

# *From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives*

by **TERRY COOK\***

Hugh Taylor has coined the expression “historical shunt” in the last issue of *Archivaria* which, it has already been observed, will probably join the Canadian pantheon of archival catch-phrases.<sup>1</sup> Taylor seems to invest the concept with two principal dimensions. The first, and more straight forward, is that the close relationship since the Middle Ages between the law officers of the Crown and other creators of legal and state documents underpinning national administration on the one hand, and the official custodians of such records on the other, a relationship which was an organic continuum between past and present, old and new, active and dormant, was rent asunder by the “historical” definition of modern archives that sprang up after the French Revolution. Since the early nineteenth century, Taylor asserts, archives were collected by and for historians; custodians of state papers — now archivists — were no longer an integral part of the administrative process, but merely the final curators under whose care dead records could repose for historical research purposes. The boxcars with the older records were moved off the administrative main line onto an historical side shunt — divorced from an active part in the administration of the state to the detriment alike of the decision-making process itself and the status of the archivist. There is a second, if more implicit, dimension to the idea of the “historical shunt,” one which ties in closely with the recent and ongoing debate

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\* Earlier drafts of this paper were read by my friends and colleagues Terry Eastwood, Ed Dahl, Gordon Dodds, Shelley Sweeney, Robert Hayward, Tom Nesmith, and Bruce Wilson. I am deeply grateful for their suggestions and criticisms which helped to hone my thinking on this topic. Each will see several of their points incorporated into this final version, although each will also be disappointed at others left out. Needless to say, I am responsible for any errors that remain and for all interpretations, and the ideas presented are mine and not necessarily those of the Public Archives of Canada.

1 Hugh A. Taylor, “Information Ecology and the Archives of the 1980s,” *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), pp. 25-37. Terry Eastwood in his “Overview of the Annual Conference of the ACA Held at Vancouver, June 1-4, 1983,” *ACA Bulletin* 8 (August 1983), p. 7, remarked that Taylor’s *bon mot* (first mentioned at the Vancouver conference) will probably join “total archives,” “historian of the record,” and “tyranny of the medium” as convenient intellectual shorthands to evoke all sorts of ideas and meanings in future debates about Canadian archives.

about the relationship of history and archives.<sup>2</sup> Although Hugh Taylor tries to have it both ways by making several concessions to the “history” side of the debate — there will always be a need for scholar-archivists for some elements of archival work, historians will remain important clients of archives, and so on — his pervading tone is that history unduly confines or narrows the vision that archivists must take with them into the later 1980s to cope with the post-industrial information and technological revolutions. The “historian-archivist” gets side-tracked onto a shunt; he becomes the passive custodian looking after dead records for purely cultural reasons. The “new archivist” by contrast stays on the main line; he dynamically interacts with the creators and users of records, seeing no great distinction between old and new, archival or administrative records. Entering the exciting, electronic eighties, “the archivist,” in Taylor’s view, “as intermediary preparing intractable historical records, long since abandoned by administrators, for painstaking and protracted research by the scholar with the help of manual retrieval systems, is no longer required. . . .”<sup>3</sup>

In all this, Hugh Taylor is the deepest and most eloquent critic of Tom Nesmith, George Bolotenko, and others who defend the centrality of history to archivy. And like the other critics, he is wrong. His notion of the “historical shunt” ultimately deals with procedural difficulties and technological challenges — all real and important — that are now facing archives, not with their very purpose for being. In blaming history (meaning the historical training, concentration, and orientation of archivists and archives) for many problems facing archives today, Taylor loses sight of the vital ethos that archivists must have — their goal or purpose for existing. As Bolotenko has already replied to his earlier critics,<sup>4</sup> Hugh Taylor confuses administrative means with cultural ends.

## I

Taylor quite rightly points out several serious weaknesses in the management of information and its ultimate control by archives. Burgeoning bureaucracies, computers everywhere, the electronic office around the corner, region *versus*

2 The history-archives debate has occurred in the following pieces so far: Tom Nesmith, “Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship,” *Archivaria* 14 (Summer 1982), pp. 5-26; George Bolotenko, “Archivists and Historians: Keepers of the Well,” *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), pp. 5-25; Patrick Dunae, “Archives and the Spectre of 1984: Bolotenko Applauded,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 286-90; Carl Spadoni, “No Monopoly for ‘Archivist-Historians’: Bolotenko Assailed,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 291-95; Thomas T. Spencer, “The Archivist as Historian: Towards a Broader Definition,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 296-300; Anthony L. Rees, “Bolotenko’s Seige Mentality,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 301-2; R. Scott James, “A Wearisome Issue,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 302-3; Ernest J. Dick, “A Challenge to Archivists and the ACA,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 304-5; Bob Taylor-Vaisey, “Archivist-Historians Ignore the Information Revolution,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 305-8; and George Bolotenko, “Of Ends and Means: In Defence of the Archival Ideal,” *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), pp. 241-47. The debate was anticipated by two earlier pieces: Terry Cook, “Clio: The Archivist’s Muse?” *Archivaria* 5 (Winter 1977-78), pp. 198-203; and Wilcomb Washburn, “The Archivist’s Two-Way Stretch,” *Archivaria* 7 (Winter 1978-79), pp. 137-43.

3 Taylor, “Information Ecology,” p. 30.

4 Bolotenko, “Of Ends and Means,” *passim*.

centre, the contrary tugs of access and privacy laws, the increasing statutory requirements in many aspects of records management and archival work — all these concerns threaten the quality and completeness of the archival record. Implicitly, they threaten the existence of the archival profession, for what good are archivists if they cannot cope with these changes? To ward off irrelevancy, Taylor argues that archivists must become part of the mainstream of records creation and use within the sponsoring agencies. Archivists must master the new technologies, the new media, the new holistic approach to “information” rather than mere “records” and “papers.” They must move out of their archives into the administrative departments of their sponsoring institutions if they are to have any hope of capturing the new, fragile, easily erasable information for permanent retention. Once captured, that information should not be carried off to be secreted in an archives, but left in departments for long-term administrative reference, under the charge of departmental archivists, more or less as were the great medieval rolls and legal documents of state in the early modern era before the notion of “historical” archives cut them asunder. The profession, in short, must move “out of the ‘historical shunt’ and back into the administrative levels of departmental record keeping and among the policy makers where we [archivists] belong.”<sup>5</sup>

If archives are thus left primarily in departments — and let one assume under proper storage environments with reasonable public access (a large assumption!) — many advantages would doubtless ensue. Rather than as is now the case with the federal and most provincial archives where each archivist is responsible for the archival records of two or three major agencies (and numerous minor ones), the departmental or in-house archivist (and perhaps even some assistants?) would be able to concentrate on one agency alone. Furthermore, the in-house archivist could “piggy-back” onto the department’s manual and automated retrieval systems rather than re-creating finding aids in autonomous archives where departmental systems are sometimes not transferred (because they are still in use) or just plain lost. Such an archivist could also be at the computer face, as it were, to schedule electronic data as required at the time of creation, rather than waiting until the time of disposition when it often no longer exists. The departmental archivist would also obviously know the nuances of the agency’s current programmes and personnel better than an “outside” archivist, and might therefore have better luck in scheduling and retaining archival records — although the role and status of in-house records managers, as revealed by Eldon Frost and Bryan Corbett, hardly augurs well in that regard.<sup>6</sup> Finally, programme administrators might be able to make better decisions by having ready access to long-term policy precedents and similar information that might be stored in a departmental archives.

Yet such arguments beg many questions. If all this is so, then why even have central archives at federal, provincial, municipal, county, corporate, or university levels? Is it merely a question of economy of scale, of administrative efficiency,

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5 Taylor, “Information Ecology,” p. 34.

6 See Bryan Corbett and Eldon Frost, “The Acquisition of Federal Government Records,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 210-32.

or of researcher convenience? I think not, for the fragmentation of the archives of any organic entity — whether an oil company, a labour union, a provincial university, or the federal government — into little archival fiefdoms scattered throughout that agency or jurisdiction's various departments would render both archives and society the poorer for it, and for reasons quite aside from efficiency and economy. In particular, the independence of the archivist and thus the quality of acquisitions would suffer, and the understanding and thus the use of records would be severely eroded.<sup>7</sup>

On the first point, the independence of the archivist as the guardian of the essential records of civilization against all comers should never be abandoned. Can one really believe that archivists hired by and under the control of the FBI or the RCMP will preserve a neutral, disinterested archival record? If Richard Nixon had hired his own archivists to conserve his tapes and records in some hypothetical White House Archives, can anyone believe that the result would be the same as under the neutral control of the National Archives and Records Administration? In-house archivists would be like in-house records managers — despite the best will in the world and solid professional leadership, usually impotent before the power of their bureaucratic masters. As Patrick Dunae has already warned, the temptation of archivists to become “captive” to the dynamic imperatives and self-interests of their sponsors is already real enough in 1984; a far more intimate in-house relationship would hasten this regrettable trend.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Hugh Taylor even concludes that “departmental loyalties and priorities would have to be respected. . . .”<sup>9</sup> One can almost hear hands rubbing together with glee at the CIA, RCMP, FBI, and Justice and Attorneys-General's departments at the prospect of such a proposition becoming archival dogma!

Furthermore, archivists working in independent, centralized archives refine the broader cultural aims of archives in ways that no isolated in-house (and dependent) archivist is likely to do. Hugh Taylor's prescription seems to ignore the total archives concept which is central to the Canadian archival experience. With the exception of a few archives mainly in the corporate sector, almost all Canadian archives acquire both institutional records and private collections, across all media. In Taylor's in-house scenario, where, for example, would private papers go? Certainly no in-house departmental or corporate archives, driven by administrative rather than cultural objectives, would sanction their collection on anything but the most narrow criteria. Is not Taylor's model based on the British and French archival traditions which Canadians by adhering to

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7 I want to underline that I am not opposing in-house archives as the term is normally understood, that is, the establishment by a labour union, church, or business corporation of its own internal archives, rather than sending its records to some centralized federal, provincial, or municipal repository. Rather I am opposed to Hugh Taylor's recommendation that the records of parent organizations having long-term value to bureaucrats, which are now kept in those centralized archives, be dispersed in future to twenty or thirty separate departments or agencies. Within the “normal” in-house definition, this would mean that an oil company or major bank would not have a centralized archives, but would have its records scattered in each of its operating branches and divisions.

8 Dunae, “Archives and the Spectre of 1984,” *passim*.

9 Taylor, “Information Ecology,” p. 31.

total archives have rejected — and with good reason. In his in-house archival operation devoted almost exclusively to the administrative, legal, and evidential side of archives, would the exciting new ground broken, for example, by archivists in the National Photography Collection in the field of amateur photography have been possible?<sup>10</sup> And what of the value of those case files that Hugh Taylor rightly sees as important to getting beyond traditional elitist history to study the history of the masses, of the real people behind the leaders and parliaments? The new sources for contemporary demographic historical studies were not collected because of any departmental fiat; departmental officials and records managers gladly assigned the minimum retention period of two years to such records, to be followed by destruction, and archivists until recently as readily approved such record schedules. Yet it was archivists schooled in history, talking to historians, reading and even researching and writing the new social history, that turned things around in the past decade and reoriented the collection policies of archives to include sampling of case file series that before were blithely thrown away. What department would agree to the retention of such records — with all the attendant costs and space involved — according to the purely administrative/legal/evidential aims of Taylor's in-house archivists?<sup>11</sup>

While it is true, as many of Bolotenko's critics have pointed out, that archivists need to sharpen their tools, develop new procedures, and hone new approaches to cope with the information revolution and computerization, it does not follow that the historical basis and training for archival work should therefore be overthrown. Indeed, to do so would leave archives as sterile collections of legal, proprietary, financial, and similar long-term administrative records — quite bereft of the broad-based collections they now have that support a wide range of cultural investigation and understanding.

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10 See the triptych authored by Andrew Birrell, Peter Robertson, Lilly Koltun, Andrew Rodger, Joan Schwartz, and Ann Thomas under the general title, "Private Realms of Light: Canadian Amateur Photography, 1839-1940," *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 106-44. On the general nature of total archives, see Terry Cook, "The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on 'Total Archives,'" *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979-1980), pp. 141-49. This piece generated much discussion and therefore amplification of the total archives concept: see *Archivaria* 10 (Andrew Birrell), 11 (National Film, Television, and Sound Archives staff), 12 (Terry Cook), and 18 (Richard Berner).

11 Hugh Taylor observes that history has often been elitist in orientation and served particular causes — often not very glorious ones. That this, however, reflects poorly on "historical" archives and archivists schooled in history, as he implies, is a *non sequitur*. Those very same archives and archivists have also collected and promoted the use of the records that now support the writing of the history of unions, women, natives, farmers, and other non-elite groups. (See Taylor, "Information Ecology," pp. 28, 32, for example.) I do not mean to imply in this paragraph that the new social history is possible only because of new collecting policies of archivists. Many medieval records, to state the obvious, were collected without any knowledge of the possibilities of demographic research, yet such records support that research now. Similarly the records of modern administration were kept for reasons that had nothing to do with the new social history. Well and good, but in addition to that there has been an awakening by archivists in the past ten years to the need to collect such case records *consciously* and to develop the complex sampling methodologies needed to do so without filling countless warehouses with mountains of paper. It is the causes of that awakening that I address here.

Indeed, in all this anti-history, anti-cultural posturing of archivists, perhaps they are believing a bit too keenly their own press releases and budget submissions to sponsoring agencies. Perhaps in so doing they are unwittingly encouraging their own dependent or "captive" state. Archivists delight in telling their sponsors how they, the archivists, are preserving the corporate "collective memory" and how, if only funds are forthcoming, those vital administrative records so necessary for the long-term functioning of the parent organization will continue to be safely managed. While this is true to a point, strident proponents of such views seem to forget that records also have informational value far beyond their narrow, original (and continuing) official value. And the identification of such informational, research value *over time* is by definition "historical," and to be done properly requires historical knowledge and historical research methodology. To deny or even to downplay the informational or secondary value of records simply reduces archives to registry offices and archivists to records managers.

The second major factor militating against in-house archives concerns the understanding and use of records. In studying the origin, evolution, and nature of records in their care — a point to which I shall return in much more detail — archivists share ideas and knowledge to the benefit of every archival function and of users. For example, the archival legacy of the old Department of the Interior, which was abolished in 1936, is scattered to a greater or lesser degree in the holdings of numerous federal departments: Mines and Resources; Mines and Technical Surveys; Resources and Development; Northern Affairs and National Resources; Energy, Mines and Resources; Indian Affairs and Northern Development; Environment; Royal Canadian Mounted Police; National Research Council; Citizenship and Immigration; Manpower and Immigration; Employment and Immigration; and the Geological Survey of Canada. And those are just the main-line departments, not the myriad of branches and divisions within them, sometimes joined, sometimes separate, always in flux between various parent agencies. The solitary in-house archivist situated in *each* of these parent departments will miss the rich interaction of archivists working together on interrelated custodial projects or user inquiries on all such records, without which duplication and mediocrity must result. Furthermore, what happens to provenance, to the records of, say, the Canadian Forestry Service or the Immigration Branch which have been housed in five or six of those successor parent departments in this century? Does each in-house archives hang onto its bit of Forestry or Immigration records, rather than have them all united in logical series in one record group or groups in a central archives? And what of Hugh Taylor's legitimate advocacy of long-term administrative needs? Will the parent department (not to say the public) really be well served by the cosy in-house archival situation he recommends? Take the case of the linear mile of federal Indian Affairs Branch archival records. These records are used almost every day by officials of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs to prepare and defend native claims cases in court, to administer long-term trust and other funds, and to search individual client histories for various benefit programmes. The active use of records for land and other native claims would alone involve issues amounting to scores of millions of dollars annually. Yet, despite this steady current use, these records are in the control not of the Department of Indian

and Northern Affairs, but of the Public Archives of Canada. There they have been subject to the most extensive computer indexing and microfilming projects of any series of records with which I am familiar. After much research and study, they have been arranged into numerous complex series and an inventory has been published. They have had expert conservation work and repair. They are stored in environmentally sound areas. Copies of the filmed records and the microfiche indexes have been diffused to archives, universities, and native bands across the country. In most cases, native researchers see the PAC archivists as neutral and trustworthy custodians of their heritage, qualities they often do not accord to officials of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. Would these Indian Affairs records — voluminous, complex, old (back to the mid-1700s), fragile, politically sensitive, and heavily used — have been better cared for in some departmental archives? Would the public or even the department have been better served by such an archives? The decision-making capabilities of the department and court defences based on these records have never been hindered by their PAC location. Would native groups believe that appraisal/destruction had been carried out in a completely non-prejudicial way? On all counts, the answer is an emphatic “no.” Readers might well reflect that the RCMP has an in-house archival programme for similarly sensitive records and that the quality of its archival records in the central repository and the public’s access to the in-house collection are both abysmal. Readers might recall as well the horror stories recounted by Louis Knafla concerning court records — including bonfires of old files and dockets in the vacant lot next door to the courthouse — as another example of in-house “loyalties and priorities” being applied to records of long-term administrative value.<sup>12</sup>

In complaining about the “historical shunt” and advancing the logical opposite extreme — in-house archives — Hugh Taylor has admirably followed the courage of his convictions, with characteristically colourful examples and analysis.<sup>13</sup> Other critics of Nesmith, Bolotenko, and the “historian-archivist” might not go so far, at least consciously. Yet the logical conclusion of their position would not be very different from Taylor’s scenario. Indeed, some such as Bob Taylor-Vaisey or Richard Kesner already write from that perspective.<sup>14</sup>

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12 See Louis A. Knafla, “‘Be It Remembered’: Court Records and Research in the Canadian Provinces,” *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), pp. 105-23.

13 He may well argue that I have been unfair in criticizing his notion of in-house archives. After all, he does concede (“Information Ecology,” p. 31) that there will still be centralized repositories, and it is conceivable that these will pick up some of the slack that I outline concerning his in-house proposal. My point is that, even in relative if not absolute terms, Hugh Taylor greatly diminishes the crucial role of the independent centralized archives; given his general prescription, his admiration of the medieval archival paradigm, and his attack on history in the broad sense, centralized archives would become very much second-rate, second-class, and second-guessed. They would indeed be true “shunts” for purely dead records quite removed from any dynamic interaction with creators.

14 See Taylor-Vaisey, “Archivist-Historians Ignore the Information Revolution,” *passim*; and Richard M. Kesner, “Automated Information Management: Is There a Role for the Archivist in the Office of the Future?” — a paper delivered at the annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Toronto, 24 May 1984, and appearing elsewhere in this issue of *Archivaria*. Both are employed in corporate situations where the broader total archives approach and cultural concerns of most Canadian archives is relatively weak.

They have all accepted the false corollary that in order to cope with the new, archivists must throw over the old, that to maintain archives in the age of the information revolution, the old notions of "historical" archives no longer work. Here there is a fundamental confusion of means and ends, of technological method and archival substance, of legitimate administrative needs and ultimate cultural goals. No one would deny that there is a need for archivists to master computer technology, the videodisc, electronic mail, records management procedures, library indexing and cataloguing principles, general management theory and practice, and much else. Similarly, one hundred years ago, there was a need for many archivists to master Latin, diplomatic, palaeography, numismatics, and other now-forgotten skills.<sup>15</sup> The social graces and standing of a Sir Arthur Doughty, once thought necessary to wile away personal collections from duchesses and archbishops, have similarly fallen beyond the ken of most modern archivists. But records management, computer literacy, palaeography, social charm, and their like are means, tools, techniques by which archivists do (or did) their work. They are literally instrumental, but they are *not* the substance or goal of archivy. That goal is broadly cultural, and to achieve it requires an historical orientation for archives and an historical training for archivists. From this perspective, the "historical shunt" is not an irrelevant side-tracking of archival endeavour, but the essential locus of its principal cultural contribution.

## II

Before attempting to demonstrate the truth of these rather sweeping assertions, however, I would like to remove some of the thickets of misunderstanding that now entangle the history-archives debate in Canada. The "historian-archivist," the "scholar-archivist," the "traditional archivist" faces the "modern archivist," the "new professional archivist," the "information-manager archivist" across a widening chasm. The gap might well be narrowed, and the heat of the debate usefully lowered, by defining more carefully the perspective of the "historian-archivist." Prior to turning to the positive aspects of the "historical shunt," therefore, I want to explain, if only by way of negative definition, what is not involved in the history-archives connection.

In the first place, "historian-archivists" do not seek a "special relationship with historians,"<sup>16</sup> but with history in the sense of historical knowledge and historical methodology (for reasons I will outline shortly). If to acquire that archivists develop a close relationship with historians (attend their conferences, read their journals, and follow and encourage their research interests), so be it, but that is entirely different from the oft-made suggestion that such archivists are in the first instance pandering to an elite clientele at the expense of other users of archives, whether genealogists or local historians, officials of sponsoring agencies or heritage buffs. As a related aside, "historian-archivists" do not deny that valuable skills, tools, and techniques to improve their craft can be learned from other professions: records managers, librarians, administrators, conservators, computer specialists, geographers, political scientists, literary

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<sup>15</sup> Bolotenko, "Of Ends and Means," p. 246.

<sup>16</sup> Taylor, "Information Ecology," p. 35.



scholars, or linguists. They insist, however, that archivists are not records managers, or librarians, or anything else, but rather that they are archivists and that archival work should be cross-fertilized by these other professions' expertise, not dominated by them.

Furthermore, "historian-archivists" do not, or should not, advocate that part of archival work "on the job" involves the writing of scholarly, academic history in the same sense that engages professional historians. Should archivists wish to pen substantial social, economic, political, or biographical studies in "the amateur part of their lives," to use Hugh Taylor's phrase,<sup>17</sup> the skills acquired in such research, analysis, and writing will doubtless benefit the "professional" part of their lives. This does not mean, however, that archivists view their archival position as a sinecure for hiding in a corner and writing history.

"Historian-archivists" should not, indeed do not, ignore the information revolution nor are they afraid to roll up their sleeves and plunge into the new electronic media or closer relations with records managers. They are alarmed, however, to hear repeatedly that preparing, analyzing, and understanding such machine readable records by archivists "for painstaking and protracted research by the scholar" will in future no longer be required, that archivists must abandon their "traditional" calling for the wiles of records and information management.<sup>18</sup> Despite such assertions, "historian-archivists" believe that the fundamental question remains unanswered: what will happen to these computer records in archives fifty or one hundred years from now? Whether machine readable data files or electronic office correspondence, will there not be exactly the same need as now exists for paper records to study the authorship of such electronic records, their provenance, their context, their interrelationships with other series of records, the functions and organizational structure of their creators, and the evolution of all this over time? Indeed, even before computer records are acquired by archives, is not such knowledge also required to appraise and schedule these records properly, just as in the case of paper records? To answer in the negative to either question only demeans the very electronic records that are at issue. If they *are* such second-class records not worthy of the archival analysis regularly applied to other media of record, both before and after acquisition by an archives, why keep them at all? Archivists to their credit have moved in the past few years from dealing only with information on paper, whether files, maps, documentary art, or photographs, to incorporating sound tapes, film, and videocassettes into their collections — all without revolutionizing the

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, p. 30, as already cited. Richard Kesner in the manuscript of his 1984 paper (cited above in note 14) says this repeatedly: "In the era of automated information systems . . . is there a place for archivists? My response to this question must be 'no' " (p. 2); "If we do not change the way we view the purpose and nature of our performance . . . we will be relegated to the antiquarian curatorial role that we have heretofore rejected" (pp. 2-3); "Simply put, we must cease to act as archivists in the traditional sense; we must become information specialists" (p. 4); and, finally, he ends by advocating "a radical departure from tradition . . . an immediate redirection of our efforts. . . ." (p. 21)

basis tenets and fundamental outlook of the archival profession. Granting that new techniques and timing are needed to cope with electronic records, why then is there such a crisis for this particular new medium?<sup>19</sup>

And, finally, “historian-archivists” do not, or should not, hanker after a mythical Golden Age — despite George Bolotenko’s occasionally nostalgic musings in this regard.<sup>20</sup> Without doubt, Canadian archives in the era of Doughty and Lamb achieved much, federally and provincially, and many leading archivists were also recognized and accomplished historians. Yet few could seriously argue that the archival profession in the 1920s or the 1950s was more dynamic or even more “scholarly” than it is now in the 1980s. Numerous factors demonstrate that Canadian archives in the past decade are better off than ever before: the quality and breadth — to say nothing of the quantity — of archival records and media now being collected; the educational level of new members entering the profession (despite the few exceptions Bolotenko cites, the norm in Canada was a B.A. until the late 1960s; since then the M.A. has become standard and the Ph.D. not uncommon — all still overwhelmingly in history); the creation of a graduate programme for the scholarly study of archives as a separate discipline; the level of serious writing and commentary about archives and records both within archives (inventories, guides, exhibition catalogues, and so on) and in scholarly journals; the increased public awareness and use of archives; and the effective fusion of archival interests in the Association of Canadian Archivists, which in turn sponsors a leading scholarly journal in *Archivaria*, a forum through the annual conference for scholarly reflection (not always achieved, but certainly more spacious than the old Archives Section of the Canadian Historical Association), and an essential lobbying focus with governments over such key issues as access and privacy, copyright, and cultural policy. There is, in short, no desire on the part of “historian-archivists” to turn the clock back, to return literally to the fold of the Canadian Historical Association or to reattach metaphorically the umbilical cord to the profession that nurtured us for decades.

“Historian-archivists” do share a very grave concern, however, that in the heady rush to define a professional independence some of their colleagues have overreacted against history and historians. Such colleagues have, in classical social psychology, reacted as the teenager against the parent, but they seemingly fail to comprehend that it is the act of rebellion, of fractious distinguishing, that is psychologically important, rather than that the values rebelled against are in themselves wrong or threatening. As in the history of other professions that evolved out of a host body, such distinguishing is both necessary (for the new profession must define and feel pride in itself) and limiting (for the withdrawal into the narrow confines of a rigid, isolated intellectual framework is

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19 Could it be that fear of the new technology has led to an overreaction? If we do not radically transform the archival profession into information management in order to (allegedly) cope with computers, so the thinking goes, then we are doomed to dusty irrelevance. Might not such fears be based on a failure to appreciate the history and evolution of archives or the long standing role of the archivist as analyst of the constantly changing media of record?

20 Bolotenko, “Of Ends and Means,” pp. 243, 247.

not only artificial but dangerous).<sup>21</sup> As the archival profession matures, it, like the teenager, will see that parental values have their place. This does not mean that the adolescent becomes the parent, but rather that the young adult if he is to be a whole person cannot deny the values and beliefs that are ineluctably part of his heritage. This indeed is Bolotenko's central insight: there are organic, generic links between archivists and the historical profession, particularly concerning historical knowledge and methodology, that must not be denied, but rather recognized, understood, and incorporated into any definition of the new and evolving archival profession.<sup>22</sup> That such links are now being diminished only sharpens the need for such definition and reintegration.

"Historian-archivists" believe this to be the case not because they want to deny archival professionalism, retreat from the information revolution, maintain elitist relationships, oppose archival education, or return to some mythical past, but rather because they believe that archival work requires it. And they insist that such work is not some luxurious frill performed off the main line on an "historical shunt," but rather the central concern and function of archivists everywhere, in all sizes of archival institutions, for all types of archival media, and in every field of archival endeavour.

Hugh Taylor sensibly asserts that "the archivist is primarily concerned with the communication of the record to the user through preservation and all the subsequent processes with which users have become familiar."<sup>23</sup> What exactly does this mean: how do we communicate intelligently with users (including of course the creator as user) and what is the nature of those subsequent processes? Taylor's statement means, fundamentally, that archivists should direct their attention mainly to what happens to records after they are acquired. This does not deny that different records having potential archival value require different acquisition strategies and scheduling tools, whether yesterday's paper docket or tomorrow's floppy disk, today's television documentary or last century's daguerreotype. It does not deny that archivists have a keen interest in the life cycle of every archival medium, from creation, classification, and contemporary arrangement, through active and dormant use periods, to scheduling and proper disposal. Such interest, however, does not mean that archivists are or should become records managers, much as they need to cooperate with these natural allies. It is the records manager — and not Taylor's in-house or any other kind of archivist — who is responsible for coping with the huge amounts of increasingly complex records of contemporary administration. It is the records manager, not the archivist, who is trained and charged to manage such active information within his agency and to ensure that his administrators have complete and easily retrievable access to it for sound decision-making. Why should the archivist

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21 I thank Terry Eastwood for this insight in a letter to me of 6 July 1983. I have commented before on this search by archivists for a professional identity. See "Clio: The Archivist's Muse?"

22 This theme pervades both of Bolotenko's articles, as cited in note 2 above. While he has carefully outlined the heritage and ethos that history offers to the archival profession, he has not shown very fully how and why this should be incorporated into the archival world of today. I will turn my attention to this task in rest of this paper.

23 Taylor, "Information Ecology," p. 35.

attempt to rescue the policy-maker allegedly fumbling through the modern information labyrinth, and in so doing intrude on the proper role of the records manager and thus abandon at the same time, at least in relative terms, the well-defined, honourable, and necessary role as archivist? Certainly there is no clarion call from either administrators or records managers for this complete reorientation of the archival profession. If anything, they rather resent, in their words, the tail wagging the dog.<sup>24</sup> Hugh Taylor does not really say why archivists must do this except that medieval and Tudor precedent supports it — a curious reliance on historical argument to deny the central value of history — and that archivists simply “belong” in the creating departments. They do not. Their role with active records is limited to scheduling them according to careful archival standards and in close cooperation with the records manager. With easily erasable electronic records, as also with certain television and radio records, such activity might well occur at the “front end” of the life cycle of records, that is, at the time of creation. But that does not mean that the archivist’s role extends to any active management of current records within a department’s information systems. While some individuals are employed as both archivists and records managers, this does not mean that the two roles or the two professions are identical, or that one should merge with the other — whether on the administrative main line or the parallel archival one.<sup>25</sup> There are active, increasingly important switching points between the two lines, and careful maintenance and lubrication of those links is obviously desirable, but that does not mean that the two trains should run on the same track.

If Taylor’s ideal of the communication of the record to the user focuses archival attention, therefore, on understanding the records in the archivist’s care rather than on managing those properly under the purview of the records manager, it also does not deny that archival records, once acquired, must be controlled carefully (the traditional “archival administration” regarding location, access, security, conservation) and administered efficiently (buildings, budgets, public relations, personnel). These issues are important, and deserve attention and study. But such administrative concerns are identical to those shared by librarians, gallery curators, and museum custodians towards their collections. And so the essential question remains. What do archivists do that

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24 Ira A. Penn, “Federal Records Management in the 1980’s — Is Just Like It Was in the 1780’s,” *Records Management Quarterly* ARMA (July 1984), pp. 5-15. In this incisive analysis by a leading records manager of the inherent problems of records management over the last two hundred years, no small amount of blame is placed at the foot of archival involvement — or overinvolvement — in records management, which in his view “indicates a complete lack of understanding of the records management function . . . a textbook case of functional misalignment. The tail was wagging the dog.” I thank Robert Hayward for bringing this article to my attention.

25 Those who attack the “historian-archivist” most vigorously, such as Tony Rees, Bob Taylor-Vaisey, and Scott James (see note 2 above), are themselves both records managers and archivists. That is fine, but they should not extrapolate from that that, because their jobs happen to combine the two professions, this is a condition that all should copy, especially when such merging is at the expense of one profession’s identity and orientation. Archivists also double in some situations as librarians, gallery or museum curators, town clerks, or official historians, but no one suggests a merging with these related but separate professions. So, too, should it be with records or information management.

is unique? What special understanding do they bring to the materials in their trust that other heritage and cultural conservers do not? What is the archivist's *raison d'être*? Or, put negatively, why are there archivists at all?

Here, then, is the crux of the position advocated by the "historian-archivist." What is the unique cultural contribution of the archivist and how is historical knowledge and methodology essential to its success? Such a contribution may be found in three main areas: the study of records in the aggregate; the appraisal, description, and careful understanding of the informational value found in individual documents; and the development of archival theory within the broader humanities and social sciences.

### *Provenance and Context*

Whether appraising private materials or corporate/government records, archivists must understand records in the aggregate. They must research to determine the provenance of a collection or series; its integrity as a *fonds*; its original order or filing arrangement (if lost or unclear); the interests and activities of its author (if an individual), or the administrative structure, decision-making processes, functions, and legal mandates of the corporate creator; the evolution and changes of these factors over time and the consequent influence on records creation and complex registry systems; the use of records over time by their creator; the peculiarities and characteristics of the medium of record; and the interrelationships of each collection or series with similar ones to which they are organically related. (As mentioned before, such knowledge is as essential to the appraisal and scheduling of records before transfer as it is to arrangement and description afterwards.) Archival theorists the world over have underlined this intellectual (as opposed to administrative) role for the profession. Michael Roper of the British Public Record Office wrote that "it is incumbent on the archivist to be an administrative historian and to explain to users the administrative background to records in his archives and the arrangement which they have acquired as a consequence." This is absolutely crucial because most users of archives "find the arrangement of archives in accordance with the agencies which created them rather than by subjects difficult to grasp and this has become especially so as administration has become more complex and has extended into new areas of activity."<sup>26</sup> In his careful probing of the central archival principle of *respect des fonds*, Michel Duchein, Inspector General of the Archives of France, concluded by stating that "*the analysis of the jurisdiction of agencies creating archival fonds and of their changes constitutes an essential and basic part of archival work*. No treatment of *fonds* can be validly conceived without this preliminary analysis. . . . An archival finding aid [or inventory] cannot, indeed, limit itself to 'describing' baldly the documents which make up a *fonds*. An introduction to the agency from which the *fonds* comes,

26 Michael Roper, "The Academic Use of Archives," *Archivum*, the proceedings of the 9th International Congress on Archives (1980), p. 33.

about its history, about its jurisdiction and its changes, about the history of the *fonds* itself, of its formation and arrangement, must precede every finding aid of a *fonds*.”<sup>27</sup> And Canada’s Hugh Taylor argues that “the archivist must become aware of the documentary context of the record, both administrative and in terms of its form, which requires a study of diplomatic, ancient and modern, set within the larger frame of culture and society.” Indeed, he goes further and bemoans our lack of knowledge of the effectiveness of departmental records-keeping systems over time, of whether the records created and preserved were effective administrative instruments in the decision-making processes of their creators, of how “limited, fragmented, and classified information” effected the evolution of the modern state and even of archival theory itself. Never one to rest on his considerable laurels, Taylor thus pioneered a course in the new Master of Archival Studies (M.A.S.) programme to consider these issues; “Society and the Documentary Record” seeks to “explore the nature of records through history, their impact on government, and the impact of the principal media of record on society and hence on the user.”<sup>28</sup> Such study of records over time to discern their origin, context, evolution, and contemporary use is by definition “history.” The corollary to this is obvious: the sophisticated study of any historical theme — native policy, railroads, imperialism, women, *and* records — requires the tools, perspectives, methodologies, interpretive power, and familiarity with historical literature and historiography that becomes second nature to the graduate student of history. It is for this reason that the M.A.S. programme now offers, in addition to Taylor’s course noted above, a compulsory course in administrative history and Canadian historiography. It is not good enough, in Taylor’s phrase, that the archivist be “aware” of the historical and documentary context of records — a doctor should be more than aware of anatomy. It is not good enough to have only some vague historical sensibility, or perspective, or appreciation. Rather the archivist must be carefully trained in history and historical research skills if he is to unravel the history of the records in his care, as prescribed by Roper, Duchein, Taylor, Nesmith, and others. Indeed, Nesmith has coined the useful phrase “the history of the record” to describe this central intellectual task facing the archivist.<sup>29</sup> Given the extreme subtleties and complexities of many records, series, and media, the more advanced such historical training, the better the archivist *qua* archivist (not as closet historian). Such is the archival educational ideal of Europe: a doctorate in a relevant field of knowledge (usually history) followed by yet more graduate

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27 Michel Duchein, “Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems of *Respect des fonds* in Archival Science,” *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), p. 82. Original emphasis.

28 Taylor, “Information Ecology,” pp. 35, 28; and Hugh A. Taylor, “Canadian Archival Literature Revisited,” *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), p. 11.

29 See Tom Nesmith, “Archives from the Bottom Up,” *passim*. Nesmith’s is the finest statement in print about the place of history in archival work and the unique scholarly mission possible for archivists.

work in archival studies.<sup>30</sup> Without such skills, knowledge, and thus *archival* understanding of the history and nature of records, the level of archival acquisition, selection, arrangement, description, and public service would be woefully superficial. Without them, the archivist becomes a warehouse operator moving about boxes, tapes, cabinets, and disks with, in relative terms, no comprehension of their contents or context.<sup>31</sup>

### *Informational Value*

The second area where historical knowledge and historiography have a major impact on archival work concerns the study of individual documents, particularly the search for informational value — although clearly the study of records in the aggregate as just discussed would be a prerequisite for the identification of many kinds of evidential or official value in records as it would be for the identification of informational value. But there is a further aspect involved here. Events, people, dates, and locales all figure prominently in letters, diaries, files, and photographs. Casual allusions or cross references (without explicit names or dates or facts) abound in archival documents to an editor of this newspaper or a minister of that portfolio, the treaty of this year or the strike of that month, the great calamity in this county or the corporate merger of several years ago. Who? What? Where? When? How can the archivist make acquisition decisions, prepare adequate finding aids, or provide minimum public service if such allusions are lost on him? While no one can know everything, a thorough training in the relevant general field of history would mean that no obvious allusions would slip through or that the archivist would certainly know where to look for the answers. Such training would establish in short a better lowest common denominator in such matters. Would the archivist not schooled in history even know where to start? Would he even know there was a problem? Should the archivist confronted with a question by a researcher as to why a crucial Indian document had been torn in two, sewn together, and covered with all kinds of initials reply, “I don’t know”? Should an archivist facing queries about a Yukon diary without known author, date, or context similarly shrug, “I don’t know”?

30 “Historian-archivists” should certainly support archival education, especially the unique Master of Archival Studies programme at the University of British Columbia. As will be seen below, its attempt to define and forward the study of archives is fully compatible with the aims of the “historian-archivist.” As in Europe, however, such graduate archival education must be built on a firm base, almost always in history. The Society of American Archivists’ Committee on Education and Professional Development concluded, after much study of the basic qualifications of employment, that “training in research methods and experience in conducting original research is *essential* if the archivist is to fully discharge his or her professional responsibilities.” (“Educational Directory,” *SAA Newsletter*, March 1983, special insert, p. 2, emphasis added.)

31 Even historians (as opposed to “historian-archivists!”) who have thought carefully about archives object to the provenance/context approach, favouring instead subject/fact/name retrieval. Advocates of the provenance/context approach such as Richard Berner and myself are explicitly challenged by them. See Peter A. Baskerville and Chad M. Gaffield, “The Vancouver Island Project: Historical Research and Archival Practice,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 173-87. Their assertions have been questioned by Gordon Dodds in “Provenance Must Remain the Archival ‘Bottom Line,’” and by Richard Berner in “Vancouver Island Project Fails to Grasp the Significance of Provenance,” both in *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), pp. 4-8.

Should the archivist if asked whether certain photographs are fakes, re-enactments, or censored and air-brushed be content with another “I don’t know”? Or does the archivist conduct careful historical research, as in these three examples, through many complex sources to determine “the history of the record”? Simple professional integrity leaves no choice, unless again archivists prefer the ideal of warehouse operators: control without understanding.<sup>32</sup>

General historiographical insights also help the archivist to determine informational value. While historical “truth” is subjective and reinterpreted each generation (as indeed are the prominent schools of literary criticism, philosophy, psychology, sociology, geography, and much else), certain broad historical trends and research methodologies can inform the archivist. Quantitative research, demographic analysis, intellectual history, psychohistory, and many aspects of the new social history all have implications for archival acquisition and description. Not to belabour the obvious, the issue of case files already mentioned is a good example. Archivists should not, of course, set their acquisition or descriptive priorities according to the fickle trends of the latest *subject* fads of history graduate schools. But they should pay careful attention to new general trends and methodologies used by historians — not for historians’ sake or some atavistic urge, but to collect a better, fuller record for everyone. As Hugh Taylor rightly points out, the new demographic case records recently brought to prominence by various users of archives, if now preserved by archivists, will also have a great impact on local heritage studies, family histories, and genealogy as well as on academic research.<sup>33</sup> They are also not without administrative use to sponsoring or parent agencies. Recent questions from administrators on the nature of forms used for naturalization of Canadian immigrants in the 1930s or the level of signing authority needed to admit German refugees after the Second World War were both partly answered by recourse to immigration case files. And in both cases, only an incomplete answer could be given simply because only a handful of such case files had seemingly by accident survived.

The study of the informational value of records has implications as well for the legal facet of archival work. This is worth exploring in some detail. To be admissible in court as credible evidence, archival documents must meet several criteria: be created in the ordinary course of business, be contemporary (or nearly so) with the events or facts described, be secure from tampering or falsification, and be under the continuous custody of a records manager/archivist who as an expert witness can vouch for these criteria.<sup>34</sup> In the light of such legal

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32 For the three case studies, see David Hume, “Life’s Embarrassing Moments — Right Treaty, Wrong Adhesion: John Semmens and the Split Lake Indians,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 261-65; Gerald G. Cumming, “Archival Detective Work: The Case of the Yukon Field Force Diary,” *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), pp. 248-60; and Peter Robertson, “More than Meets the Eye,” *Archivaria* 2 (Summer 1976), pp. 33-43.

33 Taylor, “Information Ecology,” pp. 31-32.

34 See Kenneth L. Chasse, “The Legal Issues Concerning the Admissibility in Court of Computer Printouts and Microfilm,” *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), pp. 166-201. It has been suggested that Chase overstates his case — that the rules for the admissibility of evidence from archival sources are not as difficult as indicated. See A.F. Sheppard, “Records and Archives in Court” elsewhere in this issue of *Archivaria*.



requirements, especially in relation to modern corporate and government registry records, the close connection between records management and archives, the concern for records systems and threatening technological change, and the desire to maintain control of simple provenance become increasingly important. That is perfectly sensible and finds no argument here. But it is only part of the story.

What do these legal factors mean in reality to the archivist for the records in his care? What kinds of questions in legal disputes over fishing grounds, unclear boundary delineations, or native land claims might be posed to the archivist in court, when called forward as a witness or required to answer in a deposition? Consider a map (or series of maps) which seems to support one side in a land dispute. The Crown prosecutor or defending lawyer might grill the archivist on the inks, papers, and techniques used to produce the map. Is the map an original drawn at one point in time or an office copy to which information was added later? Who added that information? Who instructed him to do so? When? Why? Are the inks and paper and watermarks and support medium contemporary with the date at which the map was supposedly made? What kind of engraving or offset process was used to produce the map? How typical was this process at the time? How accurate were the instruments in use when the map was made? What errors were likely to creep in between the field survey and the final map? What indeed was the entire process from first surveyor to final cartographer: how many hands touched it, where, how far apart in time? If a projection was used, what are its mathematical characteristics, and the resultant distortions? For an archivist to answer these kinds of questions obviously requires much study and experience, all of it based on historical research into the history of records, media, engraving and printing technologies, administrations, and contemporary political, social, and economic contexts. Courts would be less interested in the provenance or continuous custody of the map than in a demonstration of its authenticity; in short, it would not matter who owns it — or owned it — so long as it could be proven genuine. Careful control of records systems and provenance would obviously aid in understanding any record and its context, and thus in determining its authenticity, whether it had been tampered with, and so on, but such “control” factors are only part of the legal dimension of archival custodianship. Only through the thorough study of the history of records can the archivist be fully knowledgeable of his collections and thus meet his legal obligations to them. It goes without saying that such knowledge not only serves the archivist during his possible day in court, but also every kind of researcher from the genealogist to the academic to the corporate administrator who, without such guidance, may seriously misinterpret or misrepresent the document. The implications of such study for appraisal (distinguishing forgeries, facsimiles, and later editions from authentic originals) should be equally obvious, and for all archival media.<sup>35</sup>

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35 This paragraph owes much to my discussions with Ed Dahl, Curator of Early Cartography, National Map Collection, Public Archives of Canada. For an analogous example of document analysis, see his “Facsimile Maps and Forgeries,” *Archivaria* 10 (Summer 1980), pp. 261-63. I have also tried to practise what I preach: see my “‘A Reconstruction of the World’: George R. Parkin’s *British Empire Map* of 1893,” *Cartographica* (forthcoming in early 1985); and *Records of the Northern Affairs Program* (Ottawa, 1982), among others.

*Archival Theory*

The third area where the archivist can make a unique cultural contribution by the study of historical themes over time is the development of archival theory. In this regard the challenge has been raised by Frank Burke in his seminal article, "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," in which he focuses a clear beam on the deeper substance and significance of archival work and offers a lofty sense of vision to archivists seeking to define their role in society.<sup>36</sup> Surveying such leading American archival writers as Schellenberg, Posner, Holmes, Norton, Kahn, and Buck, Frank Burke found them all obsessed with the practical and the pragmatic to a large degree; all basically wrote methodological or administrative manuals to aid in solving the daily problems of running an archival programme. Well and good — such advice is essential, no one would deny it, and every archivist has gained much from such pioneering efforts. Yet by asking "what" and "how" instead of "why," these archivists did not get behind the procedures, methods, and technologies of archival work to probe its deeper meaning, which is the study of records and their relationship to society at large. Historians will not do this; they are interested in the factual content and interpretation of records, not in the actual nature of the records themselves. But archivists can undertake such study: indeed, it is the natural culmination of their work.

Such study, as mentioned earlier, is not a luxurious frill or the exclusive preserve of large national archival institutions, but rather has a crucial relevance to the daily work of all archivists in arranging and describing records, establishing their provenance and contemporary context, performing valid appraisals and records scheduling, and providing informed public service. But there is a further significance to such study of records. Based on a thorough knowledge of individual documents, archival media, and series of records, the archivist gradually should be able to recognize patterns, commonalities, and themes over time (which by definition is "history") that will allow him to transcend such study and address much larger questions. These form the locus of archival theory and the profession's potential unique contribution to the broader humanities and social sciences. Such questions might explore the deeper dimensions of the practical and psychological impulses in society that lie behind the creation of records — why do people *need* to document their activities (beyond the obvious reasons) and how do such needs in turn affect the documents created; the sociological aspects of records management in order to learn *why* (rather than how) certain organizations — churches, businesses, unions, governments — function as they do; the always thorny issue of what is historical "truth" — do the records reflect reality which the historians then interpret, or are the records themselves

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36 Frank G. Burke, "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981), pp. 40-46. Much of what follows is suggested by his analysis and examples. Resonances of his ideas may be found in Nesmith, "Archives from the Bottom Up;" and in Gordon Dodds, "Canadian Archival Literature: A Bird's-Eye View," *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), especially pp. 37-40.

mere interpretations by their creators of fragments of reality, or mere fragments of the creator's reality based on archivists' own biased interpretations and selectivity; the whole study of decision-making processes and power structures in the organization and management of a corporate body, and the relation of these to "information," or lack of information; the relationship (perhaps a two-way one?) between major ideological paradigms in a given society — theological, political, economical, bureaucratic, ethical — and the creation and use of records, and how changes in the one affected the other; McLuhanesque questions of the nature of communications, theories of knowledge, the symbiotic link of medium and message; and, finally, the mystical, almost atavistic nature of the document itself as a talisman of truth, the symbol of authenticity, the document as museum artifact and intrinsic relic or as disposable medium for the purveyance of information. These broad issues of knowledge, communications, and societal dynamics are addressed to some degree, of course, by other professions but, given their common base in the study of records, information, and media, who better than the archivist to bring fresh perspectives to these fundamental issues? Such speculation will encourage the development of archival theory, perhaps even lead to a philosophy of archives. It flows from but ultimately transcends even the "history of the record" approach for, in addition, it includes an analysis of the history and evolution of archives, archival administration, and the careers of leading archivists; it encompasses communications theory; it concerns the underlying significance (rather than procedures) of records management and conservation; it probes the patterns of use (and non-use) of archival documents; and it seeks at all times a close link between the archival issues being studied and contemporary society. The study of archives, as all this may be termed, provides, in short, a unifying and central purpose for the archival profession in the next generation.

These are lofty ideals for archives. Frank Burke sensibly warns that the "great works" in these fields might not be written by archivists for fifty years. Progress will be slow, and accomplished largely by archivists sprung from the day-to-day administration of archives, whether by appointments to university faculties, sabbaticals, or other study leaves. Yet this does not deny the validity of the search. Indeed, to do so would reduce archivists to mere handmaidens, whether to historians, corporate sponsors, or genealogists. It would deny that the profession has any *direct* contribution to make to human knowledge. It would deny the profession's solid endorsement of graduate education for archivists. Why do a Master of Archival Studies thesis or even course papers, especially as the thesis (as with all graduate theses in any discipline) is required to make an original contribution to the field of knowledge? Simply because such research and writing advance human knowledge or "truth." Can working archivists, in a new and young profession, seriously suggest that a similar ideal should not motivate them? While not all or even most archivists will be actively engaged in these scholarly pursuits — the day-to-day work must go on — *all* archivists must now strongly support those who are so engaged: encourage research in our institutions and by our employees, maintain vehicles for its expression in journals, conferences, and seminars, read carefully the published results, and integrate the findings, after proper debate and reflection, into our professional life. It is the only

sound prescription for professional health and dynamism, for maintaining the long-term social relevance of our work.<sup>37</sup>

In summary, then, the study of archives encompasses the history of records, media, and series in the aggregate; the investigations required to appraise, describe, and understand individual documents; and the development of archival theory within the broader social sciences and humanities. As shown, such study requires at almost every point the knowledge, skills, and methodology of the historian. Therefore, while the archivist is not an historian as the term is generally understood, he must nevertheless be an historian, if a special kind of historian, in order to fulfil the essential and unique challenges of the *archival* profession.

Is no reconciliation possible between the “historian-archivist” who holds the above views and the “information-management specialist” championed by Hugh Taylor, Richard Kesner, and others? Must the profession always be peopled by groups of hyphenated archivists eyeing each other uneasily? I hope not, for ideally the two camps are not as far apart as might be imagined. Hugh Taylor in essence is looking for a new breed of records manager to cope with increasingly complex types and media of information and increasing bureaucratic needs to retrieve that information efficiently. To return to distasteful hyphenations, it might be suggested that Taylor is wishing for an “archivist-records manager,” perhaps even stretching it to an “historian-archivist-records manager” or a “scholar-records manager,” for the skills that Taylor envisions as important for his in-house archivist are not far different from those which I advocate above or Frank Burke sees in the future: sophisticated knowledge of administrations and decision-making processes, a firm grasp of communications theory, an advanced understanding of various media and recording technologies, and sharpened skills of research and analysis to place ever more complex records and information in an informed context. Likewise Richard Kesner remarks that many of the new electronic records “may be of major significance as defined in *traditional* archival terms.” And because of this traditional, never-changing centre of our profession, he feels that the archivist, despite certain present failings, is “potentially the best qualified” to cope with the electronic information revolution. This is so because “through training and disposition, the archivist naturally takes a long-term view towards the value (i.e. utility) of information . . . is sensitive to the dynamics of bureaucratic structures, administrative procedures set in a *historical* context, and the needs of researchers.”<sup>38</sup> There

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37 On these notions, see my editorial “Archives and the Law,” *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), p. 23. Hugh Taylor says much the same thing when he calls for “a reasonable mix” in the archival profession of generalists, information managers, and “specialists in media or content (including historians with Ph.D.’s).” (See “Information Ecology,” p. 36.) In small institutions such a mix might have to be found in a single person (thus the crucial necessity of the M.A.S. programme also having the “right” mix); in larger repositories, more specialist hiring would be possible. Such a mix is indeed reasonable, so long as archivists have their priorities clear as a profession, their means and ends carefully distinguished, and their commitment to the broader study of archives and the enhancement of knowledge firmly in place.

38 Kesner, “Automated Information Management” (see note 14 above), pp. 14-16. Emphasis added.

is obviously much common ground here between the "historian-archivist" and the "information-management archivist." Given this large area of mutual agreement, the concern of "historian-archivists" is simply this: those very traditional skills of the archivist, which both sides see as essential in order to cope with the new computer records, are being acutely threatened by a redefinition of our profession that stresses short-term administrative uses for records or information rather than our "traditional" long-term cultural analysis of them, that places archivists in captive, in-house dependency rather than independent, professional association, that sees the "management" of records and information as more important than their scholarly "study," and that emphasizes training in technology and procedures rather than an historical understanding of records in the fullness advocated earlier. If such a redefinition is successful, we will ironically lose the very knowledge and skills that both camps concede are needed to cope with the causes of that redefinition.

### III

Daniel Boorstin, the Librarian of Congress, recently spoke of the challenge to librarians posed by computers, the information explosion, and the need for information management, and archivists would do well heed his words. Libraries are too often equated, he complained, with "information services . . . which is perilously close to saying that knowledge can or should be equated with information." The challenge facing librarians today is to establish "the distinction between knowledge and information, the importance of the distinction and the dangers of failing to recognize it." Knowledge is cumulative, "the enduring treasures of our whole human past. . . ." New books add to it, but do not replace the old books which collectively carry the human experience forward over time. Information Boorstin sees as indiscriminate facts or data which, with the electronic media, are "collected, diffused, stored and retrieved before anyone can discover whether the facts have meaning." Because of the bulk of information being created and the ease of its electronic retrieval, "information tends to drive knowledge out of circulation." Boorstin concludes that "of course we [as libraries and librarians] must be repositories of information. But somehow we must also remain places of refuge from tidal waves of information and misinformation." Libraries above all else "must be conspicuously the treasuries of news that stays news," and in that context "if librarians cease to be scholars to become computer experts, scholars will cease to feel at home in libraries. And then our whole citizenry will find that our libraries add little to their view of the world, but merely reinforce the pressures of the imperial instant-everywhere. . . . Knowledge . . . comes from the free mind foraging in the rich pastures of the everywhere-past. . . , finding order and meaning in the whole human experience."<sup>39</sup>

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39 Cited in the "Foreword" by John Parker, in *The Merchant Explorer: A Commentary on Selected Recent Acquisitions*, Occasional Paper No. 23 of the University of Minnesota Library (Minneapolis, 1983), pp. 3-5. Ali Boorstin's comments cited in this paragraph come from this source. I thank Ed Dahl for bringing this intriguing booklet to my attention.

Archivists, like the librarians of Boorstin's ideal, should be dedicated to finding that order and meaning in the records in their care, through the study of archives in all the dimensions noted earlier. Indeed, the electronic revolution, as one commentator on Boorstin has remarked, especially "behooves us to look back into that earlier [pre-computer] period, not just for similarities of accomplishment or displacement, but to see how threads of continuity pervade across time in spite of technological and social change."<sup>40</sup> That need for continuity is no less true of records and records-keeping practices than it is for any other social phenomena. In fact, it is especially true, for only a firm grounding in the past principles and practices of archives and a thorough understanding of records will enable archivists to cope with future challenges of new media and technologies. Without such continuity, only vacuity remains, a blind flailing without guidance or direction.

The quest for knowledge rather than mere information is the crux of the study of archives and of the daily work of the archivist.<sup>41</sup> All the key words applied to archival records — provenance, *respect des fonds*, context, evolution, interrelationships, order — imply a sense of understanding, of "knowledge," rather than the merely efficient retrieval of names, dates, subjects, or whatever, all devoid of context, that is "information" (undeniably useful as this might be for many purposes). Quite simply, archivists must transcend mere information, and mere information management, if they wish to search for, and lead others to seek, "knowledge" and meaning among the records in their care.

From this perspective then, the "historical shunt" is the glory of archivists, not their regret, the very essence of their unique professional contribution to knowledge and humanity. On the parallel archival line — a metaphor I much prefer to the notion of a dead-end "shunt" — archivists run a priceless train linking past and future. Their cargo is the recorded relics of civilization and they are its trusted guardians. Let them use whatever tools and practices necessary to accomplish this trust, but never let them elevate these means into ends, for viewing the broad historical and cultural ethos of archives as some kind of "shunt" where the boxcars sit idly is to stand the true role of archives on its head.

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40 See John Parker's own comments in *ibid.*, p. 5.

41 This is exactly what some of Bolotenko's critics fail to appreciate. Such scholarly study of records to determine provenance, context, interrelationships, and so on is not an unrealistic luxury, as Carl Spadoni asserts, made at the expense of archives being left poorly sorted and insufficiently described; rather, poor sorting and inadequate description exist precisely because archivists do not understand the records in their care in the scholarly depth advocated by Duchein, Roper, Nesmith, and others. Such misinformed archivists cannot see the grand custodial forest, with all its fascinating paths and interesting by-ways, because of the trees, or even the shrubs, or ferns, or weeds. See Spadoni's counterpoint "In Defence of the New Professionalism: A Rejoinder to George Bolotenko" elsewhere in this issue of *Archivaria*.