

Counterpoint

A Forum for Archival Debate and Discussion

Archival Education

In the last issue of *Archivaria*, Edwin Welch scathingly denounced library school options in archival science, but seems to know little if anything about them.¹

As the "librarian" who, according to Dr. Welch has taken over "the archives option" from "the archivist who established it," I should like to set the record straight.² The course referred to in Welch's footnote was already established before he even entered the archival profession! There are now two courses in the programme and, because of the high student demand, it is likely that more will be offered in the future.

My courses are designed to give future *librarians* an introduction to a sister profession which shares some of the aims, problems and practices of librarianship. They might also profitably be taken, as an appetizer, by someone considering a career in archives, but this is not their primary purpose and I am certainly not presumptuous enough to consider them as adequate training for the archival profession. That these courses are given in a School of Library and Information Science does not mean that I see no difference between the training and qualifications required by archivists and librarians or that I advocate a common training programme as Working Group III did. There is some common ground, and there might be a case for archival education to be undertaken in the same institution as library education, especially in the present economic circumstances. The sharing of facilities by two academic disciplines, and mutual co-operation in developing and teaching those parts of their subject matters which overlap, does not imply any subordination of the one to the other.

Welch admits the interdisciplinary nature of archives but appears to deny any overlap in subject matter with library science, which apparently he equates with "some aspect of bibliography."³ Norman French is likely to be included in a library school syllabus, but not computers!⁴ The question of common subject matter is too complex for detailed treatment here, but for a small demonstration one need look no further than the same issue of *Archivaria* which contained Welch's article. Excluding the supplement on the working class record and the book reviews, the articles of this issue touch on no less than thirty-six topics generally recognized, even in schools where no archives option is available, as elements which are essential, or at least highly desirable, in education for librarianship. In the order in which they occur, these are: public access to government information, the right of privacy, politics and professional impartiality,

1 Edwin Welch, "Archival Education," *Archivaria* 4 (Summer 1977): 49-59.

2 My personal opinions should not be taken to represent the official position of the School of Library and Information Science on archival education.

3 Welch, "Archival Education," p. 52.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

the Irish manuscript tradition and its rebirth in Britain and the Holy Roman Empire, staff and budget distribution, automation, architecture, conservation, bookbinding, paper technology, handling and storage of maps, security, microfilm, administrative procedure in government departments, bibliography and works of reference, historical methodology, administrative history, manuscript libraries, oral history, interviewing techniques, copyright, cataloguing of sound recordings, optical memory systems, information storage and retrieval, British and Canadian government publications, photoduplication, forgery of documents, newspaper libraries, display, training in information sciences, Canadiana, photograph collections, publication of historical sources, Commission on Canadian Studies, keyword indexes, and PRECIS.

Besides the existence of this common ground, however, there are other legitimate reasons for including archives in a library school's curriculum. Librarians do sometimes find themselves in charge of archival or manuscript collections, particularly in universities, and, whether or not this is desirable in principle, it would seem preferable that these librarians should have a little archival training rather than none at all. Moreover, even when university archives are cared for by non-librarians they frequently are housed in the library and administratively linked to it. Surely any archivist in charge of a university archives of this kind would prefer that his librarian colleagues should have some understanding and appreciation of his work. Many archives, too, have libraries of their own in which professional librarians are employed. A graduate of one of our courses would be ideally suited for this type of employment. Some librarians, indeed, may never have anything directly to do with archives at all, but even they, in my opinion, benefit in at least two ways from an introductory course. They see that library practices and procedures are neither sacrosanct nor universal and thereby learn to make comparisons and consider alternatives. (The converse of this, of course, is also true and serves as an argument for archivists having some exposure to library methods.) Most important, they gain a greater understanding of the needs of that other sister profession whose members, the research historians, rely so heavily on the collections of both archives and libraries that they deserve special consideration as a user group.

Assuming the desirability of archives courses for librarians in library schools, the question remains of who should teach them. Here, the ideally desirable may have to give way to the immediately practicable. However, I do not agree with Dr. Welch that only the practising archivist has the ability or the right to teach archives courses. No one to my knowledge has ever suggested that only those who are or have been practising politicians should teach political science at a university. A denial of this parallel would seem to me to belittle the significance and importance of the archivist's work rather than enhance it. To come closer to home, not every professor in a library school has had experience as a practising librarian.

The students in an archives course, even one intended for future librarians and much more one in which future archivists were enrolled, should certainly have the opportunity to learn from the wisdom and experience of practising archivists, but there is more than one way to achieve this end. Field trips to different types of archives are now a feature of our courses, and visiting archivists also conduct single seminars. Our debt to the archivists who have helped us out in these ways is immense. When one course was taught in its entirety by a visiting archivist, it was possible for the students to complete it without ever having been inside an archives or having talked to more than one archivist. This is no reflection on the person concerned, but it does illustrate one disadvantage of having the course taught by someone in full-time employment elsewhere.

Another disadvantage in the employment of a visiting archivist is the lack of contact with the students between seminars, or with those students who may not be currently enrolled in an archives course but wish to learn something in an informal way. The amount of time I spend in formal teaching of the archives courses is a very small frac-

tion of the time I spend diffusing at least a modicum of archival education among the student populace at large. This includes teaching the use of archives in Research Methods courses, supervising students who are taking Individual Study courses, talking to students about their work in the courses or possible future enrolment in them and, in my capacity as the School's Archivist, supervising the work of student assistants in our own Archives, and helping students who need to use the resources of our Archives for various purposes. The effect of all this is an integration of the archives courses with the total work of the School which no visiting archivist, however willing, could possibly achieve.

These disadvantages would not apply to the employment of a former archivist as a full-time professor and, if a comprehensive year-long programme of archival education were launched, one would expect that many of the professors appointed would be in this category. At present, the appointment of such a person does not seem to be feasible here. Even if it were, I wonder how many of the relatively small number of archivists in Canada possess the requisite academic qualifications for a university appointment (increasingly, a doctorate is the *minimum* qualification at even the most junior level) and of those who do have the qualifications, how many want to be university teachers. Of those who do so desire, how many are prepared to give up their present positions for a limited-term appointment which may well leave them unemployed in a few years' time? I am not denigrating the ability of archivists in asking these questions. The same problem exists in recruiting practising librarians to university teaching, and there are more of them. Those practitioners in both fields whose experience is of a calibre and length to compensate for the lack of a doctorate, or those who have both substantial experience *and* a doctorate, are usually already in secure positions from which the prospect of an insecure appointment, in this case to teach elementary archival science to prospective librarians, would not seem very exciting. Possibly, once there is a full-scale archives programme somewhere, the prospect may look a little more inviting to some archivists, but even then I doubt if candidates with experience acceptable to Dr. Welch and academic qualifications acceptable to the universities will come out of the woodwork in overwhelming numbers. A somewhat ironical possibility is that this archives programme would perforce have to be staffed largely by history PhDs with perhaps a little low-level experience in archives, that is, by persons with qualifications identical to my own except that I have others in addition and many years of university teaching behind me. Would Dr. Welch reject me as an applicant on the grounds that some of my qualifications cancel out the others?

A professional association of archivists, and indeed an individual archivist, has the right and the duty to be concerned about the quality of archival education, possibly even of that offered to librarians. On the other hand, a university has the right to offer courses subject only to the existing internal and provincial approval procedures. Whatever may happen in the future, courses are now offered in library schools which have not received the official blessing of the Association, although they have satisfied normal academic programme requirements. If the Association or an individual finds these courses inadequate in any way, no one can deny their right to criticize. If they wish to establish accreditation procedures, this is a matter for negotiation. If they wish to establish other programmes, they are free to try. However, if either the Association or an individual exercises the right to criticize any existing course, this should be done with full knowledge of the objectives of the course, its intended constituency, the course content, teaching method, quality of student work, student evaluation of the course, library, archival and other resources available and the use made of them, and the abilities and qualifications of the instructor based on real evidence, not merely a rumour that he or she is a librarian. Otherwise the criticism is unlikely to be taken seriously.

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