9)

This student greatly appreciated her growing relationship with the archivists and commented that she felt she was being welcomed into a community. She noted this relationship was particularly important when doing research in remote archives where her normal social group was missing.

As researchers mature and gain more expertise, their relationship with the archivist may become more strategic. One historian described maintaining a link with the archivist with the hope that he would keep him in mind when new material came in:

I have known him now for 25 years or something and he knows what I am interested in and so I would keep chatting with him. I mean it’s partly sort of a strategy on my part, keep a tie with him because he knows what’s new, what’s coming in and he might keep me in mind and so for an archives that you use frequently and over a long period of time, that kind of relationship is very helpful. They may warn you about materials that have arrived that haven’t been processed yet, but you can get access to. (IS1)

These relationships are built and nurtured over time. The historians greatly valued the information they received from archivists they had come to know through informal and social contact. One of the historians noted that he usually contacts the archivists he knows prior to visiting an archives. He explained that if he tells them he's coming to town they will ask him what he's researching. Once he explains his topic, the archivists suggest places to look for information, and they might even put him in touch with other specialists in his research area. Although researchers often contact archives with specific requests for material prior to a visit, in this case the historian contacts archivists he knows in a more informal, social manner hoping that they could locate relevant information for him that he had not specifically requested. Another historian also mentioned establishing a close collegial tie with an archivist with whom he collaborated on a published work. This archivist also put the researcher in touch with other colleagues with different areas of specialization, which the historian described as "very helpful."

The more senior historians also advised their PhD students about the value of establishing a relationship with the archivist. One of the historians emphasized that the respect of the archivist has to be earned and that the relationship is based on trust:

Well, you know, there are research agreements, and you need to be more concrete about what you want and you ask in chunks, and then when they, when you started to look through this stuff, you have a better sense of what you are finding and what you are not finding, so your questions get more informed. Also, from the archivist's perspective, they start to trust you as a researcher. I mean they don't think you are some naïve student who thinks that in a week they are going to go through 300 boxes, or 300 legal case files. (IS7)

Interestingly, the PhD student who thought she had "stumped" the archivist was at the beginning of her research and was asking very broad vague questions, such as "Do you have anything about marriage?" Such a broad question might indicate to the archivist that the student had not "done her homework" and therefore had not yet conformed to the "research agreement." PhD students at the beginning of their research first need to do background research to become familiar with the kinds of records available in their areas. This enables them to ask more specific questions and therefore gain the "trust" of the archivist. Once trust is built they are more likely to establish a relationship with the archivist that would give them access to the archivist's knowledge.

Reciprocity

While the historians were aware of the tremendous value of the archivists, they believed that archivists also gained some benefit from the relationship. One

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historian mentioned how the contribution of the archivist is recognized and acknowledged in publications, while another historian noted that she had been able to put an archivist who was working on his master's degree in touch with someone working in his area. Another historian explained how the knowledge he had gained from being immersed in a collection was useful to an archivist just beginning to work with that collection: "I've been able to tell them where to find their own documents." (IS4) Without having interviewed archivists directly about these relationships, however, it is difficult to speculate about what benefit they derived from them.

Experienced versus Novice Historians

It is apparent from the interviews with both the PhD students and the historians that their abilities to gain access to archivists differed. In most cases, the more experience a historian had in the archives, the better access he or she had to an archivist, along with a greater understanding of his or her importance. PhD students, on the other hand, often expressed frustration with the archival system because they did not have a good overview of it or know the best way to navigate it. They had a sense that the archivist may be the key to understanding the system and getting access to relevant materials, but their inexperience limited their ability to approach archivists and strategically tap into their knowledge.

One of the key issues for beginning researchers is their lack of confidence in approaching the archivist for help. This PhD student described being in an archives for the first time and feeling unsure about how to approach archivists for the information she needed:

... I didn't really feel like I could approach them so much about: "I'm looking for something on this, where should I look?" Now I think that there were more archivists who weren't in the reading room, I'm sure there were, and I probably could have made an appointment to go see one of those and I didn't. ... (PHD4)

While expert researchers realize the importance of tapping into the archivist's knowledge, inexperience or inability to establish rapport with the archivist may keep less experienced researchers from this access. However, even when they do understand the value of the archivist, the less experienced researcher may still be denied the benefit of the archivist's knowledge because of his or her lack of interest in the student:

But I found that ... I had to give exactly what I wanted from her [the archivist], and sometimes you're not clear, right. Sometimes there's a certain fuzziness around the project, and I knew there was some annual reports in the collection that I would like to see. And so I got to see exactly what I requested, and there didn't seem to be a lot of interest in what it was exactly that I was

working on and how the archives might facilitate that process. And that, I think, is an example where I didn't have a rapport with the archivist. (PHD3)

This student understood that the archivist could be of more value than just retrieving the items he had requested. From the archivist's point of view, this may have been considered a successful interaction, while the student wanted his fuzzy and unarticulated need interpreted by the archivist and translated into suggestions for useful records. Because the student had not established rapport with the archivist, he did not have the opportunity to explain his research interests and hope that the archivist could match him up with relevant material.

PhD students learn the value of archivists both from their increasing experience in the archives, as previously noted, but also from observing the behavior of more experienced historians. For instance, the following interviewee who had recently finished her PhD described the process from her initial reticence in contacting an archivist to her increasing involvement with them:

One of the first occasions I went to the XXX Archives, I was actually helping out a professor for whom I was doing research work and his first reaction upon walking in was "Oh, we have to get in touch with XXX XXX, and she looks after all the XXXX materials of the XXX Archives." He said, "We will have to call XXX and get her down to talk with us." Its like, "Wow, he wants to talk to the archivist." That would never have occurred to me at that stage and it was only as I'd progressed through my PhD and I would hit snags about permissions and things about certain materials, literary material, at the XXX Archives that I had any kind of personal kind of contact with XXX XXX for my own research purposes. It's just, it's for me . . . anyway, there was a sense that I didn't have the right to bother an archivist and I didn't, in a sense, know that there was that person I could call on, this person who specifically looked after this group of papers. That's something you learn as you go along. . . . (PHD1)

This student felt because she was only a beginning researcher she did not yet have the right to talk to the specialist archivist, thus supporting our premise that the relationship is capital that has to be earned. This is not to suggest that the specialist archivist would not have helped the student, only that the student was constrained in her information seeking by her sense of limited entitlement to approach the archivist.

Discussion

Research in archives is different from research in libraries. While materials housed in libraries are discrete items that are retrieved through fixed elements, such as author, title, or subject, materials in an archives are not usually described at the item level. Findings aids describe collections, but usually not all the items contained in a collection are described, so archival researchers rely on a general

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description of the collection to ascertain what might be included. As researchers gain experience in archives, they learn that an effective way to overcome the limitations of the finding aid system is to consult with the archivist who knows the collections in his or her research area. It is necessary to engage with the person who knows the collection because the finding aid's description often does not encompass all the ways the material could be useful. The archivist has created a strong mental image of what is in the collection, and it is relatively easy for him or her to link that representation to what the historian needs. Without this relationship, the possibility of gaining access to relevant sources, particularly in private institutions such as church archives, can be blocked. This finding supports Rundell's earlier study that noted the difficulty with using church archives.¹⁹ This contact with the archivist is not equally important to all archival researchers, however. In a study that examined how genealogists use archives, Duff and Johnson found that professional genealogists use the same kinds of records over and over and become experts in the kinds of information to be found in them. They consult only rarely with archivists but build up extensive social networks with fellow genealogists with whom they share their knowledge of sources.²⁰

The archivist is important to the researcher for other reasons besides their knowledge of collections. They also connect researchers to other people working in their field and to other archivists who have specialized knowledge that can help them. Recognizing the valuable capital possessed by the archivist, historians develop different strategies to establish relationships with them, including chatting, doing their homework, and offering to help with matters that concern the archivist, such as explaining collections, collaborating, and empathizing over professional problems. The purposive nature of the historians' efforts to establish a relationship with the archivists and their description of it at times as being utilitarian, indicates their recognition that the knowledge they can gain access to through the relationship is a valuable asset that facilitates the success of their research. Historians recognize that establishing the relationship is a necessary prerequisite to gaining access to this knowledge. Unknown researchers, inexperienced students, or historians who have not made an effort to establish rapport, therefore, may not have the same beneficial social capital.

Conclusion

These studies indicate that the social capital of the archivist is highly valued by historians. However, both the capital and access to it may be under threat.

¹⁹ Rundell, "Relations Between Historical Researchers and Custodians of Source Material."

²⁰ Wendy M. Duff and Catherine A. Johnson, "Where Is the List with All the Names? Information-Seeking Behavior of Genealogists" *American Archivist* 66 (Spring/Summer 2003): 79–95.

The greater mobility of archivists both among portfolios within an archives and among institutions, as well as the increasing number of archivists who are currently retiring are reducing the number of archivists who have specialized knowledge of collections. For instance, one senior historian noted that he no longer had a connection to an archivist at his provincial archives:

People there have tended to move around a little more. Their portfolios . . . no I don't have a close connection . . . actually I have lost it at the XXX Archive too, the fella just retired. (IS1)

In larger archives, access to the specialist archivist is becoming less common. Intermediaries, such as automated systems and reference archivists who have only a general knowledge of the collections, are increasing the divide between the specialist archivist and the archival researcher. At one archives, this divide is both physical and metaphorical. As a PhD student noted:

So then, you know, an archivist would show up from across the street. There is this big sort of metaphor about the division. . . . The researchers were on the one side and the archivists were on another side of the street and getting them to cross sometimes could be a bit fuzzy. (PHD9)

Since this article looks at the relationship between archivists and historians only from the perspective of historians, more research is needed from the archivists' point of view to get a fuller picture. Nevertheless, based on the present study, there are a number of ways archivists, if they so desire, can make a concerted effort to foster relationships with novice historians. At the national level, the Society of American Archivists could schedule its annual meeting to coincide with the American Historical Association or vice versa. At the state level, archivists could hold joint conferences with historical societies. At all levels, national, state, and local, archivists could attend meetings of historians and present papers. Professors also need to introduce students to the archives preferably at the undergraduate level so that they can become comfortable working in the archives and interacting with archivists long before they start graduate-level research. Archivists should also go out of their way to inform PhD students that specialists are available to help them, by chatting with the students and showing interest in their research. However, this will require significant resources, and archives will have to decide whether they will provide this amount of attention to a relatively small number of archives users.

Since our sample of historians is small and the participants had been using archives for many years, it is possible that they are describing research methods that are no longer in general use, particularly by younger historians who are more experienced with using unmediated automated information systems and Web-based sources. As well, the increasing use of the World Wide Web to access archival collections will mean even less opportunity for historians to establish

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personal relationships with archivists, and this strategy may no longer be possible. Future research should investigate whether historical researchers develop other strategies to grow relationships with archivists when they are no longer in face-to-face contact with them. For instance, it would be interesting to know about what the archival researchers in Tibbo's study²¹ were contacting archivists by e-mail, regular mail, and telephone and to understand the nature of this contact. With the increased use of the World Wide Web, archives will have to create systems that will duplicate the archivist's contextual knowledge of collections that is so valued by historians. Sadly, however, while these systems may make the process of archival research more straightforward, it threatens to do away with the social component that makes research fun.

²¹ Tibbo, "Primarily History in America."