

Archives From the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship

by TOM NESMITH

The “new” social history is no longer new. Monographs and theses in social history abound; several academic journals have been established under its banner and older ones have been won over. But interest in social history has neither been confined to university history departments nor are social historians incapable of appealing to the general reader. Archivists considering the future course of historical research will want to note articles on teaching social history at the high school level in recent issues of *The History and Social Science Teacher*. They may have also noted that not long ago *Time* magazine ran a cover story on the influence of social history on American historical writing and more recently *Saturday Night* magazine gave the new found prominence of social history among Canadian historians an extended editorial if not its front cover.¹

Over the last twenty years or so social history has been changing the way history is studied and profoundly affecting the relationship between archives and academic historical research. This issue of *Archivaria* is presented because the editors believe some of those changes have strained the traditional alliance between historians and archivists which still sustains both professions. Archivists are, for the most part, no longer as familiar with historiography as they once were. One major reason for this is sociohistorical research has radically altered the alliance’s former historiographical base. The editors have therefore invited a group of leading social historians to discuss their interests in relation to archives. This article introduces the issue with an overview of recent changes in the research environment archivists and historians share in order to suggest that these new conditions make it necessary and possible to strengthen the relationship by encouraging an approach to archival scholarship somewhat different from the one many historians are acquainted with or, for that matter, most archivists are committed to.

Any discussion of the relationship between archives and academic history immediately touches on the cultural role of archives, and more specifically, its relationship to one of the key issues in archival circles – the nature and place of

¹ Chad Gaffield and Ian Winchester, “The Concept of Total History in the Classroom,” *The History and Social Science Teacher* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 159-65; Greg Kealey, “Looking Backward: Reflections on the Study of Class in Canada,” *The History and Social Science Teacher* 16, no. 4 (Summer 1981): 213-22; Lance Morrow, “Rediscovering America,” *Time*, 7 July 1980, pp. 18-23; Viv Nelles, “Rewriting History,” *Saturday Night*, February 1981, pp. 11-16.

scholarship in the archival profession. Unfortunately opinion on the role of scholarship in the profession usually divides over the question should archivists also be historians. It is fair to say that most archivists do not think of themselves as historians and although, strictly speaking, archivists do not do exactly the same kind of work the academic historian does, important questions remain. Do archivists still need to be historians of the records in their care? If so, what does it mean to be a historian of archival records? Does it require archivists to be scholars? If so, how is archival scholarship of that kind related to the formal discipline of history?

The first answer many archivists might be expected to give to these questions is that they want recognition as “professionals” who possess technical and administrative expertise related to the operation of an archive but they do not pretend to be scholars. But may we not ask whether our cultural role can be independent of the quality of our personal scholarship? It is a strange doctrine indeed which states we can continue to claim a central role for archival institutions in cultural life without committing ourselves individually to the scholarly work required to make original contributions to knowledge. The archivist needs to be a scholar who can administer an archival institution and recognize the administrative interest the sponsor of the archives has in the records it keeps.

The advantages gained in recent assertions of the archival profession’s autonomy from academic history have not come without costs. It has been easy enough to jettison our former scholarly base in historiography but not as easy to recover it in the sphere of work archivists claim as their own. The archival profession has been weakened in the process. The value and challenge of archival work are largely untapped and unknown – meaning that it is still regarded as a second or third choice, if even that, among professions university students might think of entering. The intellectual promise of archival work, since seldom fulfilled by archivists, means archives often do not retain outstanding archivists who either cannot enter the small number of administrative positions available in archives or do not want to because to do so at the moment requires a radical change in their approach to archival work. Although archives can be a focal point for cultural life, our profile among cultural institutions has been obscured by those institutions which participate more vigorously in cultural activities, while our oldest and one of our best allies, the academic historian, not without reason, questions our commitment to scholarship. How strange it is that we who profess to find satisfaction in assisting scholarship find little in our own experience with so many forms of communication which generate much scholarly reflection.

This article is intended to encourage efforts to renew the scholarly base for archival work beginning with a redefined partnership with academic history. I attempt to show that historical writing today, due mainly to the prominence of sociohistorical research, is far more hospitable than earlier historiographical tendencies have been to an archival scholarship grounded in the study of the nature and purposes of archival records and institutions. Archival scholarship of that sort can develop as archivists participate in a wider shift now taking place in other traditional historical subdisciplines. With political, intellectual and military history and the history of technology, archival scholarship can find a source of rejuvenation

in social history.² The study of records and archives in this way, “from the bottom up”, to borrow a phrase social historians have used to describe their interest in ordinary people not usually accounted for in historical writing and substitute it for what Frank Burke calls the “sub-archival phenomena” in the history of society that shape the information archives hold, can serve as the basis of archival practice and enrich historiography.³ The history of society is the starting point for archival scholarship and archival scholarship is the foundation of archival work. Social history and, as I develop later in the article, some recent work in the social history of women, merit attention not just in order to enable archivists to appreciate the research interests of an increasing proportion of users of archives, important as that is, but also because they allow archivists to come to fuller understanding of their own development as a profession and point toward a larger role for scholarly archival work.

Although the “new” social history is no longer new it appears to have entered a phase which should encourage a renascent archival scholarship. An unmistakable feature of recent historical study is heightened interest in critical thinking about historian, Laurence Veysey, goes further with the suggestion that “historical criticism, in the more demanding circles, may be in much better shape in the contemporary United States than substantive historical writing.”⁵ The arrival of a methodological *awareness*” which occurred in the 1970s. Another American historian, Laurence Veysey, goes further with the suggestion that “Historical criticism, in the more demanding circles, may be in much better shape in the contemporary United States than substantive historical writing.”⁵ The arrival of a “new” social history critical of deficiencies in older approaches to the past made no small contribution to this state of affairs. However, Kammen and Veysey draw attention to the fact that social history’s bold use of historical statistics often gleaned from less than adequate sources has actually allowed far more ambiguous and therefore more modest conclusions than were hoped for by the most intrepid advocates of quantitative and computer assisted studies. The result, Veysey concludes, is that “social history has shifted more and more toward an argument over the meaning of evidence.”⁶

2 Laurence Veysey, “Intellectual History and the New Social History” in John Higham and Paul Conkin eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1979), pp. 3-26; Richard Kohn, “The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research,” *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (June 1981): 553-567; David Hounshell, “Commentary: On the Discipline of the History of American Technology,” *The Journal of American History* 67, no. 4 (March 1981): 854-65.

3 Frank Burke, “The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States,” *The American Archivist* 44, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 42.

4 G.G. Iggers and H.T. Parker eds., *International Handbook of Historical Studies: Contemporary Research and Theory* (Westport, Conn., 1979); C.F. Danzell ed., *The Future of History* (Nashville, 1977); Michael Kammen ed., *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca, 1980); John Higham and Paul Conkin eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1979).

5 Michael Kammen, “The Historian’s Vocation and the State of the Discipline in the United States” in Kammen ed., *The Past Before Us*, p. 31 (emphasis in the original); Laurence Veysey, “The ‘New’ Social History in the Context of American Historical Writing,” *Reviews in American History* 7, no. 1 (March 1979): 8.

6 Veysey, “The ‘New’ Social History,” p. 8.

That problem is neither new to the study of history nor unique to social history but it has become a major concern to social historians because their great achievement – the tremendous expansion in the range of topics and people historians study – has obliged them to master a wider variety of sources than historians have ever before employed. And if social history's success in broadening the scope of historical research has already come up against old questions about the meaning of evidence, the major problems for social historians, problems they will share with other historical researchers, are going to include the need for continuing adaptation to new, unfamiliar or overlooked sources as much as they may be the kinds of issues which have dominated their work: the legitimacy of this or that subject area or the advantages of local, regional or class analyses. As historians continue to increase the variety of records they use from private correspondence and diaries to parish registers, censuses, city directories, assessment rolls and beyond those to the non-textual media, they are moving further and further onto the archivist's terrain. If historians have multiplied their subject interests so rapidly that no archivist can possibly stay abreast of them all, archivists have acquired experience with a wider diversity of records than most historians now use. The variety, extent and complexity of these sources have great significance for the place of archives in research of all kinds, the role of the archivist, and the relationships between archivists and academic historians.

The nature of most modern archival records, whether the still largely textual records of private corporate bodies and governments or the non-textual media, and the seeming inevitability of ever more rapid evolution in communication technologies, makes their care and use increasingly dependent upon scholarly study of the nature of the records themselves. But archival work remains in essence an exercise in historical understanding. Unlike other professions whose expertise may become obsolete when new techniques are introduced, the archival profession is dependent on knowledge of the history of archival records and work in order to serve its clientele. Acquisitions are made with a view to what may be historically significant to researchers in the future as well as what may be of lasting value to the sponsoring institution; and the contemporary issues archivists concern themselves with from archives and the law to micrographics ought not to be seen as vital interests more important than our historical research role but as another dimension of that role because responses to the issues of our day soon become part of the history of our work for our successors. Among the new challenges archivists have is to see how insights from other disciplines facilitate historical research in archives and to learn to draw upon a wider spectrum of historiography than was most highly valued when knowledge of political history written from the far narrower and much more familiar range of records – mainly personal manuscripts – formed almost the entire basis of archival expertise.

Archivists have only recently begun to say very much in their professional journals about developments in social history. Those who have, myself included, stress the familiar concerns of archival scholarships: the importance of understanding the techniques social historians use, the topics they study, the more varied sources they require and the implications of social history for archival

practice.⁷ The best archival service will always depend on understanding the purposes and source needs of researchers. And there will always be archivists who find their circumstances draw and permit them to study some familiar historiographical problem. But the new research environment archivists and social historians, among others, are defining requires more than that of archival scholarship. The kind of archival scholarship most needed in future ought to rely heavily on the archivist's historical research skills in order to prepare the more extensive reference tools massive institutional archives require and to address more specific questions related to the creation and use of particular records. At the same time, to place his work in a wider context, the archival scholar should attempt to see record creation and use as integral aspects of the history of society. The first step toward achievement of these goals can only be taken when the lapsed discourse between archivists and historians is resuscitated.

The research environment archivists and historians have established over the last two decades has ended the close relationship they once enjoyed. The orientation of much sociohistorical research departs from the main approaches to historical study adopted for example by the early custodians of the Public Archives of Canada. The public Archives found a cultural *raison d'être* in the early part of this century in provision of records for the kind of historical writing which was supposed to instill Canadians with a sense of shared nationality.⁸ However, most social historians make their aim the history of *society* or comparative *societies* rather than the *nation*.⁹ And although most studies in Canadian social history stay within national political boundaries they are often less concerned with the nation as the primary human group to be understood as they are with the constituent elements in society: glass, gender, family, local or regional communities, occupational, ethnic and age groups.

Social historians are far less interested than most Canadian historians have been in writing about the major events in the history of national public affairs or in preparing biographies of the prominent politicians, soldiers and diplomats who "built" the nation. When social historians have followed their research interests into national public affairs it is usually in order to pursue some aspect of social processes affecting the constituent groups in society — the changing status of women, for example — rather than the political process of nation-building. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg points out, social historians and historians of women especially, focus much of their attention on "private places: the household, the family, the bed, the

7 Vital Chomel, "Une autre archivistique pour une nouvelle histoire?", *La Gazette des Archives*, n.s. no. 91 (1975): 238-48; Jean Favier, "Les Archives et les nouvelles tendances de l'histoire," *Journal International des Archives* 1, no. 1 (1980): 7-10; Frederic Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice", *The American Archivist* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 113-24; Tom Nesmith, "Le Roy Ladurie's 'Total History' and Archives," *Archivaria* 12 (Winter 1981): 127-33; Eva Moseley, "Sources for the 'New Women's History'," *The American Archivist* 43, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 180-190; Nancy Stunden, "Labour Records, and Archives: The Struggle for a Heritage," *Archivaria* 4 (Summer 1977): 73-91.

8 Ian Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty: The Cultural Role of the Public Archives of Canada, 1904-1935," *The Canadian Archivist* 2, no. 4 (1973): 4-25.

9 Eric Hobsbawm, "From Social History to the History of Society," in M.W. Flinn and T.C. Smout eds., *Essays in Social History* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 1-22.

nursery, and kinship systems.”¹⁰ At the same time it is not helpful to overemphasize the distinction between “public” and “private” because an interest in “private places” has directed sociohistorical research to the study of public institutions beneath the parliamentary level such as schools, hospitals and prisons. Political decisions can hardly be isolated from social issues. Many of the best sources for Canadian social history are and will increasingly be government records. One of the tasks for the archival scholar is to make explicit the connection between the social assumptions and purposes of government and their record creators and the kind of information they acquire.

Although social historians will continue to rely heavily on government records their research interests do veer from what has been the traditional orientation of archival activity in Canada where strength has been concentrated at the national level, and until recently, acquisition efforts directed mainly toward the private papers of notable public officials. Since most of the people social historians study do not leave many personal records, or have not had them acquired by an archives and in all likelihood will not have them acquired, social historians have resorted to parish registers, censuses and personnel files in order to document social characteristics and changes. The sheer extent of this material necessitates local microstudies of a city, county or township and the use of quantification and in some cases computers to assist control and analysis of the information.

This approach to sociohistorical research is by no means universal but it has been the basis of some of the most ambitious projects in historical research.¹¹ Although projects of this kind may make heavy demands on archival reference services, they have done so while altering the traditional relationship between the archivist and historian. The computer programmer, social scientist and statistician become the historian’s primary allies. Together they may form an interdisciplinary research team which may include physical scientists as well. But that is not the most important issue from the archival viewpoint since the historian’s new allies are also the archivist’s potential customers. The key issue lies elsewhere. If, as Laurence Veysey says, social historians have correctly emphasized the importance of “representativeness in evidence”,¹² or the point that firm conclusions about the characteristics of large numbers of people should not be drawn from fragmentary evidence created by those from other social and economic strata, some social historians have tended to do so with literary evidence but not as diligently with the records they have turned to. In commenting on demographic studies based on parish registers Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, the eminent French historian in the *Annales* tradition which has inspired much of the “new” social history, minimized the importance of understanding the full context in which the records were created as a first step toward learning to use them. To put it another way, he seems to have overlooked the fact that history “from the bottom up” still begins with the history of the records. And as the records become more complex so too does their history.

10 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The New Woman and the New History”, *Feminist Studies* 3, nos. 1 and 2 (1976): 185.

11 Michael Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975); David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto, 1981).

12 Veysey, “The ‘New’ Social History,” p. 10.

For Le Roy Ladurie the work of extracting the mass of data on family structures from the registers was “Herculean and depressing”. He looked toward the day when computers could be programmed to perform the work in “this thankless preliminary phase, from the initial data-collection to the reconstitution and statistical analysis of the family files.” At that moment, he added, the “historian will then have virtually nothing to do but apply thought: which should after all be his or her proper task.” The implied view of archival work in this description of demographic research is hardly engaging. And while Le Roy Ladurie did express interest in placing the computer records generated by research of this kind in an archives for others to consult he maintained this practice was creating “a new kind of archivist . . . a sort of historical technologist very different from the traditional scholarly graduate of the *École des Chartes*.”¹³ Whether or not historians deposit their data banks in a machine readable archives, and even though the institutions sponsoring archives are going to do so more frequently, it is unlikely that scholarly thinking about the origin and development of these records will be obsolete, although there is a danger that some historians and archivists may think it will be. It is to be hoped that unless archivists want to be reduced to sitting at computer terminals releasing electronic data they will take it upon themselves to understand the nature of the information they control.

If archival records can be detached from historical context by one of the pioneers in the “new” social history, the archival perspective can be pushed even further into the background, as Peter Bower pointed out in regard to the ill-fated Landon Project. In this case the “new” social history’s orientation of historical study toward local microanalyses confronted the traditional weakness of local archives in Canada. Bower anticipated serious distortion of archival development in south-western Ontario as a result of the project’s need to collect local records in the area for what would have amounted to its own archives. The point Bower makes is that the research project’s particular and short-term archival needs could not provide the basis for an overall, long-range archival program for the area’s historical records.¹⁴

The limitations of the archival system and its holdings which have prompted social historians to ponder the creation of their own archives have also made it necessary for them to consult a range of sources outside archives—particularly published sources—since they often provide the most easily identifiable blocks of material. We can also expect historians to take greater interest in artifacts as awareness of the utility of material evidence improves. Clearly the role of libraries and museums in historical research will continue to expand as historians become more familiar with the variety of sources archives find it very difficult to provide or which lie outside archival mandates. The transition from the older historiography primarily sustained by archives to the new historical research environment dominated by sociohistorical approaches has put some distance between archivist

13 E. Le Roy Ladurie, *The Territory of the Historian* (Chicago, 1979), pp. 5-6.

14 Peter Bower, “Archives and the Landon Project”, *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977/78): 152-55.

and historian. An archives is but one repository a researcher might visit and the archivist is now only one of several experts historians are likely to approach for assistance. The added distance between the two has aggravated inherited tensions in their relationship.

The study of social life was part of the earliest view of the place of historical research in Canadian archives. The first Archivist at the Public Archives of Canada, Douglas Brymner, would not appear out of place in 1982 with a comment he made in 1882 on the value of what was then understood to be social history: "The changes that have taken place in the mode of writing history have rendered the collection of papers on social progress of much more consequence in the eyes of historians than was formerly the case. The importance of collecting the political records of the country has by no means diminished, but more attention is now paid to what is taking place in the social life of the various classes of the community to account for the progress or decay of the community as a whole."¹⁵

But defined as a separate field, primarily concerned with local history, as Brymner went on to state, and loosely related to other fields like political history, social history could not long hold the lofty position Brymner allowed it. Brymner's assistant, Joseph Marmette, put the actual status of social papers in a clearer light in his 1886 report on the value of French records for the study of New France. He introduced the section of his report on the social information in the records by commenting: "If we turn aside from the great lines of the history of wars, industry and commerce, and seek the more restricted, but no less interesting field of social life, domestic manners and character of our ancestors, there is no lack of new matter to excite our curiosity . . ." Even more revealing is Marmette's idea that the social aspect of historical study largely concerned "anecdotes and adventures", as he called them in this case, about two young women in the colony who ran afoul of the local authorities.¹⁶ Social history conceived as the isolated escapades of immature young women could not but be of peripheral interest or a light diversion from the serious concerns of historical scholarship. And for Brymner and Marmette the Archives did not exist merely to satisfy historical "curiosity" but to serve the public and commercial life of the nation.

Arthur Doughty, Brymner's successor and Dominion Archivist from 1904 to 1935, took office as "scientific" history written on the basis of critical handling of original manuscripts was gaining acceptance at Canadian universities by those aspiring to be professional historians. Doughty clearly perceived the importance of this approach to historical research for the Archives and for writing national history. He succeeded in assuring a place for the new department as an agency of the federal government by cultivating alliances with the new generation of professional historians who came to rely on archival sources for the purpose of writing the sort of objective "scientific" history that he hoped would be an antidote to those partisan, sectional, ethnic and class biases which had threatened Canada since Confederation.¹⁷ The Brymner-Doughty legacy is the particular orientation

15 Report on Canadian Archives, 1882, p. 6.

16 Report on Canadian Archives, 1886, pp. xxxii-xxxiv.

17 Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty," pp. 10-11.

they gave the cultural role of the Public Archives. Their intense need to demonstrate the practical utility of archives for historical research into the public life of the nation eventually more than ensured the survival of the Public Archives and the new archival profession. By the early 1920s Doughty moved within the country's political and social elite and the Public Archives had become not only dominant in the field of historical research but also one of the premier federal cultural institutions.

But the historical profession's even greater success in finding a prestigious cultural role based on archival research overshadowed the archivist's contributions and eventually left some archivists with the idea that too many historians saw them as their "hewer of wood and drawer of water"—a stereotype Dominion Archivist W.K. Lamb openly detested by the 1960s.¹⁸ However the deeper problem with the archivist's subordinate role only became obvious when Lamb and others tried to break out of it. No matter how strenuously he objected to unflattering caricatures of archivists Lamb could not articulate the nature of archival expertise beyond claiming that it blended "sober, solid training in history" with "practical experience" in archives.¹⁹ And as historiography rapidly moved from the core to the periphery of the archivist's professional knowledge in the 1960s and 1970s archival expertise largely amounted to what common sense could glean through practical experience on the job.

It is fair to conclude that our archival heritage, by having to rely so heavily on the alliance with history, prevented archives from also justifying their existence on the wider basis of their possession of the distinct archival perspective on the nature and philosophy of information. In these circumstances scholarship could only play an auxiliary role within archives. If practical experience in the maintenance of records rather than an intellectual experience with them was all that archival work could add to the archivist's education in history, the scholar-archivist could only find an outlet for his scholarship outside archival work in conventional historical research. But scholar-archivists could not hope to keep up with the output of their colleagues in the historical profession on those terms. Until archival work itself could be seen as the object of scholarly inquiry instead of the realm of practical experience, W.K. Lamb might well fume about the sort of junior archivist who seemed to value archival work only as a springboard to the historical profession and who thought the most flattering comment he could make about archivists compared them favourably with vacuum cleaners.²⁰

The varied characteristics of the new historical research environment which social history has helped bring about have forced Canadian archivists to discover what is distinctive about their work. The old environment dominated by the

18 W.K. Lamb, "The Archivist and the Historian," *The American Historical Review* 68, no. 2 (January 1963): 385.

19 W.K. Lamb, "The Modern Archivist: Formally Trained or Self-Educated?", *The American Archivist* 31, no. 2 (April 1968): 175, 177.

20 Lamb, "The Archivist and the Historian," p. 385.

archivist's close relationship with the academic historian blurred the distinctive features of archival work or at best reduced them to the level of function rather than knowledge. Archivists provided and maintained the records historians used; historians published their research and taught; archivists received their education from historians, read their research and occasionally published a piece of historical research themselves. There is little wonder that archivists entering the profession in the 1960s and 1970s, many of them with graduate degrees in history and facing the challenge of establishing new archives or administering greatly expanded ones, resented their inferiority and worked to establish the autonomy of the archival profession. The movement toward greater autonomy reached a turning point with the creation of the Association of Canadian Archivists in 1975, but that achievement represents only the precondition for what can be hoped will eventually become a fully articulated archival perspective on research and culture. The steps already taken toward that goal have introduced a truly new element in the Canadian research tradition – the full impact of which has not yet been felt and is by no means assured. No matter how long or influential our archival experience has been or how great the contribution to historical research of our most venerable archival institution – the Public Archives of Canada – we have never before brought the in-depth study of the nature of records and archival work to bear systematically on research.

It is no accident that the developing archival perspective in Canada has taken hold during a time of fundamental reorientation in academic historical research. And, while that brought historians into contact with new allies, techniques, and topics, archivists began to address more closely the needs of a host of researchers outside the community of academic historians. An expanded and ever more fragmented research clientele has been a major force compelling archivists to identify what is elemental to the archival function in order to attempt to provide as many as possible of the diversified services now demanded of them. The archival perspective begins to emerge as archives recognize that in order to provide any service they must first adequately serve the archival needs of the institution sponsoring them and a corollary of this, not yet as widely appreciated, that to provide proper service to all their users archives must make the institutional origins and setting of their sponsor's records obvious. The archival perspective has also been strengthened when archivists have demonstrated clearer commitment to acquisition of as complete a collection as possible of the types of records available whether photographs, films, videotapes, sound recordings or computer records and not primarily those records academic historians or any other research group may use at any one time and which, today, still are overwhelmingly textual.

Although the new archival perspective has emerged out of separation of the historical and archival professions, it is essential to academic historical research as *provenance* and *respect des fonds* have been because it is an extension of those principles. But recent phases in the evolution of the archival perspective have caused some historians to fear that there are tendencies in archival work which endanger historical scholarship. C.P. Stacey, a distinguished friend of the Public Archives in the historical profession, correctly detected an erosion of commitment to historical scholarship on the part of many archivists although he incorrectly blamed much of it on what he called "the great inter-departmental parlour game of

records management.”²¹ About a year ago the editors of the *Canadian Historical Review* complained that decisions affecting public service at the Public Archives indicate it “is being run by and for administrators, not for historians.”²² However wide of the mark historians may be with criticism of the role of records management in a modern public archives or of the administration of the Public Archives, they quite properly warn against any trend elevating the importance of the administrative aspects of archival work above all others. No friend of archives would argue with the view that the now expanded public archival institutions must be administered as efficiently as possible, and that the added complexity of that responsibility requires archivists to develop administrative skills and an understanding of records management techniques the traditional archivist cum historian did not have to master.

To some extent the archivist’s declining involvement in academic historical research is understandable. At one time most archivists could keep up with the main body of historical literature, and the best archivists did keep up with it even if they were seldom able to contribute publications themselves. Ironically the very success of the old alliance of archivist and historian, if measured by the veritable explosion of historical publications in the 1960s and 1970s, makes it impossible for archivists to read as widely in history as they once did while also attending to their heavier administrative duties and more ambitious acquisition and custodial programs. Indeed it is now impossible for most historians to stay on top of their own literature.²³

Unfortunately some in the archival profession mistakenly conclude from the fact that archivists can no longer be expected to be as close to academic history that to continue to fulfill our cultural role we need only administer the institutions we control without actually understanding their holdings in any depth. Our tradition of scholarship has been one of our greatest sources of strength but in a period of rapid change in archives we are presiding over its deterioration with scarcely a murmur of regret never mind protest. Our scholarly tradition must be brought forward into the new research environment as much as our administrative methods and records management services have been in order for this generation of archivists to hope to see the realization of the goal it has obviously embraced—the full flowering of the archival perspective in our society. What remains to be accomplished before that goal is reached is very much dependent on a vigorous archival scholarship. Our particular role cannot be fully appreciated without developing awareness of the archival perspective on communication and information and it is the special

21 C.P. Stacey, “The Public Archives of Canada at the End of Its First Century,” *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers*, (1972), p. 22.

22 David Bercuson and J.L. Granatstein, “The Public Archives of Canada and the Historical Profession”, *The Canadian Historical Review* 62, no. 1 (March 1981): 2.

23 American historian Bernard Bailyn comments: “Only a besotted Faust would attempt to keep up with even a large part of this proliferating literature in any detail.” See his “The Challenge of Modern Historiography,” *The American Historical Review* 87, no. 1 (February 1982): 2.

contribution of archival scholarship to define and elaborate upon the archival perspective.

Our most enthusiastic efforts to promote archives will meet with discouragement in the more demanding research environment we now inhabit because we need more to earn public support and understanding than the argument that we are well-administered storehouses of information. After all, every cultural institution will make that claim. Why are archives different? Why do archives deserve a separate existence? Archives are indeed great storehouses but the idea that before everything else archives are media of communication imposing ways of knowing is seldom acknowledged and still less frequently given much thought.

To talk about renewing archival scholarship or about its experimental and even controversial character will undoubtedly sound odd to many non-Canadian readers. They will notice that as scholar-archivists in Canada work their way out from a definition of their scholarship scarcely different from the historian's they are actually moving in the direction of well-established European traditions of archival scholarship. We do well to recall that Sir Hilary Jenkinson, who is often cited by those who want to remind archivists that they are not historians, was himself still very much a scholar.²⁴ But if the staples of archival scholarship in Jenkinson's time—the paleography and diplomatic of medieval and ancient documents—cannot be the basis of archival scholarship in Canada where most archival records date from the late eighteenth century Canadian archivists may accept the invitation Christopher Brooke offered British archivists to develop a “modern diplomatic”.²⁵

Brooke explains that diplomatic contributes to understanding the information records convey by performing the preliminary task of uncovering “what must be known if documents are to be handled.” That involves identifying the different types of documents, their forms, functions and origins. “But if this is not mingled with scholarly and historical insights,” Brooke adds, “it rapidly degenerates into arid formulation, analogous to elementary philology.” Brooke makes the point that we must understand the people who created and used the documents before we can really understand their research value, and that, it seems to me, takes us into the history of society.²⁶ The information documents transmit is always incomplete and slanted; documents mislead and obscure, perhaps more so than they reveal. To know why that is so and how it affects their use in research we need to know something of the broad historical context which gave them birth and value.

Brooke maintains that a major weakness in some approaches to diplomatic studies and to the new social history lies in the tendency to view documents largely as self-contained entities within whose boundaries most answers to questions about their authenticity, accuracy and research value can be found. He refers to historians of

24 See especially his discussion of “Archives and the Science and Study of Diplomatic”, *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 1, no. 8 (October 1958): 207-10.

25 C.N.L. Brooke, “The Teaching of Diplomatic”, *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 4, no. 1 (April 1970): 8.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4, 9.

social structure who based their studies on demographic statistics derived from parish registers fully aware of the limitations and fragility of their findings. He does not take them to task for failing to criticize their sources but for failing to pursue the causes of these deficiencies back into the history of the record as assiduously as they construct their histories from what they believe the records faithfully convey. Brooke's criticism did not diminish his high regard for demographic social history but actually implies that in getting behind records and their factual inaccuracies and limitations a wide area of historical research opens up which is of joint interest to archivists and historians.²⁷

James Cassedy's *Demography in Early America: Beginnings of the Statistical Mind 1600-1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969) is one study written by a historian which suggests some of the wider insights archivists could bring to their own studies of the social context of record creation. Cassedy points out that the preparation of demographic statistics in colonial America reflected the aspirations of particular communities. In Puritan New England a well-developed sense of community animated by intense feelings of religious mission prompted the creation of parish registers as a means of deciphering God's will for the community and of measuring the degree of his pleasure with the community at any one time. These records were believed to be earthly counterparts of the heavenly books in which the genealogies of the faithful were thought to be written. Population growth measured in vital statistical records, unlike records of earthquakes, fires, comets or other disasters and wonders, were a clear indication of divine approval. They sustained confidence in the belief that the community had been chosen by God for a glorious destiny in America.²⁸ On the other hand certain religious beliefs bordering on superstition inhibited thorough compilation of demographic statistics. Public officials were stymied from time to time by those who refused to be counted because they had read in II Samuel chapter 24 that King David's census of the Israelites had so angered God that he punished them by sending a pestilence which killed 70,000 people. Governor Hunter of New York complained in 1712 that there had been widespread resistance to a census of the colony's population on the grounds that there existed a causal connection between the previous enumeration and a "sickness" which subsequently broke out.²⁹

If we turn to a non-textual record—photographs—we can see in recent work done by archivists how we may begin to relocate a scholarly basis for our work where historical insight into the nature of communication converges with archival interests. Peter Robertson and Lilly Koltun, both of the Public Archives of Canada, offer two examples of this point.³⁰ Robertson's article "More than Meets the Eye"

27 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

28 James Cassedy, *Demography in Early America: Beginnings of the Statistical Mind, 1600-1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), pp. 102-3.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

30 The most recent example of leadership archivists have provided the study of photographs in Canada is found in *BC Studies* 52 (Winter 1981/82)—a special issue edited by Joan Schwartz of the Public Archives of Canada entitled *The Past in Focus: Photography and British Columbia, 1858-1914*.

deals with a familiar problem in diplomatic—to what extent do records, and in this case photographs, convey accurate depiction of past realities? He challenges the assertion often made by pioneers in photographic technology, and too often unchallenged by researchers, that photographs provide exact truth about their subjects. Robertson shows that the social ambitions of photographers, among other factors, have shaped the way reality has been depicted in photographs. For instance, in order to earn social respectability and economic security for their profession late nineteenth century photographers insisted that their pictures were faithful representations at the same time as they retouched or staged them in a manner that flattered their clients.³¹

Lilly Koltun's *City Blocks, City Spaces: Historical Photographs of Canada's Urban Growth, c. 1850-1900*, an exhibition mounted at the Public Archives in 1980, explores the insight that different ways of communicating with photographs shape the impression of what is communicated. In the case of mid to late nineteenth century photographs of Canadian cities the perspective adopted by the photographer—the panoramic shot, street scene and close-up—offer highly interpreted views of the growth of cities. Consequently it is as important to understand the intention behind the selection of perspective as it is to attempt to ascertain the accuracy of the information transmitted for that itself is a distinct statement about urban life. The panoramic views, says Koltun, “are not merely documents of growth in detail, but the visual equivalent of pride in growth generally.”³² They glorify a particular type of human society—the urban—and impose on us a heightened awareness of the formative influence of the record creator on the view of reality portrayed.

Does a sociohistorical approach help us to understand the social status of archival work, or in other words, public perceptions of the nature of archival work? These perceptions affect the primary interests and aspirations of the archival community and for the most part archivists feel the need to challenge them. Ours is a small and little known profession; we are keenly aware of the fact that our marginal status within the sponsoring institutions and communities we serve is the major factor shaping our work. What are some, at least, of the origins of our marginality?

In my view it is not that we suffer so much from the popular caricature of the archivist as a frail, bearded old man doddering over dusty manuscripts, but quite the opposite. Our work has been perceived as a feminine function and therefore has characteristics related to traditional stereotypes of women: it is thought to be passive by nature, subordinate to the truly creative work of others, again, the “handmaiden” role, and even ornamental or a cultural frill. Indeed, how often have we spoken of providing a “home” for records? And in keeping with domestic images of our work, recall the unthinking young archivist who incurred W.K. Lamb's wrath for comparing archivists to vacuum cleaners. Of course, in fact, archival work has nothing to do with innately masculine or feminine characteristics—assuming they exist, and archival work can be done equally well by men and women. My point is that our society has tended to view cultural pursuits generally,

31 Peter Robertson, “More than Meets the Eye,” *Archivaria* 1, no. 2 (1976): 34-36.

32 Lilly Koltun, *City Blocks, City Spaces: Historical Photographs of Canada's Urban Growth, c. 1850-1900* (Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1980), p. 13.

and not just archival work, as part of a feminine sphere of life. As Bernard Ostry points out, many Canadians have thought of cultural activities in the same way as Archbishop Trench described them in the 1850s as “the ornamental fringe of a people’s life” which “can never, without loss of all manliness of character, be its main texture and woof. . . .”³³

How did this perception come about? My own hunch is that in our case it may be related to the fact that the history of modern public archives coincides with wider access women have gained to the means of communication. During the nineteenth century education for girls became an accepted social goal. By the end of the century women like Susanna Moodie and her sister Catharine Parr Traill had become notable literary figures although as children during the 1810s they had actually been forbidden by their mother to waste time writing stories.³⁴

By the late nineteenth century public education in the basic skills of communication had prepared growing numbers of women to enter journalism, teaching and librarianship or to become clerical workers and telephone operators. As a result some of these occupations were “feminized”, which is to say that they came to be viewed as particularly well-suited for women, and so it seemed natural and appropriate that women who for one reason or another were not ready to fulfill or were unable to fulfill their primary duties in the home should be allowed to enter them in large numbers in order to support themselves.³⁵ Certain peculiarly female attributes—punctuality, neatness, precision and dexterity of hand and eye—were thought to have given women the correct temperament and physical abilities required in accurate record keeping and communication. Agnes Machar of Kingston, Ontario, writing under the pseudonym “Fidelis”, said in 1879 that these qualities opened a new range of employment opportunities for women as copyists and bookkeepers. She believed women could compete on equal terms with men who had customarily dominated clerical work.³⁶ Between 1891 and 1921 in Canada the number of women in clerical work rose from 3,092 to 90,612 or from 12.8% of the

33 Bernard Ostry, *The Cultural Connection: An Essay on Culture and Government Policy in Canada* (Toronto, 1978), p. 5.

34 Clara Thomas, “The Strickland Sisters,” in Mary Quayle Innis ed., *The Clear Spirit: Twenty Canadian Women and Their Times* (Toronto, 1966), p. 45. Ann Douglas, in her *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977), p. 61, suggests that in nineteenth century America “the supreme product of feminine fashion, the chief emblem of the emerging female consumer, was not found in the lady’s clothing, but rather, odd as it may initially sound, in her reading and writing.” Women, of course, still communicated in traditional ways through embroidery, needlework and lacemaking—to name a few “media”. In addition to the statements made in the designs and material used in these creations a poem, verse or adage might well be woven into the fabric. Craft work could lead to other outlets for women workers in the book-binding and printing trades and in manuscript illumination and hand-printing for books. See Anthea Callen, *Women in the Arts and Crafts Movement 1870-1914* (London, 1980), pp. 96-97, 179-211.

35 Dee Garrison, “The Tender Technicians: The Feminization of Public Librarianship, 1876-1905,” *Journal of Social History* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1972/73): 134-35; Alison Prentice, “The Feminization of Teaching” in Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women’s History* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 49-65. For women in clerical work see Alan Delgado, *The Enormous File: A Social History of the Office* (London, 1979), pp. 37-8.

36 “Fidelis”, “The New Ideal of Womanhood,” *Rose-Belford’s Canadian Monthly and National Review* June 1879, p. 673.

total of men and women to 41.5%. The number of men employed in clerical work went from 21,029 to 127,325 over the same period.³⁷ The social tension created by the feminization of clerical work surely explains evidence of the male clerk's anxiety about the sexual identity of his work:

Don't we lose our manhood? What do we see of real life? What do we know of the world? What do we know of anything? . . . We aren't real men. We don't do men's work. Pen-drivers—miserable little pen-drivers—fellows in black coats, with inky fingers and shiny seats on their trousers—that's what we are. . . . Think of crossing 't's and dotting 'i's all day long. No wonder bricklayers and omnibus drivers have contempt for us.³⁸

The view that women were especially suited for record-keeping duties because of their ability to communicate well was rooted in attitudes toward their prior and essential maternal role. Women, above all else, assured the continuity of human life by bearing and nurturing children. By extension, they have a special custodial role in institutions like the home, family, school and church which were primarily responsible for the transmission of enduring cultural values. Women had a distinct responsibility as guardians and bearers of memory, and so they wrote histories, formed women's historical societies, took a major part in historic sites and war memorial movements, maintained family records and correspondence—a duty the photographic industry quickly perceived³⁹—and ensured that anniversaries, birthdays and special occasions like Christmas were remembered and properly celebrated. The other side of the mediating role these activities gave women is evident in the particular calling women had to reconcile conflict, promote harmony, restore broken spirits and health, and nurture the weak and dispossessed in the wider family of society through the many charitable associations they founded at the turn of the century and by entry into other new occupations opening to them such as nursing and social work. Feminine nature bestowed on women guardianship of home and culture and the task of social communication.

What does this excursion into the social history of women suggest about archives and archival scholarship? Simply stated, the feminization of cultural activity and record keeping provides a fundamental aspect of the sociocultural context in which archival work and historical research have been conducted in Canada since the mid-nineteenth century. This fact has posed a continuing problem for archivists and historians who have had to devise a defense of their cultural role which could prevent their relegation to the periphery of society's attention. The establishment of the Public Archives of Canada in 1872 by the Canadian government represented a

37 Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Census Branch, *Occupational Trends in Canada 1891-1931* (Ottawa, 1939), pp. 18-19. The census figures for 1891 did not include clerical workers in government service.

38 B.G. Orchard, *The Clerks of Liverpool* (1871) cited in Delgado *The Enormous File*, p. 21. For information on trends in female participation in the clerical work force in Great Britain see Gregory Anderson, *Victorian Clerks* (Manchester, 1976), pp. 56-7.

39 Brian Coe and Paul Gates. *The Snapshot Photograph: The Rise of Popular Photography 1888-1939* (London, 1977), p. 18.

dawning awareness at the political level of a basic change in the nature of historical research which also promised to confirm its value as a serious intellectual pursuit. Historical research based on critical understanding of original manuscript sources could not be confused with nostalgic curiosity or any other form of sentimentality about the past, and it could not long be viewed as a cultivated hobby so lacking in intellectual rigor that almost anyone could do it well.⁴⁰ That, after all, would have condemned the study of history to auxiliary status in Canadian life.

The opening of state archives in the nineteenth century did more than facilitate a change to more critical handling of primary sources. It also attracted researchers to the mine of political papers in their custody. The historical and archival professions developed on this new ground; the emerging group of professional historians aided by archivists at the Public Archives wrote their most important books and articles on the history of national political affairs. Archival and historical work pursued as civil service and academic professions reduced the possibility of large numbers of female members and found a practical cultural role in national political history which largely excluded the study of women in the past from the research agenda. This, it seems to me, insulated the Public Archives and the historical profession so successfully from crippling doubts about the relevance of cultural pursuits already akin to traditional female activities that they enjoyed a position of cultural and intellectual leadership in Canada until well into the mid-twentieth century even though cultural activity was still hardly a major part of Canadian life.

Nevertheless, the achievements of the archivists and historians who preceded us remain, and they require assessment. To suggest that they are limited and not irreversible takes nothing from them. It only means that the changes introduced by the contemporary historical research environment necessitate careful thinking about archival responses in order to prevent the limitations from endangering the accomplishments. It is obvious now that the political history encouraged by the opening of state archives concentrated too much attention on one admittedly indispensable subject. The new historical research environment fashioned in large part by the growing appeal of social history has ended heavy concentration on political history and so reduced the old ground archivists and historians jointly occupied. The new environment has also contributed to tension within their alliance since the archivist, unwilling to remain "handmaiden" to the historian who no longer dominates the research community using archives, insists on recognition of a distinct and equal contribution to research. Friction between archivists and historians has made it difficult for the former to adapt well to historiographical changes which can in fact help archivists achieve their new goals. It is not that archivists are unaware of increasing interest in social, cultural or intellectual history among users of archives, however even the warmest archival responses are hamstrung by the problematical status of scholarship in the archival profession. Perhaps wanting to do away with their "feminine" role in relation to the academic

40 James Douglas, "The Present State of Literature in Canada, and the Intellectual Progress of Its People During the Last Fifty Years," *Literary and Historical Society of Quebec Transactions*, New Series, Part II, 1874-75, p. 67; Douglas Brymner, *Report on Canadian Archives, 1888*, p. vii.

historian, too many archivists leave the impression that archival scholarship informed by historiographical insights is itself a frill or some remnant of a now outmoded special relationship with historians which can only confirm the profession's "feminine" identity or that it must always be subordinated to other duties if the profession ever hopes to escape its marginality.

It is my view that the archival profession will not make significant inroads against its marginality without also encouraging its own scholarship. Archival scholarship is the underdeveloped component in the emerging archival perspective. But the transformation of historical research interests and methods and the changing source base for historical studies are bringing about a shift in the centre of gravity in research which makes it all the more necessary for archivists to have a scholarly understanding of the records in their care. The new variety and complexity of records make historians as well as other researchers increasingly dependent on archivists to be able to identify valuable new or overlooked sources and explain the context in which they were created and used.

The research project most familiar to us as the basis of Canadian historiography until very recently often involved examination of one major collection of private manuscripts for the purpose of writing biography. This work may have been supplemented by some digging in similar collections for related caches of correspondence. These collections, even though some may have been very large, emanated from one person's hand or office and were digestible by a single industrious researcher. Although the records may have been acquired in a few stages they were likely obtained in one major effort at the end of the individual's career or life and for the most part their physical extent would have been determined by that time. Recent developments in historical research and mainly in social history, have sent researchers to other kinds of sources: the records of social service institutions, professional associations or labour unions and government records like the census, case files and personnel records. These records present very different problems. It is obvious that some of them, hospital records for example, cannot be acquired by even a major public archives and require a new range of archival services provided at the hospitals. For other records that have been acquired by major public archives or are their unique responsibility, as government records are, the familiar archival problems associated with personal manuscripts have changed. The records of private associations and institutions and governments do not necessarily emanate from one prominent person's hand or office; their origins are likely to be highly complex. Responsibility for creation of a major public record like the manuscript census has been distributed among a great number of people, most of whom have not been well-known public figures but statisticians, clerks or other minor officials.⁴¹ The composite origins of many

41 Alan Brookes, "Doing the Best I Can": The Taking of the 1861 New Brunswick Census," *Histoire sociale – Social History* 9, no. 17 (May 1976): 70-1. Brookes observed that despite growing use of the nineteenth-century census in Canadian social history he had not come across any studies of "the actual process of setting up, taking and compiling a census" or of "the nineteenth-century context from which the censuses emerged, the motives and aims that produced these documents, and the innumerable practical obstacles strewn in the path of such undertakings."

government textual documents as well as non-textual records of private or public origin like a film, photograph, map, a radio broadcast or sound recording, television program or machine readable records suggest that as these sources become more widely used in research of all kinds their own histories will have a far greater bearing on our understanding of the information they convey than is the case with private correspondence.

A government record, even if far simpler in nature than a census, comes to rest in an archives after having been borne along by a constantly evolving administrative system which must be understood before the record can either be located or used properly. And unlike the physical extent of an individual's personal papers, which may be set soon after the donor's retirement or death, the ongoing relationship an archives has with a private association or the institution sponsoring the archives means their records can become so voluminous, even after documents without historical or lasting value have been destroyed, that they easily become unmanageable for a single researcher. More often than not, researchers will be unable to examine them all and may actually miss many of the most important records for their projects.

The kind of archival scholarship needed in these circumstances is changing too. When reliance on the private manuscript source shaped historical research its simpler provenance, familiarity as a medium, and the narrower range of subjects that it dealt with allowed archivists to include among their most important and rewarding functions aiding the academic historian to locate significant new subject matter in the records. Since the nature of the private manuscript source reduced the dimensions of the research problem archivists could be expected to be almost as familiar as the historian was with the historiographical basis of the research project. Moreover archival principles of arrangement—*provenance* and *respect des fonds*—dovetailed neatly with historiographical tendencies. The personal manuscript collection became the mainstay of narrative political history and biography.

Today the personal manuscript is less likely to define the topic or to do so in quite the same way. Researchers now also turn to omnibus record groups of government documents which contain information on tens of thousands of topics. The old image of the historian scouring all the records during an exhausting marathon of research bears less and less relation to reality. The amount of textual material alone is so great in just one archive and the number of archives and other repositories which may have to be consulted or visited is so much greater that even an experienced academic researcher cannot be expected to know where to plunge into the documents without considerable preparation made in consultation with an archivist who, by virtue of a sustained relationship with the records, is the only one in a position to be of direct assistance.

Or so researchers might hope. One of the serious problems facing research is that the archivist may not offer much help, and not solely because the sources may overwhelm but because the research role of the archivist is no longer as highly valued as it once was. Just as researchers, due to the nature of modern records, become more heavily reliant on archivists to make crucial decisions for them about the historical value, origins and location of records they either do not yet know exist or have not even learned to use, many in the archival profession are defining their

expertise in other than scholarly terms. It is essential that archivists in non-administrative positions be encouraged to play the pivotal role in research they should have. And to do so they must be aware of the research value of the records in their care and be able to convey that to the researcher. The high value which ought to be accorded to research skills needs to be restored. Administrators of archives must make it possible for staff members to opt for a research career in archives and then encourage and indeed expect many of them to pursue it as much as they are now encouraged to pursue an administrative career which, perhaps unnecessarily, means some of the best qualified archivists move further and further away from direct involvement with records in research while others realize that the route to career advancement will not be harder to travel if in order to develop the skills needed to demonstrate potential as an administrator their research ability must be sacrificed.⁴²

The enlarged research role now opening to archivists still requires them to have a general understanding of historiography in order to assist historical researchers to locate pertinent categories of information and to introduce researchers without historical training to the body of literature and the research techniques accumulated by the only scholars who have made the past as such their business. But since historical writing now moves in so many different directions and the research community using archives is more diversified and records more voluminous and complex archivists may not be as able as they once were to locate precisely information on specific topics for historians or for anyone else for that matter. They should however be able to help them discover what the creator of the record communicated by showing them who was most likely to communicate it within a large institution and how. Does this shift in the way archivists assist researchers mean historical knowledge is no longer the core of archival scholarship? Not a bit. Even though archivists may neither be able to offer nor be required to offer background historical information on all the topics our expanded research clientele studies from archival records we must understand the history of those records; otherwise, we will be inadequately prepared to help any of them. These requirements can ultimately direct our attention to a badly conceived history of communication if we do not rule out of consideration anything in the history of society bearing on the nature of our records. I suggest that in moving in this direction we will incur our greatest debt to historiography and make our largest contribution to historiography at the same time as we enhance the research opportunities and cultural experience of all who work with archival records.⁴³

42 I am thinking in particular of the definition of an archives administrator as one who must "shrug off, however reluctantly, the seduction of an operational archivist's career" that Richard Huyda, Director of Planning and Program Evaluation at the Public Archives, offered to the 1982 conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists in a paper entitled "Archives Omnipotent: Lucifer at Bay." Are we to believe that those who commit themselves to a research oriented career in archives have succumbed to some "seduction" or that they are among the "Lucifers" to be kept at bay? Is it not possible for an administrator of archives to articulate a larger conception of archives which embraces administrative *and* scholarly excellence? Or is the operational level archival scholar who formerly may have been tagged an "historian manqué" now to become an "administrator manqué"?

Since most sponsors of archives are large institutions which deposit their records in those archives the points I want to make will be illustrated by examples drawn from their records. Archival inventories should reflect an understanding of the historical context in which the institution was established and developed so that the changing perspectives represented in the records it created for the purpose of accomplishing its goals can be appreciated. In other words inventories should enable the researcher to begin to answer the question: how does the original purpose of the record affect what may be done with it? Inventories also ought to provide an overview of the evolving administrative structures of the institution in order to identify the agencies and officials creating and controlling particular classes of information. The history of record-keeping systems the institution employed to control its records will have to be outlined so that researchers can pursue their particular interests through the record group's information maze.⁴⁴

Archivists will also need to document the introduction by the institution of non-textual records whether or not the archives actually has those records. We will hardly know what to look for in acquisition work if we don't know what we can expect to find and researchers will want to know that the institution had a particular function or communicated in a certain way even though those records may no longer exist or may not be available. Their absence itself may of course be evidence for a point of view a researcher may be developing. Archivists should understand the histories of the non-textual media not only in order to ensure that conservation measures and research conditions are appropriate for the technological basis of the record but also to understand the technical limitations and manipulations and the historical context influencing what was communicated and how it was done at different times. We ought to know why new means of information gathering and communication were adopted, resisted or perhaps overlooked for a time because they reflect the goals of the institution. They may also cause changes in administrative structures as information divisions are added and in the expertise the institution rewards or people it employs to create its most important records: statisticians, cartographers, photographers, filmmakers, media relations experts or computer programmers. What is the historical background of these professions? How has their work evolved? What kinds of information have they gathered at various times and why?⁴⁵ Our appraisal of the long-term value of institutional

43 For discussion of approaches to the history of communication see Garth Jowett, "Toward a History of Communication", *Journalism History* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1975): 34-37 and his "Communications in History: An Initial Theoretical Approach", *The Canadian Journal of Information Science* 1, no. 1 (1976): 5-13.

44 Two fine examples of inventories produced in the Federal Archives Division of the Public Archives of Canada are Terry Cook, *Records of the Northern Affairs Program (RG 85)* (Ottawa, 1982) and Bob Hayward, *Records of the Canadian Forestry Service (RG 39)* (Ottawa, 1982).

45 Two articles which relate the development of statistical records in the United States to social values are Margo Konk, "Accuracy, Efficiency and Bias: The Interpretation of Women's Work in the U.S. Census of Occupations, 1890-1940", *Historical Methods* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 65-72 and Patricia Cohen, "Statistics and the State: Changing Social Thought and the Emergence of a Quantitative Mentality in America, 1790-1820," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, 38, no. 1 (January 1981): 35-55.

records depends on knowing when and how they were used and the value the institution attached to them.

I have argued so far for archival scholarship as an essential part of the day-to-day operation of an archive. Rather than the tentative status it so often seems to have in our work I have suggested something of the new breadth archival scholarship requires as a result of changing archival records and the transformation of historical studies social historians have done so much to advance. But archival scholarship points to more than that depending on our view of the nature of the archivist's contribution to the community. What should we offer in return for the unique privilege of caring for archival records? To acquire and preserve them, yes, of course; to help others employ them, indeed. But at the same time can we not also begin to provide insights into the evolution of society through the study of communication? Why are records like they are? What occurs when a record is created, selected for preservation in archives and used there in research?⁴⁶ How do these actions affect and reflect perceptions of reality? What happens in a society when its means of communication change or in sectors of society when record keeping practices are assimilated?⁴⁷ Despite our proximity to records these questions have seldom been taken up by Canadian archivists. Is it really possible that they have little relevance or attraction for us? Are they only for others to attempt to answer. Others will certainly do so and we may continue to survive by other means, but will we flourish? I doubt it.

46 Frank Burke has already posed some of these questions for archivists in his "The Future of Archival Theory in the United States", *The American Archivist* 44, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 40-46.

47 For two examples of research into these questions see M.T. Clanchy's study of the impact of changing methods of communication in the Middle Ages in *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307* (London and Cambridge, Mass., 1979); and for the impact of record keeping on the development of sport see Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York 1978).