

EDITOR'S REPLY: *While Bolotenko can defend himself, the charge by Scott James that the editors of Archivaria should suppress certain viewpoints that may be disagreeable to some archivists, or even to the profession as a whole, simply is wrong-headed. It smacks of the very Orwellian danger against which Patrick Dunae cautions us a few pages earlier. And far from highlighting a tired, irrelevant canard (by giving Bolotenko the "lead article" status), the editors felt that the issues he raised go right to the centre of the definition of our young, evolving profession and that they are worthy of debate and further analysis. The unprecedented response of readers, including Scott James himself, obviously vindicates our position, thus preserving our knuckles, I should hope, quite unbruised.* T.G.C.

A Challenge to Archivists and the ACA

Congratulations on a most stimulating series of lead articles in *Archivaria*: "Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship" by Tom Nesmith (No. 14) and "Archivists and Historians: Keepers of the Well" by George Bolotenko (No. 16). They have guaranteed my continuing support of the Association of Canadian Archivists when it was admittedly beginning to wane. I welcome the challenge that both offer to archivists to become actively involved in the historical enterprise and not primarily to busy ourselves with the formidable intricacies of information science and the bolstering of our professional image.

Perhaps, however, we should be taking the argument one step further. Can we turn Bolotenko's dictum on its head and suggest that the archivist makes the best historian, rather than only that the "historian still makes the best archivist." (p. 6) Bolotenko himself builds the base for this assertion when he argues that the "new historians" have relinquished their responsibility to the context, to the totality of the human past. The most fundamental critique of history is surely that it has failed to take into account crucial aspects of the collectivity of human experience. Just as the archivist is repeatedly admonished to faithfully represent the totality of human experience, so the best history does likewise. Not to do so is a failing just as much for good history as it is for a good archival programme.

If this be the case, perhaps we should be adding to the historical enterprise in the small and large domains that our archival responsibilities take us. For archivists to write history should not be considered a quaint and tolerable pastime, but rather a fundamental part of our responsibilities. Perhaps the oft-repeated nostrum that we archivists need to turn our energies to becoming better managers deserves a healthy dose of scepticism. This is not to say that archives do not need better management and better promotion — this they surely do. But the courses to this end, no matter how current the pop psychology that they offer, are perhaps not the most appropriate place for many of us to be spending our time. We would be better employed doing a critique of the latest magazine article, book, or television programme that made extensive use of the archival sources we know best.

To take the argument yet a further step, we need to carefully examine the activities and priorities of our Association of Canadian Archivists in this light. The lesson that I draw from Nesmith and Bolotenko is that I am better spending my time with the host of academic and other societies that are investigating the documents under my

care than in the much vaunted archival “networking.” Certainly the implication is clearly that the ACA annual conference should be back with the Learned Societies, where we have much to contribute and little to fear.

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Archivist-Historians Ignore Information Revolution

The Appelbert Commission identified two landscapes in the Canadian archival community. Having read again two articles, one by Tom Nesmith and the other by George Bolotenko, there appears to be good cause to speak of two landscapes. Both Nesmith and Bolotenko deal with the archivist-historian or archivist as historian; both reflect considerable thought and concern; both, in my view, reveal disturbing misconceptions of the archivist’s role in today’s information environment. It is questionable if either reflects a realistic picture of Canadian archivists or “archivy.” They certainly do not reflect the corporate archival mandate and the role and challenge of its administrator.

In addition, as one of those trained in historical research skills at the graduate level, I take exception to the role which they wish me to play in today’s environment. I was confused, I must admit: am I to be an historian and serve other historians; or am I to use the skills of the historian to interpret my records for others. The latter is much more practical, but it still reflects an insular understanding of the role of the archivist for the future.

Identification and control of archival resources depends today on the application of more than historical training, skill, or disposition. It requires a more functional understanding of all the records themselves, and any potential use for them: why we keep them at all; the decision on what to make accessible first and to what level, and how to justify that; the balance between identification and acquisition, and access; the questions of legal admissibility and acceptability. It requires the creation of information systems which reach out to control archival resources in a myriad of formats and locations. And it requires more than a mere basic understanding of management techniques. And to explain this, let me deal with five issues: the relationship between historiography and archives; the alleged lack of communication; the librarian-records manager syndrome; archivist, archivist-historian or other; and finally, the management of information.

The relationship between historiography and archives. Tom Nesmith raises an interesting question: the role of the archivist in response to new historical methods. The alliance is broken; we do not merit the historian’s respect; we do not understand the nature nor value of our own holdings; we must return to a scholarly base to restore all of the above. We are fortunate to be under such a sentence of anathema and we still have time to avoid the fuller sentence of excommunication! It seems as if Nesmith wants us to make a special effort to allow the new breed of historian to have