

Reflections on the Goal of Archival Appraisal in Democratic Societies*

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RÉSUMÉ Cet article fournit une réflexion sur les idées qui sous-tendent l'évaluation archivistique dans les sociétés démocratiques. L'auteur examine quelques courants de pensée récents relatifs à l'évaluation et aux concepts de base de la gouvernance démocratique, afin de lancer une discussion sur les buts de l'évaluation dans les sociétés démocratiques et sur les difficultés d'atteindre ces buts. D'un côté, il fait valoir que l'évaluation sert à comprendre rétrospectivement les actions des gouvernements, ce qui constitue un des moyens de promouvoir la connaissance éclairée dans la cité démocratique. De l'autre, il avance que l'évaluation doit satisfaire le besoin de reconnaissance et d'identité des communautés culturelles au sein des sociétés démocratiques pluralistes. L'auteur conclut que les archivistes doivent continuer de se préoccuper de l'intégrité du matériel qu'ils sélectionnent, tout en servant cette double finalité de l'évaluation dans les sociétés démocratiques.

ABSTRACT This is a reflective essay on ideas that animate archival appraisal in democratic societies. The author examines some recent strains in thinking about appraisal and some ideas about the basic concepts of democratic governance in preparation for a discussion of the goal of appraisal in democratic societies and the difficulties in the way of achieving that goal. On the one hand, he argues that appraisal serves the goal of retrospective understanding of the actions of government as one of the means of fostering enlightened understanding in a democratic polis. On the other, he advances the view that appraisal must attend to the need that pluralistic democratic societies have to foster the recognition and identity of cultural communities in their midst. He concludes that archivists must continue to concern themselves with the integrity of the material they select while serving this dual goal of appraisal in democratic societies.

The aim of this article is to develop some ideas about the goal of archival appraisal in democratic societies and to examine some of the difficulties that lie in the way of achieving the goal. This is a dangerous subject to address for

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two reasons. On the one hand, it makes the risky presupposition that a variable activity such as archival appraisal has an underlying goal, and that its goal depends on the kind of society in which it is performed. On the other hand, it raises the large and thorny question of what democracy is – obviously dangerous ground for an archival scholar to enter. Despite these dangers, it is the best way to explore the relationship between archival appraisal and society, which is ultimately what animates the exercise. To develop some preliminary ideas about that relationship, the paper will give an overview of three strains of thinking about appraisal. These are ones I have detected that relate to my subject. They by no means provide a summary of the discourse on appraisal. The paper will then briefly discuss several characteristics of modern, democratic societies that are relevant to the conduct of appraisal. Finally, it will identify several challenges for archivists performing appraisal in democratic societies.

Three Strains of Thinking about Appraisal

Appraisal in the sense of institutionalized evaluation of archival documents or records in order to determine their disposition is a relatively recent phenomenon. For centuries, organizations and individuals determined to preserve some of the records they generated for the obvious reason that they provided evidence either of their rights and privileges or were valuable as sources of evidence of past action to which, for some reason, the entity creating them would need to refer. Often, it must be admitted, records survived for no particular, identifiable reason, and were often neglected, their value little appreciated by the society that produced them. For instance, a parliamentary committee in Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century reported that

it is but a small faction of the public who know the extent and value ... of the historical documents of this country. Our Public Records excite no interest, even in the functionaries whose acts they record, the departments whose proceedings they register; or the proprietors to whose property rights they furnish the most authentic, perhaps the only title deeds.¹

Ultimately, many records that had survived the centuries found their way into archival institutions established mostly by the state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was an era when relatively manageable bodies of completely inactive records were rescued. Few if any of these documents were destroyed. The goal of the acquisition of these early records was decidedly historical. Archives were viewed primarily as sources for studying the past and building a sense of national and local heritage. Decisions about selection

¹ Cited in T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago, 1956), p. 7.

were justified as serving the needs of research into the past, if they were justified at all. For instance, the German archival scholar Adolf Brennecke believed that the purpose of appraisal was to remove the irrelevant dross to enhance the clarity and usability of “the archival body” produced in this process of selection.² To take another example, the great American writer on appraisal, T.R. Schellenberg, believed that “because the major problem of the modern archivist is to select archives for permanent preservation ... the element of selection should be implicit in the definition of archives.” Therefore, he defined archives as records “which are adjudged worthy of permanent preservation for reference and research purposes....”³ A large body of writing about appraisal, some of it very recent, makes a similar assumption that the goal of appraisal is selection and acquisition of sources of the past. This is the predominant view among archival writers. They see preservation of archives as playing a cultural role in the community to foster memory and understanding of the past.

Another minority view sees appraisal as a danger to the integrity of archives. The English writer Hilary Jenkinson took the extreme position that archivists should not conduct appraisal lest their biases affect the quality of the archives selected for permanent preservation.⁴ Although he relented somewhat later in his life in the face of the imperative to reduce the massive volumes of modern records to some manageable proportion, he raised the most difficult question there is about appraisal. What are the grounds for making decisions about the disposition of records? Other writers, such as Luciana Duranti, have argued that the main goal of appraisal is to leave us with what Jenkinson called an unimpeachable body of archives as unsullied by biased selection as those that came down to us, however fortuitously, from ancient administrations who preserved records for their own and not historical purposes.⁵ These writers are concerned that the insinuation of historical judgments into appraisal will distort the meaning of those that are selected for preservation. They reject that idea that it is the archivist’s task to engineer what the sources of the past will be.

In a similar vein, Angelika Menne-Haritz objects to the view that archivists aim directly to serve the interests of historical research. Menne-Haritz uses Brennecke’s ideas to develop the argument that archives should be selected to reveal how decisions were made by eliminating those records irrelevant to that end. She argues against the evaluation of the content of archives which in

2 Adolf Brennecke, *Arkivkunde: ein Beitrag zu Theorie und Geschitedes europaischen Archivwessens* (Wolfgang Leesch, ed.) (Leipzig, 1953), p. 38.

3 Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, p. 16.

4 Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, Part III: “Modern Archives.” (Oxford, 1922).

5 Luciana Duranti, “The Concept of Appraisal and Archival Theory,” *The American Archivist* 57 (Spring 1994), pp. 328–45.

effect she argues tended to be the approach of those who hold that appraisal serves historical and cultural ends.⁶ All the writers in this class take the high ground, that it is the archivist's duty to see that appraisal should strive neither to add nor to subtract anything that would distort the meaning of records in keeping with the doctrine of the integrity of archives.

The third strain of thinking is more recent. Writers in this group, borrowing heavily from post-modernist insights, exhort archivists to acknowledge that records only have the value attributed to them by people who act on them including, of course, the archivists who appraise them. In this vein, Brian Brothman urges archivists to reflect on presumptions they bring to appraisal. He argues against the view that it is possible to preserve archives unsullied by human value judgment. He takes the position that the values archivists bring to the task of appraisal "embod[y] society's values." Brothman leads us to reflect on not just that archivists make value-laden decisions, but rather to look closely at the end or goal they have in mind. Self-critical and reflective examination of what they are doing, he supposes, will lead archivists to better practice.⁷

Other writers like the South African Verne Harris and Canadian Terry Cook have responded to Brothman's call. Harris urges archivists to serve the interests of justice in their work. He is too much the post-modernist not to see that a goal so elusive as that will be difficult to achieve. But calling on his knowledge of the manipulation of archives in apartheid South Africa, he situates appraisal squarely within a political problematic. In effect, he argues that the appraisal decisions that archivists make have political consequences. Arguing that archivists are impartial or apolitical in their work is for him akin to living with your head in the sand.⁸ Harris also argues that if records are to serve us in arriving at justice, we have to concern ourselves with questions about the effect of our actions on the truth-telling capability of records. The call for justice, he says, is "a call which demands that we ask ourselves what truths we are telling by our actions, and ... how these truths connect to 'the truth'."⁹ Cook also accepts that appraisal has a political dimension, at least in the case of public records. Essentially, his argument is that the essence of government in a democratic state is the interaction of citizens and organizations with the state. The evidence of this interaction is worth preserving and that evidence of

6 Angelika Menne-Haritz, "Appraisal or Documentation: Can We Appraise Archives by Selecting Content," *The American Archivist* 57 (Summer 1994), pp. 528–42.

7 Brian Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 78–100.

8 Verne Harris, "Seeing (in) Blindness: South Africa, Archives and Passion for Justice," The Records & Information Management On-line Service (RIMOS) at <<http://www.caldeson.com/RIMOS/harris01.html>>.

9 Verne Harris, "Law, Evidence and Electronic Records: A Strategic Perspective from the Global Periphery," *Comma* 1–2 (2001), p. 33.

it is more valuable when results deviate from intentions and when citizens are not merely passive recipients of government services but voice their opinions about the decisions governments make and their effects.

These three strains of thinking suggest a number of themes for further discussion in the last section of this paper. Now it is time to turn to the characteristics of democracy.

Some Facets of Democratic Society

This section necessarily dwells largely on those facets of democracy that are most relevant to the discussion of the goal of appraisal. Political philosophers generally agree that the central ideas of democracy are:

- Supremacy of the people;
- The consent of the governed as the basis of legitimacy;
- The rule of law: peaceful methods of conflict resolution;
- The existence of a common good or public interest;
- The value of the individual as a rational, moral active citizen;
- Equal civil rights for all citizens.¹⁰

Some, such as Robert Dahl, would add the underlying notion that all persons are equal when it comes to matters of government.¹¹ Dahl also enumerates a number of practices or characteristics of democracies as they have developed in the modern world. They are:

- Elected officials. Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
- Free and fair elections. Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
- Inclusive suffrage. Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
- Right to run for office. Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in government, though age limits may be higher for holding office than for the suffrage.
- Freedom of expression. Citizens have the right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socioeconomic order, and the prevailing ideology.
- Alternative information. Citizens have a right to seek out alternative

¹⁰ This summary is taken from Barbara Goodwin, *Using Political Ideas*, 2d ed. (New York, 1987), pp. 179–80.

¹¹ Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (New Haven, 1989), pp. 84–85.

sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exist and are protected by laws.

- Associational autonomy. To achieve their various rights, including those listed above, citizens also have the right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.¹²

This much fits the common conception of democracy. The problem comes in trying to realize democracy's ideals. For instance, in contemporary democracies, only with great exertion can the voice of individual citizens have an effect on government policy and actions. Voting at election time is a blunt instrument to register one's desires or promote one's interests. Any sense of the common good gets lost in the welter of special interest and in the rough and tumble of political life. Nevertheless, advocates of democracy generally recognize that the people must be enlightened. They place great stress on the means to create an informed public, such as through education and public discussion. The need for informed citizens makes it difficult to justify procedures that withhold or suppress information they need to make decisions in their own interest. Ultimately, informed citizens living in an open society have the opportunity to discover and realize the common good, which Dahl describes as "what the members would choose if they possessed the fullest possible understanding of the experience that would result from their choice and its most relevant alternatives..."¹³

It is a principle of democratic government that elected officials who are delegated the responsibilities of governance by the sovereign people are accountable for their actions to citizens. In essence, this means that democratic leaders must render to citizens an account for their actions. Of course elected officials and their delegates in administration are subject to the rule of law, but, as political scientist John Dunn puts it, "the main weight of democratic accountability falls on attempts to maximize the degree to which politically consequential conduct by rulers and their subordinates is always in the open." The move to more open government in recent years is always justified as a buttress to accountability. However, it is difficult to reconcile openness with the need to give rulers the latitude or discretion to make decisions. As Dunn says: "The more we bind [our rulers], no doubt, the less they will be able to do against us, but the less, too, and at least equally consequentially, they will be able to do for us." Dunn also makes the interesting argument from our point of view that "democratic accountability is inherently retrospective ... in that what is held accountable is always actions, and there is no conceptual possibility of calling future acts to account in the present." So, on the one hand rulers need latitude

¹² Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*, p. 221.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

to make decisions while on the other citizens need the right to know of their rulers' actions "not necessarily immediately, but at least at some definite point in the future."¹⁴

One other aspect of democracy needs our attention before we turn to the goal of appraisal. Modern democratic societies place great weight on individual rights, vesting them constitutionally and in laws. Justice and fairness, it is often argued, depend upon the exercise of these rights. The good democratic life is one in which every citizen is treated fairly according to agreed upon community standards. Arguments of this kind say little about a particular problem of modern democracies. Within any given democratic society there are often many cultural communities striving to survive. As the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor argues, "a number of stands in contemporary politics turn on the need, sometimes the demand, for recognition" by these communities. He connects this need for recognition with identity, in the sense of persons' "understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as [human beings]." He then says our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, "so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves.... Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need."¹⁵

The Goal of Appraisal In Democratic Society

We are now ready to turn to the goal of appraisal in the sense of its orientation by asking the question: what do archivists in a democracy aim to achieve overall in their work of appraisal?

To begin this part of the discussion, it is necessary to lay some cards on the table. I am not searching for a democratic ideology of appraisal, in the sense of supporting some political agenda, as was the case, for example, in the orientation of appraisal as propounded by archivists in the former East Germany.¹⁶ In fact, I favour a pragmatic philosophy of appraisal. We build our decisions on the knowledge of the value of past preservation of archives to project what will be valuable in the future. We can know the value of past preservation only from our experience of past productive use of archives. A pragmatist looks to past decisions and their efficacy and builds on that experience. We already

14 John Dunn, "Situating Democratic Political Accountability," in Adam Przeworski, Susan C. Stokes, and Bernard Manin (eds.), *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 339–41.

15 Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1992), pp. 25–26.

16 For a discussion of East German appraisal ideology see, Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of the Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 69–107.

have a large body of experience of the ways in which selection and preservation serves society and this experience alerts us to values for our society. We bring that knowledge to any evaluation of archives for the purposes of determining their disposition. I take it that this is what Brothman was arguing when he said that an archivist's values "embod[y] society's values." It is also, at least generally speaking, an answer to Jenkinson's implicit question about the grounds for making decisions of appraisal. We preserve what works for us in our society. Therefore, the real question is how do we orient ourselves to determine, from among the vast volume of records produced in modern, technologically adept society, those that will serve the continuing interests of citizens of a democracy?

From what I have said about democratic society, I draw this conclusion. Appraisal of archival documents in a democratic society must somehow serve the need of citizens to know how they have ruled themselves, and to allow them to build understanding of their place in the communities to which they consider themselves to belong, including of course the national community. On the one hand, retrospective understanding of how people in a democratic society have ruled themselves is essential to the health of any democracy devoted to individual rights. On the other hand, retrospective understanding of cultural communities in the kind of pluralistic society virtually every country in the world is becoming is similarly essential to those communities' sense of recognition and worth in the larger democratic society that is committed to individual rights.

I purposefully say that citizens need to know how they have ruled themselves. It is the essence of democracy that elected officials and their subordinates act in the name of the people, and ultimately all citizens need to come to terms with their complicity in past actions of their government, to judge the past and make those judgments part of their outlook on current and future actions. To put it another way, when citizens of a healthy democracy devoted to justice consider the political choices their government makes, they ought to be able to do so with adequate knowledge of similar past decisions. Understanding similar decisions and their outcome in the past gives citizens some experience to weigh in judging current actions. However, it is no easy matter to put the requisite information about political decisions in citizens' hands. From one perspective, as the Canadian professor of law, Maxwell Cohen observed, "there is no escape from confidentiality in the exercise of power. It is the degree and timing of correlative disclosures that mark the difference between a free political order where debate determines policy, and a silent tyranny where secrecy stands as a high barrier to any public share in, or surveillance over, decisions and their making."¹⁷ From another, it is often difficult to

17 These remarks were given before a Canadian parliamentary committee in 1976. Quoted in Terry Eastwood, "The Disposition of Ministerial Papers," *Archivaria* 4 (Summer 1977), p. 19.

have perspective on current events, to see, let alone to judge the effects of actions taken.

Seen in this light the preservation of archives in a democratic society supports Dahl's notion of enlightened understanding. In this sense, preservation of archives is a public good in democratic society. Public goods are those things the will of the people makes the common entitlement of all citizens. Because democratic societies place a premium on individual rights and aim to foster the liberty of citizens to decide for themselves what the good life is, some measure of coercion is needed to make everyone contribute to the cost of public or collective goods.

Now, retrospective understanding in the senses in which we have been developing it is deeply historical and cultural. The opportunity to assemble the evidence to reflect on past actions of governance, where those actions continue to reverberate in society is, if you like, a virtue of democratic society, of a society open to the constant questioning of its actions, and its treatment of individuals and communities within its boundaries. This explains why the strongest strain of thinking about the value of appraisal of archives has historical and cultural overtones. It does not explain how you get from this broad historical and cultural purpose to particular decisions. It is clear, however, that concern for the integrity of archives is always at issue. You cannot claim to preserve evidence of how a people has governed itself or treated the communities seeking recognition without concerning yourself with the integrity of that which you select to preserve. Whether one's concern is with Menne-Haritz for revealing decision-making, or with Harris for realizing justice, or with Cook for illustrating citizen-state interaction, one has to ask how the appraisal decisions one makes affect the integrity of the "archival body" preserved for posterity.

From the foregoing, we can say that citizens of a democracy have interests in the question of appraisal of archives. They have an interest in knowing how they have governed themselves and come to their current condition, and a companion interest in obtaining a sense of the condition of their community in the wider society from which they gain a sense of recognition. Archivists are the democratic delegates to perform the act of appraisal of archives to serve these interests. This is easier to see in the case of archivists who have responsibility to appraise "documents made or received and preserved in the conduct of governance by the sovereign and its agents," that is, public records¹⁸ than it is in the case of private archives. However, we need to develop some sense of the play of private archives in the scenario I am setting.

It can be argued that the same obligation to serve the interests of democratic society exists even in the case of archivists who appraise private archives.

18 This definition of public records is taken from Trevor Livelton, *Archival Theory, Records, and the Public* (Lanham, Md., & London, 1996.)

From one angle, records of private provenance often complement the public record. This is a very old perception, one made for instance by several archivists of the early era of archival development in Canada. In his annual report for 1882, Douglas Brymner wrote that “the special object of [his] office is to obtain from all sources, private as well as public such documents as may throw light on social commercial, municipal as well as purely political history.”¹⁹ An early Provincial Archivist of British Columbia, E.O.S. Scholefield, remarked that both public and private archives were necessary “if close adherence to truth is desired.”²⁰ In time, the preservation of public and private records in Canadian public archival institutions became a cornerstone of the “total archives” concept. In recent times, some of the Canadian discourse would lead one to believe that the kind of connection Brymner and Scholefield made no longer applied in the separate worlds of appraisal and acquisition of public archival material on the one hand and private material on the other. Certainly, there is a close connection of private archives with the issue of cultural recognition and identity, but the right sense of connection here is not simply the specific light afforded by private records on aspects of societal development. Democratic societies, as we have seen, guarantee individual rights, such as in the guarantee of freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of thought, belief, and expression, the freedom of peaceful assembly, and the freedom of association.²¹ Private archives will inevitably reveal a good deal about how these freedoms are enjoyed. Beyond that, to expand a little on Cook, there is more to governance than state-citizen interaction, if by citizens we mean individual persons. Much interaction in modern governance is between corporate bodies of one kind and another, the many kinds that flourish in a society where freedom of association is guaranteed, and, as all those who plead for preservation of private archives argue, public records do not tell the whole story, certainly not of the effects of governance. In any event, corporate bodies are major actors on the stage of democratic society. For some sense of Harris’s “the truth” of the matter of how we govern ourselves, we have to appraise and acquire private archives as a complement to the public records we preserve. Finally, a society that values individual rights and freedoms must see the full flowering of the kinds of human action and creation that individuals alone can make and alone leave residue of in their own archives.

19 Ian Wilson, “‘A Noble Dream’: The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada,” in Tom Nesmith (ed.), *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, N.J., 1993), p. 66.

20 Terry Eastwood, “R.E. Gosnell, E.O.S. Scholefield, and the Founding of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1894–1919,” *ibid.*, p. 121.

21 See, for example Section 2 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The Challenges of Appraisal in Democratic Society

I suppose that you are asking yourself the very question I have asked myself. It is very well and good to speak grandly of the goal of appraisal in democratic society, but how can we ever achieve the goal? My first answer is that you will never achieve a goal until you understand it, can articulate it, and orient your work by that understanding. A substantial part of my purpose is to articulate my understanding of the goal of appraisal, and to invite comment and criticism of my ideas. Beyond that I see a number of challenges facing appraisal of archives in a democratic society. You will surely see others, particularly those of a practical nature, but these are mine.

In many democratic societies, it is my opinion that the role I have outlined for archives is not realized in the mandate of public archives or appreciated by political leaders and their subordinates. Many archivists the world over know this from experience and have in fact worked to the best of their ability to obtain adequate legislative or policy foundations for their institutions and programs. Without a proper mandate to act towards achieving the goal, archivists work at a distinct disadvantage. For instance, many public bodies remain beyond the mandated scope of archival services in many of the societies that would fit the Goodwin/Dahl model of democracy. In one sense, we can see this as a reluctance to exercise coercion on behalf of preservation of archives for the public good, other public goods and private interests having greater priority. In another sense, in some ostensibly democratic societies, there is insufficient political will to institute a regime for public records-keeping and preservation adequate to the task.

It is also the case that the juridical situation of archives is often not conducive to realizing the goal of appraisal, particularly in its role as a buttress to political accountability. Accountability is a property of the institutional structure of a democracy, “whereas responsiveness [to the popular will] is a consequence of interaction within such structures. Put another way, responsiveness is a measure of how much accountability an institutional structure permits.” John Ferejohn enumerates three “serious limitations to accountability within democratic institutions.” First, “electoral heterogeneity makes it possible for officials to play off some voters against others to undermine their accountability to anyone.” Second, institutions of accountability operate in real time, giving officials the opportunity to group popular with unpopular decisions. Third, “elected officials enjoy an immense informational advantage over the voters that limits how accountable such principals will be to the voters desires.”²² To

22 John Ferejohn, “Accountability and Authority: Toward a Theory of Political Accountability,” in Adam Przeworski et al. (eds.), *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 131–132.

some extent we can see that preservation of archives is a countervailing force against these limitations, in the sense that it is one of the measures to realize openness or transparency of government.

However, this means that archivists conducting appraisal need to be able to see and assess all records, and to make decisions unfettered by the immediate concerns of politics. The contrary tendencies in reality make it difficult to take this broad view removed from immediate concerns. For example, the nature of electronic records forces archivists to make appraisal decisions soon after records have been created. The need to have a broad and somewhat distanced perspective does not mean that archivists aim to be apolitical, nor that they lack their own political ideals and ideas. It simply means that they need to be given the proper situation in which to act in the public interest to assist government in rendering an account of its past actions so that they can be judged, over and over again it must be admitted, in the court of historical understanding. Public archival institutions are one class of what might be called “accountability agencies” in democratic governments, and they need to enjoy a measure of autonomy, some would say independence, from other branches of government to do their work properly. It is a significant challenge to bring this subtle understanding of the role of archives to the political and bureaucratic mindset in even our healthiest democracies. Nevertheless in this era of freedom of information there are heartening signs that the connection between records-keeping, preservation, and accountability is something steadily being made more manifest, at least in democracies like our own.

Serving the interests of cultural communities in a democracy is also problematical. To some extent, it is necessary for these communities to identify themselves and lay claim to recognition. Some would say that these cultural communities should take responsibility for preservation of their own archival heritage. Still others would say that the welfare of these communities is not a democratic responsibility; moreover, cultural communities, whatever they are, do not create archives even if events in the lives of their members might be the subject of records both public and private. The possible exception is corporate bodies with a cultural-community purpose. There is a good deal of evidence, in Canada at least, that cultural communities – native communities and certain “ethnic” (for lack of a better, more precise word) groups come to mind – are eager to take action themselves, in part because they judge there has been a lack of attention to the preservation of archives revealing of their experience and upon which they can rest an understanding of their place in the grander scheme of things. This is a sensitive matter, for these communities often have grievances against the larger community, some of them of longstanding. That the preservation of archives appears to be in the clutches of that larger community does not instill confidence in them that diverse interests will be served. Still, given the line of argument I have taken, cultural communities have a call on the resources of the duly instituted archival system of a country and even

on public support for their own efforts should they decide to take them. In the end, a pluralistic society needs pluralism in its archival system. American pragmatist that he was, Schellenberg recognized this long ago when he argued that “diverse judgments ... spread the burden of preserving the documentation of a country among its various archival institutions.”²³ Nonetheless, one may submit that the need to respect cultural communities has to be expressed in acquisition policies and has to be taken into account in making appraisal decisions in a democratic society animated by the goal I have explained in this paper.

Another challenge, the greatest, is to find methods that lead to comprehensive analysis of records in the light of our perennial concern for the integrity of archives and the goal to serve citizens of a democratic society with the sources for understanding how they have governed themselves in the past, how they have come to be where they are, and how they may best plot their continued course of action. Healthy dialogue about appraisal among archivists, such as we have enjoyed recently, will be part of that process, but so too would more dialogue with the people we serve in a democracy, for we must not forget that archivists also owe those they serve an accounting of the decisions they have made. Of course, most members of society are unlikely to come into direct contact with archives, and are therefore unlikely to express a view on these matters. The relationship between archivists and members of society is essentially a fiduciary relationship, one held or given in trust. Citizens of a democratic state expect to be able to trace actions that had consequences of moment in their lives and, I would submit, the lives of their ancestors. They trust that their society will look after that interest, which means they trust us to make good decisions on their behalf. With that remark, I bring to an end my reflections on the relationship of appraisal of archives with democratic society.

23 T.R. Schellenberg, “The Appraisal of Modern Public Records,” in Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (eds.), *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice* (Washington, 1984), p. 68.