

Articles

Reflections on Early *Archivaria*: Intimations of Polyphony

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RÉSUMÉ Pour souligner le premier quart de siècle d'*Archivaria*, cet article présente une perspective personnelle sur la création de ce périodique, son style, ses objectifs, son auditoire et ses collaborateurs ainsi que sur la manière dont il a été reçu au sein de la communauté à ses débuts. Sur la base d'un examen de trois articles, l'auteur cherche à éviter de s'en prendre aux problèmes reliés à l'archivistique ou à *Archivaria* mais se permet quelques flèches gratuites (sans attaquer les *RDDA*). Il enfourche quelques chevaux de bataille, se permet quelques bons mots et prétend à une régénération triomphale et une affirmation de certaines idées archivistiques.

ABSTRACT In celebration of *Archivaria's* first quarter century, this article presents a personal perspective on the founding of the journal, its style, objectives, target readership and contributors, and the early reception by the community. Based on an appreciation of three articles, the author goes on to avoid coming to grips with most issues, both archival and of *Archivaria*, takes a few gratuitous pot shots (but not at *RAD!*), rides some old hobby horses, exercises some neat words, and purports to herald a triumphal regeneration and affirmation of certain ideas archival.

Twenty-five years! How much has changed since that sweet and pleasant summer day almost a generation ago when a dozen or more archivists and friends gathered at a cottage at Lac McGregor in Quebec to discuss what *Archivaria* could be. Above the door to the cottage was a stenciled, hand-coloured, nearly two-metre-long banner that read:¹

ABANDON <i>HOPEFULLY</i> ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE!

The Proposal

The proposal to take the existing journal, *The Canadian Archivist*, to a new level began in a parallel, but initially unconnected,² formation with the inten-

sive, sometimes torridly debated, and even emotionally charged work undertaken by the Constitutional Committee of the Canadian Historical Association's Archives Section in 1974–75 to draft a constitution for a new association for Canadian archivists.³ In the heady atmosphere of those days, a "Prospectus for *Archivaria* – A Journal for Archivists in Canada" was floated and warmly accepted, but with some qualms about the projected annual cost of nearly \$13,000 and a whiff of scepticism that enough copy could be generated to sustain a quality publication. It must have taken a leap of faith to believe that more than half the cost was mooted to be recoverable from advertising, non-member subscriptions, street sales (!), back issues, and donations – along with a breezy observation that an "effort will probably be made to secure some Canada Council funding..."⁴ Nevertheless, it was embraced by the independence-minded archivists of the day, some of whom believed that a regular scholarly publication was part of the apparatus of a legitimate professional or academic association.

The name suggested for the journal reborn was "defined as i) all types of media suitable for archival retention; ii) information of all types relating to archives."⁵ It was to be published twice yearly and the prospectus diplomatically noted that it "may include certain transactions and proceedings relating to the Association's annual meeting." Material carried was to be in the official language of submission with abstracts in the other official language. The costs of a fully bilingual publication did not have to be entertained in the end because there was no realistic likelihood that a single national association for archivists (let alone archival journal) was in the works. "Canadian" solutions would have to be found and were, however, use of the word "Canadian" in the journal's title was deliberately eschewed in the exuberant vision of the potential international character and readership of works on archivy. Truth be told, some of us felt that what seemed to be the Canadian way – "total archives" – warranted exposure and articulation beyond the rarified atmosphere of participants in international councils and congresses of archives. A few might have thought that it should be debated and possibly emulated elsewhere.

A production structure of regional and journal section editors was envisaged, and articles were to be refereed, albeit with the cautious caveat: "Where appropriate...." The proposed elements of the publication were not especially innovative, but there was a deliberate intention to enrich the journal with graphical information. Some components matured slowly, if at all, for example, *Potpourri* ("oddments, trial balloons, peculiar and unusual items, etc.") and *Acquisitions* ("recent new and important acquisitions with a brief description..."). *Counterpoint* did not seem to flourish for some time as a stand-alone element. It was intended to be a "forum for discussion or debate of substance relating to items carried in [the] journal or under discussion in archives."

A Neighbourly Review

In the *American Archivist*, an early reviewer of the first two volumes of *Archivaria* observed that the contents of *Counterpoint* as an open forum seemed indistinguishable from some other sections of the journal, and that *Potpourri*'s limits were undefined.⁶ Judging by some of the animated, persistent, and occasionally acrid debates carried on in later volumes of *Archivaria*, this perceived overlap between thoughtful articles and open fora has never been fully resolved – nor perhaps should it, for it could be seen as a sign of engagement and vitality. All the same, the author's point was taken, though it was to be some years before the journal's now familiar "Advice to Authors of Submissions" became an endpiece refrain that has remained substantially unchanged for almost two decades.

The reviewer heartily congratulated the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) and the Midwest Archives Conference (United States) for their new journals:

As publishers,... they have committed their resources to enhancing archival literature and promoting serious discussion to the profession as a whole... [*Archivaria*]...is handsomely printed, and the type face, even in the footnotes, is remarkably easy to read.... Archivists everywhere should salute and support these two new publications. Our profession is stronger for their existence, and we will all profit from this enlarged marketplace in which to explore the significant issues of the ever-changing archival world.⁷

Most of the comments delighted the staff of *Archivaria*, especially because we chose to believe the word "profession" was used in a global sense – our sense and the core of our target readership.

As has been noticed elsewhere,⁸ the lead article in the first issue of *Archivaria* was not by an archivist or even an historian. This presaged a persistent pattern of the journal in trying to reach a readership beyond archivists and to break down some boundaries between practitioners and users of archives. The comments of the early reviewer of the journal were finally reflected in *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–83) when the editor, through "Advice to Authors," made an animated declaration of devotion to "the scholarly investigation of archives in Canada and internationally" and advised potential authors that the journal "aims to be a bridge of communication among archivists, and between archivists and users of archives." It offered a sampler of thematic possibilities for would-be authors and closed with the open-ended words "and much else."⁹ The sky's the limit!

Archives sans frontières

This *archives sans frontières* or *archivistes sans frontières* approach of *Archi-*

varia is rooted in the genesis of the journal and, indeed, the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA). It seemed time, or past time for some, in the first half of the seventies for the archival community to venture beyond the sheltering wing of the Canadian Historical Association. For those of us particularly interested in the communication vehicles for what our colleagues had to say, it also seemed time to emerge from the nurturing protection or limiting constraints of our institutional identities, to give individual and independent expression to what we had to say about what we were doing, and to explore more fully the nature of our discipline and the dimensions of our work.

Archivaria was to be one of the means of giving voice. Yet we remained concerned about the big voice in Ottawa, even though it was usually mellifluous. Although the devolution of *Archivaria* was not accomplished in the early years, the intent from the start was that the editorship, at the very least, leave the Public Archives of Canada (PAC) as soon as it had achieved a firm enough footing. Arguably, this footing is yet to be fully established, and may even be chimerical with respect to completely producing and maintaining the journal from start to finish simply because of the magnitude of the effort required.¹⁰

The Editing Style

By no means all but certainly the core of work done on the journal was undertaken by volunteer staff in Ottawa for several years. The overwhelming bulk of the time was found after work hours, not because the PAC was not supportive – we simply didn't ask for it initially. The effort required to produce *Archivaria* proved to be an eye-opener and, in due course, the PAC gave some overt and welcome consideration to the principal workers. This critical contribution by the institution was given willingly, informally of necessity in a bureaucratic structure, and, I supposed, in recognition that the role of *Archivaria* in the archival community was compatible with and justifiable under the PAC's own mandate.

One of the most demanding tasks we encountered, and had anticipated, was obtaining copy of the sort and calibre that would mesh with the type of journal we envisaged. We wanted to get away from the "show and tell" material and the "how we do it in Upper Rubber Boot" approaches, not for reasons of academic elitism, though we did feel there was a rigorous discipline to explore. We harped on taking the "we's" and "I's" out of most copy. We insisted that authors "abstract" the ideas and processes they were presenting to get at and investigate underlying principles, best practices, and theories.

An Absolute Pain

We must have been an absolute pain to some of our prospective authors. In defence, I would say that while our method was to hound archivists into putting

their ideas on paper, our motivation was to avoid “rejection slips” by challenging and working hard with writers (both users and practitioners) to hone thoughts and copy.¹¹ According to some liberating contemporary poststructural and postmodern conventions, we might have been open to charges of perpetuating intellectual dishonesty or the like. Certainly, five years later, the ongoing enthusiasm and demands of the editors seemed to be wearing thin on some members of the archival community. One reader observed at the time:

Editors should spend more time and energy encouraging and cajoling archivists to write rather than academics. As a charter member of the ACA, I think *Archivaria* is our proudest achievement. Most serious criticism is in personal style of editors who imposed so much of their personal energies and egos into the publication that many archivists lost much energy and interest in further writing for *Archivaria* or further involvement in the ACA.¹²

When we pondered potential sources of material for *Archivaria*, we were acutely aware that our readership would not want to see a publication that seemed to be or was a vehicle for staff of the PAC or for the heads of institutions and their senior staff. We also knew we had to build up a backlog or “train” of articles so that we didn’t have to scramble for articles before every edition.

I don’t know if this train ever arrived for *Archivaria*’s editors, but initially the editing station seemed like an abandoned prairie town. To our delight, the problem was not for want of *willing* prospective authors. Nevertheless, it was for equally intractable reasons that boiled down to the difficulty of staff in smaller institutions (that is, smaller than the PAC) being able to find the time to think, discuss, and write. Although I appreciated this situation intellectually, it was not until I left the PAC to go to a smaller institution myself that I really “felt” and understood the importance of time and critical mass of staff resources in assembling my experiences and thoughts in a reasoned and structured form. This is not at all to say that the National Archives of Canada (NA) has, or had, the luxury of time to encourage staff to communicate their ideas through the vehicle of *Archivaria*. It is simply that the NA has a critical mass enabling it to be more flexible and participate more fully in such essential public and community work.¹³ Even so, it is encouraging to see, over the years, a growing number of authors from smaller institutions represented in the journal in addition to authors from the university-based education programmes.¹⁴ It is also my impression that, through time, the editors have become somewhat more light-handed, but no less demanding, as the nature and style of the journal became more familiar to its readership. This mutual maturing process is probably letting the personalities and opinions of authors shine through a little more clearly in many cases – a very positive development.

The Community's Reaction

So, what was the immediate response of the Canadian archival community to the introduction of *Archivaria* (leaving aside the normal early and possibly ongoing concerns about its cost in relation to the ACA's budget and other priorities for the new association)? No survey or other measure was taken at the time, so an answer probably has to be sought largely in soft anecdotal evidence and fading memories.

One indicator might be earnestly drawn from the appearance of the second volume. Since persistent concerns about *The Canadian Archivist/L'Archiviste canadien* had been its irregular temporal and physical appearance, the editors of *Archivaria* determined to bring the journal out substantially ahead of its publication schedule and to distribute it at the beginning of the first ACA annual meeting at Laval University in 1976. After many anxious moments for those of us already at Laval, the managing editor wheeled in after a reckless drive from Ottawa to deliver a few precious boxes of the journal still sticky and smelly from printing. The first run had produced a defective cover, which was entirely replaced overnight by our ever cooperative printer.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the point of the early distribution was made, with some helpful drama, and the journal was well received.

At the next ACA conference, in Fredericton, the president sounded a cautionary note about the character and the financial well-being of the journal when she reported "that even in awarding a healthy grant to *Archivaria*, the [Canada] Council expressed doubts as to its qualifications as a scholarly publication."¹⁶ All the same, the editors were pleasantly astonished at the annual general meeting by the fulsome applause on a motion of thanks for their efforts. They were also somewhat bewildered by a motion (which passed) recording "that *Archivaria* is the official publication of the Association of Canadian Archivists." The motion was probably made simply to correct an oversight, but for some it might have been a gentle reminder to the editors of their relationship to the association. Whatever the motive, at this moment, *Archivaria's* staff felt their efforts had been authoritatively sanctioned by the community's assembled highest court.

Editorial Liberty or Absolute Licence?

This reception went beyond inducing warm and fuzzy feelings for the journal's personnel. A few of the managing staff of the journal had gone to Fredericton with some degree of trepidation underlain by a subdued, but readily available, pugnaciousness. While not many members of the ACA may have had an inkling of the situation, the editors of *Archivaria* had themselves deliberately never made a public issue of the brooding concern that a few influential members of the archival community had with the independent stance the journal staff assumed from the start.

Born initially of a journalistic rather than an academic sense of editorial freedom, the editors' actions, rather than words, had made it clear that the content, style, and direction of *Archivaria* was their domain and that their first responsibility was to the readership. The entire focus of the staff had been to produce a quality journal. Communication or, more accurately, public relations work with the ACA executive had been given short shrift, born of total engagement with the task at hand rather than a disregard for the association.

In retrospect, and given the genuine concerns some executive members had for the new association's solvency, the focus of *Archivaria's* editors could well have been seen as arrogance or a unilateral and reckless "damn the torpedoes" licence to do as we pleased. In fact, the journal's staff expended a great deal of effort raising a creditable amount of money through advertising until, after a number of years, the time, effort, and business demands of this approach no longer seemed justifiable in a volunteer organization.¹⁷

Yet, even given my most gracious interpretation of the causes of the turbulence, I still cannot but believe that there was an underlying "power" issue of unacceptable control of the journal at hand that had to be stayed from the beginning. I recall, with unexpected clarity even after all this time, having discussed with colleagues the potential step of resigning in protest notwithstanding my deeply felt commitment to *Archivaria*. I agonized over this ploy because it could be a loss, not a certain victory, and would undoubtedly be forgotten by many long before I got over it. Fortunately for my ego, I never had to come even close to taking this step, thanks, I believe, to the community's early attachment to the journal. This is not to say that the issue of editorial independence died on the spot, for there were some pretty vigorous disputes yet to come, including a particularly unpleasant raised-voice, table-thumping episode, which, I must confess, chafes me still – probably because I never rose to the bait, if that's what it was, and growled in return.

Nevertheless, to my knowledge, no editor of *Archivaria* has ever shied away from issues of maintaining responsible editorial independence, of publication determined by verifiable merit, and of fair and reasonable financial support. This is as it must be.

The Reader Survey of '81

The ACA *Bulletin* of April 1981 carried a report on the results of a survey of *Archivaria* readers. There has not been another survey that followed similar lines of inquiry. If this survey provides a benchmark of sorts for the value of the journal up to that point,¹⁸ it is probably fair to say that it had a pretty high approval rating, well spiced and enlivened by some mixed feelings, substantive suggestions, a bit of graceless posturing, and sincere reservations or disagreement among the respondents.¹⁹

Irreverent comments included the lamentable proportion of material writ-

ten by or aimed at users of archives, relevance to an archivist's daily work in the trenches, and rather edgy remarks about the length of articles, the journal's bulk, wordiness, regularity of appearance, appallingly incomprehensible language, tight editorial control of the journal, slickness and cost, lack of truly original "think" pieces, more monologue than dialogue, not technical enough, not representative enough, etc. Even so, there was more than enough support to encourage the editors' hope that the journal was on the right track.²⁰

One comment in particular caught my eye at the time and again more recently. I fear the last sentences (my emphasis) probably still ring too true:

Archivaria is one of the most successful activities of the ACA. It is making an extremely important contribution to the archival profession in Canada and I strongly oppose any change in its format. *In my opinion, the major problem vis-a-vis Archivaria is that very few archivists can take any time at work to think about ideas, conduct research and write articles. We must work to ensure that this is accepted as an integral part of archival work.*²¹

Altogether, the contents of the next twenty years of *Archivaria* leave the impression of a perceptible shift in balance towards archivists. This may be a rightful direction positively reflecting increased authorship by archivists and greater relevance of the material in *Archivaria*, yet it strikes me that it may be timely to specifically address some of the articles to users. I am reminded of a comment I heard recently from National Archivist Ian Wilson, only partly tongue-in-cheek I suspect, that it would be good for archivists to take a year off from talking to each other and to spend this time communicating with anyone and any group that is not part of the archival community. Perhaps it is time to trot out the sales pitches, tedious as it might seem to some, and make a concerted effort to help "them" understand better what archives do and why they matter. Certainly it is time for *Archivaria*'s editors to consider reinvigorating efforts to cajole the many communities of archival users to articulate their research needs, trends, ideas, concepts, controversies, models, and expectations of and concerns about archives.

A Co-Dependent's Reaction and False Segue

When I was approached as the founding editor to submit something to *Archivaria* for its twenty-fifth anniversary, I was enchanted. When it was suggested that I might do an overview of the literature published in the journal since its inception, I gasped and demurred because it has been some years since I thoroughly digested the journal from cover to cover and indeed since I have been employed in the field. Nevertheless, I wanted to do something because, having left the practice, I wanted to reinforce, confirm, and declare from my new, but

not-so-distant, “business” vantage something about what archivists have long been saying.²² Organizations depend on what they do!

In a sense, I have moved from depending on archives for my livelihood to depending on them for my work: is this a form of co-dependency? I also suggested to the editor that, rather than reviewing the literature, I would pick out a few articles to anchor some probably gratuitous observations about what the journal has and has not been featuring.

I have chosen to appreciate briefly three articles from the journal which occupy a special place in my mind, not because they are the best of *Archivaria* but because each has a special quality for me personally as to where they went or did not lead in archival literature. Starting from this appreciation, take notice that I intend to change gears now and roam onto indistinct paths that I believe should be opened up more through archival writing in *Archivaria* and elsewhere.

Of Moles, Management, and Memory

The first piece, an oddball at the time, and one of my all-time favourites because it was unsolicited, explored the impact of the profession from fresh and insightful angles, expanded the types of material carried by the journal, and, above all, was a good and easy read.

Of Moles...

Peter Gillis’s memorable lead article in *Archivaria* 9, “Of Plots, Secrets, Burrowers and Moles: Archives in Espionage Fiction,” warmed our winter reading in 1979–80. His opening image was nothing short of inspired. Picture the funeral of J. Edgar Hoover and a secret agent masquerading as an archives photographer:

...the official-looking identification pinned to his breast-pocket was stamped with the seal of the Department of Archives. No one questioned it; no one knew what it meant.

His article proved to be a delightful source of instantly recognizable images and attention-grabbing one-liners for what seemed to be an endless parade of public presentations as I assumed my new job at the Provincial Archives of Manitoba in 1980. What better way of introducing the process of trying to explain what archives do and their importance to everyone than by starting with the familiar and the humorous?

Gillis’s work also made me ache to write a companion piece about archives and science fiction, my escapist reading of that time. I hope someone will write this for *Archivaria* some day, for my taste has changed of necessity, and I could not now face the prospect of revisiting the scores of novels and short

stories that could authoritatively underpin such an enterprise.²³ Even more, I hope a proper appreciation of this article will be undertaken in the not-too-distant future, especially in a broader context of perceptions of archives and archivists in popular imagination and culture. The mystique of archival work remains a pervasive theme in the “lay world” and is both a blessing (for exploitation) and a burden (for explication) to the community as Peter Gillis underlined by his very choice of the words from Robert Ludlum’s *The Chancellor Manuscript*: “No one questioned it; no one knew what it meant.”

Of Management...

Written with characteristic clarity, precision, and purpose, Michael Swift’s “Management Techniques and Technical Resources in the Archives of the 1980s” in *Archivaria* 20 is my second springboard article. Buried amidst articles in the summer 1985 volume, it appeared as the relentless impact of economic restraint was beginning to be recognized for what it was: not a valley in the cycle of organizational progress, but an irreversible, widespread, systemic, and relational change in organizational stability, dynamics, interactions, and management. Without embellishment, he distinguished what he had to say in his paper from the more commonly discussed focus of archival management by observing that a “good archival administrator recognizes that scholarly study of archival records, theory, and practice is the intellectual foundation of efficient, economical, and innovative archival management.”²⁴

Six Challenges

Starting from the premise that archivists must find innovative ways of doing more without additional resources,²⁵ he identified at least six challenges facing archives, then proceeded to articulate a framework of basic, durable, and already tested techniques available to manage archives. He prudently left aside discussing the processes of applying these techniques in any detail, possibly for the sake of brevity and in recognition of the need for them to be tailored to the individual circumstances of archival organizations. He noted that the manager of an archival programme “has to be recognized as an effective manager – especially when the time comes to appeal for additional resources.” One might add “or justify existing resources.” He observed that most persons currently managing archives were equipped as archival professionals, but: “Very few have a background in organizational management.” He tied the *obligation* of using good management practices, at an appropriate level of sophistication, to “technological advances in the areas of conservation and electronic data processing” and identified them as essential parts of solutions to address problems besetting modern archives. He concluded his article with the following:

Modern management techniques can turn this difficult period to advantage for archives by critically examining our programmes, perhaps for the first time in many years. [We may be forced] to eliminate extravagances tolerated in better times, demand higher productivity from our staff, and modernize outdated practices, and introduce systems, techniques, and equipment which will prepare archives for the twenty-first century.

If exploration in *Archivaria* is any measure of basic and cutting-edge issues for archives and its profession, it would seem that what Swift was writing about fell largely on infertile ground, if not on deaf ears.²⁶

Leaving aside nuance and perhaps stating the obvious, one can arbitrarily chart the work of many senior or executive managers as flowing in two directions: vertically (up and down from the manager) and horizontally. Basic organizational planning embraces them all and often includes sessions engaging many, most, or all staff. Few organizations do this as well as they would like for a variety of reasons.²⁷ The planning process (not addressed by Swift) is often as important as the product itself in helping staff contribute to and understand the organization's mandate and, of course, obtaining buy-in at all levels.²⁸

“Managing Up”

The most intractable and least satisfying aspect of the planning process is dealing with the dynamics of “managing up.” I have heard a rule-of-thumb for some deputy ministers is that, in schematic terms, they spend a significantly higher proportion of their time (sixty per cent) dealing with their ministers than in directing their departments. Clearly, most managers have, in varying degrees, a managing-up component to their portfolio, some of which means navigating uncharted waters rather than marked channels. Although forms of contingency planning can help, what these people do in heavy weather calls on a battery of knowledge, skills, and techniques that can be very personal and specific to a situation. They are not often easily discussed meaningfully in an open planning situation with staff. They also don't lend themselves readily to being elaborated in venues such as *Archivaria* – even disguised as case studies.

Manoeuvring in High Places

Although manoeuvring in high places can play havoc with an organization's plans, that's life. It is not a valid reason for avoiding contemporary management tools.

Planning encompasses understanding and exploring the dimensions of an organization's mandate, among other things. It can be beneficial to start by identifying the vision and values of the organization and more or less running

through the steps addressing the management elements laid out in Swift's article. Despite or because of the dynamics and unpredictability of the managing-up piece of the process, the foundation must be laid to support a pervasive appreciation of the need for flexibility at the management levels, trust in the overall direction, and sufficient resilience throughout the organization to absorb bumps, grinds, and shocks along the way even if they appear to run counter to "the plan," seem to be in the way, and are even rationally or substantially inexplicable.

A Case in Point?

Without making more of the specific issue than it deserves, which is not much in this case, let me try to illustrate my last point. The May ACA *Bulletin* ("2000 Annual general meeting edition") carried a squib from the editor which portrayed the visiting National Archivist as employing "funder-speak" (*in misgauging his audience?*) and just drawing back from the "brink of consigning all archives to the management of Disney who offers the public immediate gratification without content or context." Just in time, the author seems to suggest, and perhaps as an afterthought, the archivist did acknowledge other presumably more serious roles and "relevancies" of archives.

I suppose this item was prepared in jest, though the humour was lost on me. If not in jest, what was its purpose? Was it to suggest that this archival director does not really understand the functions of archives (*give me a break!*), or that he is ready to sacrifice the public service roles of archives to their public visibility (*more likely it's part of a strategy both to correct or balance an insufficiency and to lever understanding and support for archives in Canada*), or that he is wilfully heading in entirely the wrong direction (*it's possible, but he deserves at least the benefit of trust or doubt at this time*)?

This example may be flawed by the contextual absence of organizational coherency contemplated by some management theory, and I admit that I am probably only being as fair to the editor as he was to the speaker, but it does have the virtue of being in the public domain, as it were. I think it can stand as an instructive example of the types of reactions to leadership that can be encountered in contemporary organizations, whether or not there is an effective planning process in place. Although this case attributes a narrower vision of the value and role of archives in society to a manager than is, by all logic, true, it should also be recognized that the complex job that archives and archivists are trying to do – with very limited resources – can also result in or reinforce a bunker mentality that resists a broad vision and risks organizational and professional marginalization. Either situation can fruitlessly drain an organization's energy and focus if left unattended.

Although I would not at all argue for leadership unquestioned, the role of managing an organization, especially a public institution, needs to be clearly

understood and appropriately differentiated from that of working in or for an organization. Part of a manager's role is to allocate and obtain resources to enable the work of staff. The manager's line of questioning, regardless of professional interest or curiosity, is more likely to be "will a proposed solution work and at what cost?" than "how does it work?" The manager has to secure recognition (and commitment) from more senior levels that problems exist, are important, and then portray the solutions and costs in a digestible way to the resource allocators and final decision makers in a highly competitive organizational context and diverse political environment.

Archivaria seems to be doing a creditable job of exposing the almost genomic search for the attributes of "recordness" and solutions for managing records in an electronic environment, but less so in the areas of managing archives in the Darwinian morass of organizational change, competition, and cooperation, or within the context of governance evolution, transnational information sharing, and global corporatization. Radical change and evolution in these areas are having profound impacts on the nature, value, and qualities of information. They warrant further analysis.

...And of Memory

The appearance of M.T. Clanchy's article "'Tenacious Letters': Archives and Memory in the Middle Ages" in *Archivaria* 11 (Winter 1980–81) represented something of a watershed for me. It led me to read other works of his, most notably his book *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*.²⁹ While the specific setting for his work was not particularly familiar to me, his ideas and analysis resonated: the exposition of the societal dynamics of communication; memory; record-keeping; validity, authenticity, and reliability; access to information; the origin, convergence, and divergence of archives and libraries; records management; cognitive implications of information media; and on, and on, and on.

Over the years, I found myself going back time and again to his thoughts as I increasingly grappled with the implications for archiving of the more modern information revolutions. His work is sprinkled with aphorisms and analyses less arcane and more immediately accessible and meaningful than Marshall McLuhan's. One of my favourites is his somewhat prosaic, but evocative observation (emphasis mine):

It is also appropriate to consider archives and libraries together because, although all kinds of distinctions were made between different types of writings in the middle ages, *the twofold modern division between books and records is an anachronism*.³⁰

Clanchy's work suggested to me that a key to understanding records or information in an electronic environment was not the Babbagian³¹ power of

the computer, but rather in the communication of information. The two cannot, of course, be entirely separated for the purpose of analysing their implications for record-keeping. Yet, applying the concept and contemporary realities of information communication to what archives do with information opens up all sorts of interesting lines of query and investigation. Situating the processes of communication, publication, or distribution alongside such concepts as knowledge, information, or data enhances their redolence, expands their implications, places them in a societal and temporal context, and underscores the plurality of disciplines working with human discourse and interaction.

Such analytical paradigms, especially in combination with the sheer growth and linkability of information, heighten the value of the very essence and qualities of recordness and throw into relief much of the more recent writing in *Archivaria* about identifying and preserving the content, structure, and context of records. With the Internet in place, notwithstanding its still unrealized potential for eventual universal accessibility, users are assuming new and dynamic relationships to information that are, in effect, putting insistent pressure on information monopolies and near-monopolies to share more of their stock-in-trade and to integrate their activities.

Epiphanies, Commodities, and Polyphonies

The belated corporate discovery or its recent revelatory recognition of “knowledge” and the self-serving merits of sharing this elusive commodity – and its allies, information and data – is not really new, but the ability to distribute (and control) it on a global scale is unprecedented. Likewise, the public’s apparently insatiable search for information is battering at the physical portals and digital doors of organizations, pushing to the forefront, among many other things, relentless questions of ethical, moral, and legal natures and of human rights about the management and control of information as never before in their social pervasiveness and urgency.

Even today’s comparatively limited exchange of information electronically has caused many governments to start regulating its flow, ostensibly in the public interest. Powerful parts of the international corporate community, in their own interests, appear to be accepting the need for this regulation, or at least self-regulation, in protecting the personal information of individuals.

Many governments have subscribed for some time to the right of people to gain access to their own personal information and to other information held by public bodies with some limited and narrowly interpreted exceptions. Legally enshrining these rights is usually accompanied by a righteous invocation of the democratic virtues of open and transparent government, and of accountability to the governed or served. The news media are increasingly publicizing tangible evidence of the importance of good record-keeping practices in the

public sector, buttressed by the findings of information access and privacy oversight agencies.³²

We are also witnessing the blurring of the demarcation line between information held by governments and that held by the private sector.³³ There is intense pressure to blend and manipulate information banks ostensibly to serve society better, but accompanied by grave expressions of concern as to what should be permitted, most prominently today in the arena of identifiable personal information. The divide between public and private information seems to be as a line drawn in the sand before the surging tides of communication. Notwithstanding the current ebb of invasive government influence and authority before the flow of avaricious global corporatization and communication, some of us may live to hear the private sector join a swelling public chorus in chanting the broader principle of accountability to people and voicing a public right of access to information other than one's own personal information. Perhaps such polyphony would encourage more socially responsible and better record-keeping practices in the private sector.

Such musings may explain my impulse to write the "sci-fi" equivalent of Peter Gillis's article. Nevertheless, I am increasingly convinced that archives and archivists need to explore more fully, from their particular perspectives and preferably in this journal, the range of future directions for managing information in a complex, interdisciplinary, and networked environment. Are the traditional core functions, principles, and activities of archives still sound and not too limiting? Are there things archives and archivists are doing now that can or should be done by others, or not at all? Have some of the divisions between libraries and archives (and other information fields) become anachronistic? How do archivists define themselves: by what they actually do (or should be doing) in an organization or by what they think they are? Will "published" convey much in the near future or will "communicated" or "distributed" be more meaningful? What are our benchmarks and how do we know that we are moving in the right direction? Are archives linked to the right partners, if they are linked at all? Are the organizational structures properly configured and scarce resources appropriately deployed to retain and protect the record into the twenty-first century?

It seems to be a good time now to sharpen and apply Occam's razor to test core archival principles, constructs, and current practices against today's reality and tomorrow's virtuality of the record in an information communication environment.

Back to the Future

So, where have my reflections on twenty-five years of *Archivaria* led me? Back to where I started. If I were the editor of *Archivaria* today, I'd close the circle and hold a gathering of archivists and friends of archives in a warm and

pleasant place to discuss where the journal could go during the next quarter century. I would hope the deliberations could inspire a publication even more immersed in controversy and debate than it has been for the past twenty-five, more demanding of its authors and readers, more provocative and evocative in its directions, more aimed at users, but still dedicated to finding the cutting-edge in archival practice, ideas, and theory.³⁴

This gathering place would have above its doorway a computer-generated, but hand-coloured sign reading:

EMBRACE *SERENDIPITY* ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE!

Hopefully, it would serve *Archivaria* and its staff differently, but as well as the last.

Notes

- 1 The word “hopefully,” employed as “it is to be hoped,” became something of a trope for the journal’s staff reflecting the intellectual commitment and editorial rigour they wanted to bring to *Archivaria*. We accepted F.G. Fowler’s disdain for the usage and the words of a panelist for the 1975 *Harper Dictionary of Contemporary Usage*: “I have fought this for some years, will fight it till I die. It is barbaric, illiterate, offensive, damnable, and inexcusable” (p. 311). As a morale booster for what became a very demanding avocation, it was invaluable. Since I don’t feel comfortable naming any one of the journal’s founding workers without mentioning all, its value here for me is simply to conjure a pretext to salute their work individually and collectively, and to let them know that I am still fighting this losing battle of usage.
- 2 I use the word “unconnected,” but not to mean “unheralded.” The May 1974 *Archives Bulletin* put forward a vision for the existing journal *The Canadian Archivist/L’Archiviste canadien*: “[It] should be published at least annually with a definite date of publication adhered to, twice a year if possible. It should be the journal of the Canadian archival community with detailed papers on the theory, problems, trends and solutions of archives management, results of surveys, longer articles on specific institutions or archivists’ careers, papers read at annual meetings, reports on significant collections, or finding aids completed. The *Archivist* should be a publication which offers valuable information to historians, sociologists, etc. who use archives, as well as a forum for Canadian archivists to develop their skills and knowledge of archival science.”
- 3 The Constitution of the Association of Canadian Archivists was approved in Edmonton on 3 June 1975.
- 4 Personal copy. I presume the journal is keeping its archives properly at the National Archives. In fact, the Canada Council awarded \$5,079 to *Archivaria* in 1976–77 with a commitment for two more years (subject to the sustained quality of the publication). Significant advertising revenues were also brought in for a number of years until the burden of managing all the associated work and solicitation gradually displaced this source of funds.
- 5 Ibid. Bob Gordon’s letter to the editor in *Archivaria* 20 (Summer 1985) provides a more elaborate perspective on the origin of the journal’s name.
- 6 Trudy Huskamp Peterson, *American Archivist* 40, no. 1 (January 1977), pp. 75–76.
- 7 I note that *Potpourri* still surfaces porpoise-like from time-to-time after many years of being attractively advertised to potential authors as accommodating “edited documents relating to

archives, having amusing, poignant, or piquant appeal.” I do hope that these whimsical characteristics, at least, will not be lost in future submissions to the journal, even if the current editors think the section heading should be hyphenated as in *Pot-pourri*. I also note, as an unwelcome intimation to us all, that a regular reader of the journal can hardly miss the increasingly common appearance of obituaries, a section that few of the early staff of *Archivaria* likely contemplated.

- 8 Gordon Dodds, “Canadian Archival Literature: A Bird’s-eye View,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983–84), pp. 26–27.
- 9 Inside back cover. Similar wording was still being used thirty-four volumes later, in *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1999), p. 255.
- 10 A reader of my article kindly provided me with the following information. To date, thirty-three per cent of the issues have been produced under the general editorship of persons outside the National Archives (NA); the journal has been edited outside the NA four times (in British Columbia, Nova Scotia, and twice in different parts of Ontario); and, with one exception (British Columbia), the administration and production management has remained centred at the NA. These bare statistics hardly begin to portray the importance of the overt and pervasive support given by the NA over the years to the *Archivaria* enterprise led by successive National Archivists, their senior associates, and, in particular, numerous professionals. It is not too much to say that *Archivaria* could not have survived at the level of quality it exhibits, and probably cannot, without this backing.
- 11 I took some private comfort in the heat of working on the second volume of the journal when I was told that one prospective author had asked another something to the effect: “Have you been edited for *Archivaria* yet? I have never had to work so hard at getting something ready for print.” Coming from one of Canada’s foremost archival thinkers, Hugh Taylor, and it having been said approvingly, as I thought, encouraged me to think we were heading in the right general direction.
- 12 “Archivaria Reader Survey,” *ACA Bulletin* 6, no. 2 (April 1981), p. 14. The survey was conducted for the ACA Publications Committee to assist in evaluating the journal.
- 13 My comment should not be taken to suggest that staff of the National Archives are given free rein to write for *Archivaria* on company time or that they do not also feel under siege in dealing with the short- and long-term challenges facing archives and archivists.
- 14 This issue surfaced very clearly in a response to the ACA reader survey. One respondent commented, “This is not a criticism as such, but sometimes I feel overwhelmed by *Archivaria*. Perhaps this stems from the fact that my archives is a one person operation. Trying to do reference work, organize collections, answer all of the three hundred yearly letters, get new collections, cope with increasing public demand, and then along comes *Archivaria* with all its well-written articles telling me a few more things that I should be learning about! This does not mean that they [the editors] should ‘lower’ their standards to deal with my everyday problems. I am sure that every one person operation in the country is in the same position I’m in, but at times one feels more inferior than ever to the great ‘god’ the PAC!” “Archivaria Reader Survey,” p. 14.
- 15 I have been contacted “out-of-the-blue” by this printer a few times over the last decade, and he still comments on the thrill, energy, and enthusiasm he shared with *Archivaria* staff in producing the journal, notwithstanding our editorial “greenness” and the substantial technical problems we encountered. He was as fresh and committed as we were to this publication.
- 16 This information and the following quotes in the paragraph are taken from the *Archives Bulletin* 2, no. 3 (July 1977). In fact, the grants went on for many years under the Council’s successor agency for this programme and, for all I know, may still do. For the curious, the revenue sources for *Archivaria* divided into three roughly equal proportions of between five and six thousand dollars each: advertising, subscriptions and the ACA contribution, and the Canada Council.

- 17 Furthermore, with a greater sense of purpose and confidence, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada picked up where the Canada Council left off in 1978 by providing financial support to *Archivaria*, often (maybe always) accompanied by positive and encouraging reactions from its juries. The importance of the Council's funding went far beyond the simple financial support it provided, for it lent credence to the already widely held belief of the journal's readership that it was a good piece of work and that, I might suggest, it contributed wholesomely to the archival community's credibility and sense of professionalism.
- 18 It should be noted that three of the survey respondents, as reported in the *Bulletin*, complained that the design of the survey was highly defective, really only sought an expression of approval or rejection of *Archivaria*, and did not place the journal in the context of the overall communications and publications programme of the ACA. One of them pithily stated: "this survey is not a fact-finding one; it is a plea for approval. Change is accepted as healthy in every endeavour except *Archivaria* where change is viewed with distrust bordering on paranoia." One of them also felt the simplistic nature of the survey "will not only breed more rancour than this debate already has, but will waste a valuable opportunity to find out what archivists in Canada really think about how they are being served by the publications."
- 19 I make no pretense at having done a systematic analysis of the responses or at balancing criticism with praise (of which there was much). Giving it a "pretty high approval rating" is, I venture, an understatement, though I already expect to be told that my comments are biased and rooted in an erstwhile "conflict of interest." Both observations would probably be true. In my rendering of the survey, I have emphasized the less positive based on vigour of assertion rather than on frequency of occurrence.
- 20 I am grateful for the comments of a referee for this article who pointed out that my false and unbecoming modesty here, and elsewhere in this article, leaves a distorted and unfair view of some things. I agree with the reader that it should be known that, of eighty-five respondents, the large majority strongly supported the journal's tone and accomplishments. Of the three critics referenced in footnote 18 who charged that the survey was flawed by design, one could argue generously that they chose to discount the comments because it wasn't the type of survey they wanted – which is quite different from saying the survey results were wrong. I was not associated with the survey at all, but I do remember when the issue surfaced for me that I observed that their comments were "politically" motivated and churlish. Certainly they had a different agenda, but it would probably be equally churlish of me today to impute motives to this fractious few without closer study of the event.
- 21 Ibid. "Archivaria Reader Survey," p. 15.
- 22 I am now involved in the oversight of legislated public access and privacy rights in Manitoba. Time and again, my office has been reminded of the importance of good record-keeping policies and practices in all media, of authoritative information and reliable evidence, and of what a struggle it is for record-keepers to foster best practices in organizations. In the course of our investigations, we have had numerous occasions to publicly and privately remind organizations of their information-related responsibilities and duties.
- 23 Since I submitted this article for publication, I have become aware of the following article: Arlene Schmuland, "The Archival Image in Fiction: An Analysis and Annotated Bibliography," *American Archivist* 62, no. 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 24–73. Although this article is replete with useful and interesting information, my appeal is for an analytical, even postmodern, look at the perceptions of archives and archivists, using fresh analytical frameworks and concepts we have recently seen employed by historians.
- 24 "Management Techniques and Technical Resources in the Archives of the 1980s," *Archivaria* 20 (Summer 1985), p. 95.
- 25 The refrain "doing *more* with *less*" had apparently not yet received wide currency.
- 26 Shortly before I began writing this article, *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1999) arrived with a fascinating

article by Michael Hoyle examining record-keeping standards in the context of public management theory and practice in New Zealand.

- 27 I would guess that the time it takes to plan well is the most common reason (which is not a good reason, but may reflect a reality), closely followed by the notion that the process does not fit the corporate style or culture (usually bad reasons).
- 28 It is my firm impression that insufficient attention is paid by most, if not all, archival education programmes in Canada to the matter of administering or managing an archives as an organization. Graduates would be much better equipped if they had substantive exposure to such matters both in terms of the techniques and skills of managing an organization and in how to work professionally (or, at least, what to expect) in a managed environment. Even if a person does not manage an organizational unit, it takes discipline rooted in knowledge and understanding to work effectively in one.
- 29 The first edition, published in 1979 by Harvard University Press, was followed by an expanded volume in 1993 through Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, U.K. The first edition became, I gather, something of a cult classic among U.S. archivists and probably elsewhere. In view of the interest it generated in the broad archival community and the fact that much of the focus of the additions to the second edition has significant archival overtones, it is a nice curiosity to observe the second edition touted that it was printed on acid-free paper.
- 30 M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (Oxford, 1993), p. 154.
- 31 Charles Babbage (1791–1871), of course, has been credited with being the most influential, if not singular, originator of the design and construction of modern computers.
- 32 Modern access and privacy legislation provides a right of access to a *record*, and usually only deals with *information* when trying to limit access to a certain type of information regardless of which record contains it. People will increasingly require and demand access to information and not simply to a record. Some governments are already complying with this approach in small ways when it is simpler or more appropriate to produce the record from information held, rather than to provide access to the records holding the information sought. It is important to note that where this is happening, it is being done as a matter of organizational convenience and not of public right. A recent District Court decision in the United States involving the Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) ruled that searching the agency's computer databases for selected data in response to an access request did not amount to "creating a new record" and, presumably, neither did providing this information to the requestor. Part of the ruling read: "Because HUD conceded that it possesses in its databases the discrete piece of information which Schladetschv seeks, extracting and compiling the information does not amount to the creation of a new record." *Jack Schladetshev vs. U.S. Dept. of Housing & Urban Development* (No. 87-3168), 4 April 2000.
- 33 The work and products of Statistics Canada are prominent examples of an agency intervening in the collection, assembly, and distribution of information to serve some research needs and special interests of the public and private sectors, while offending others.
- 34 I would also petulantly revive the original word marque and unique logo of *Archivaria* in some form under the spell of the first, least quoted, and more archivally evocative sentence in George Santayana's use-worn statement: "Progress, far from consisting in change, depends upon retentiveness. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Perhaps I would change the microfilm reel to a compact disc, but the superimposed quill would definitely stay. I would not reinstate the old cover, since the flexibility of the newer format is better now, but I would sing a threnody for the original artwork apparently lost during the editorship's 1981–82 **Babylonian Captivity** (in B.C., geographically speaking).