

From the Editor

ARCHIVARIA AFTER TEN YEARS

Somewhere in the United States (and to my knowledge so far only once in Canada) Dr. Ira Progoff is probably conducting another *At a Journal Workshop* designed to set the participants on the path to “an ongoing, open-ended program of *personal* growth.” Dr. Progoff’s students (or patients) are submitted to his “*Intensive Journal* method” of self-analysis which requires them to record their feelings and experiences in minute detail in the specifically prepared workbooks and “Period,” “Daily,” and “Life History,” logs he provides. The “dialogue” they enter in these diaries, says the doctor, will bring them to “a New Now ... the Open Moment of our life.” Whether the general editors of *Archivaria* have been the Dr. Progoff’s of the archival profession is, I suppose, a possibility. No doubt, archivists have sometimes felt like they have been asked to take part in one long “*Intensive Journal*” workshop over the years of *Archivaria*’s existence. If so, does a review of *Archivaria*, which with this issue completes ten years as the “diary” of the Association of Canadian Archivists, lead to our “New Now” or “Open Moment” as a profession?

In the first twenty issues of the journal, successive editors Peter Bower, Ed Dahl, Gordon Dodds, Terry Eastwood, Terry Cook, and myself have encouraged archivists’ attempts to study all facets of recorded information and the knowledge to be gained therefrom — a collective endeavour that may be termed the discipline (or science or study) of archives. While “recorded information” may appear to some as straightforward or unworthy of scholarly study, experience suggests otherwise. As Thomas Mallon suggests in his recent study, *A Book of One’s Own: People and Their Diaries* (New York, 1984), which is based on hundreds of diaries by people as different as Gladstone and Goebbels, and includes the above account of Progoff’s seminars, recording information is no mere passive transcription of fact from observation and memory to permanent document. As a diarist in Mallon’s book says, diary-keeping is “an instrument for knowing ourselves, for creating ourselves.” (p. 87) The very acts of making, using, maintaining, and disposing a record (such as a diary) obviously in themselves select, organize, and intensify experience and become forces shaping perception, behaviour, aspiration, and even the health of the diarist. As Mallon shows, cases of obsession with record keeping have meant that for the diarist “each action and every thought exists only for how it will appear on paper.” (p. 289)*

* I would like to thank a colleague in the Federal Archives Division of the Public Archives of Canada, Brien Brothman, for drawing this book to my attention.

Unlike Mallon's diarists, archives may first give the impression of being largely neutral elements in the pursuit of knowledge — passive receptacles of raw data. And to do their work well, it has rightly been argued that archivists should be as unobtrusive as possible in selecting and arranging archival documents. The wisdom in this counsel is reflected in the archival principles of *provenance* and *respect des fonds* which exist to protect the integrity of documented information. All the same, archivists soon realize when confronted with the seemingly anarchic proliferation of documents — past and present — that their work, despite its studied neutrality, is by necessity a radical intervention in the process of documentation. Archivists intervene to select for preservation only a tiny fraction of this material — a fraction of the minuscule amount of it actually made available to archives. (Regardless, archives bulge with documents.) Archivists then arrange the material and describe both the arrangement and the subject matter of the documents in indexes, finding aids, inventories, and publications of all kinds. They often emphasize certain portions of these holdings in varying configurations mounted in exhibitions. In addition, archivists shape and administer the bureaucracies, budgets, laws, policies, procedures, and technical programmes not only in archives, but in records management, micrographics, conservation, and computer applications which also limit, focus, and drive the archival intervention.

Before arriving in the deceptively tranquil confines of archival reading rooms, documents have had a far from uneventful passage from the stationery shop to the archival shelf. These various interventions which take place for an archives to function at all must be studied to permit it to do the work properly. The human activity which is the province of archives — the recording, use, disposition, and preservation of documentation — is significant and complex enough to require extended analysis to guide archival practice and research. The sustained study of this vast dimension of life gives rise to the discipline of archives. Its exploration has been and is *Archivaria's* purpose.

The discipline of archives has been quickened by greater recognition in research circles that the societal process of documentation makes the use to which documents may be put much more problematic. Archival and historical scholars have long been aware of this type of problem in guarding against forgeries and the possibility of errors of fact in the documents. But as historians investigate the nooks and crannies of "total history" and archives find uses in every aspect of the pursuit of information across every type of medium, broader questions are emerging about the reasons for the very existence or absence of certain kinds of information and documentation. These questions can only be tackled by consideration of such factors as literacy levels and social conditions and attitudes which may or may not have permitted or encouraged documents to have been created and kept, and by ideological tendencies which may or may not have passed over or distorted certain types of information, by the particular technology of the medium of record which may have allowed or favoured documentation of some activities and not others, or by the administrative capacity of major institutions to collect, manipulate, and maintain reliable information. Awareness of these kinds of underlying factors shaping the emergence and characteristics of documentation underlines the fact that information is always fragmentary, skewed, dispersed, and varied in format, media, and content. Knowledge of how and why the documents became this way is a prerequisite to locating and interpreting them in archival institutions.

Study of the origins, purposes, and effects of documentation falls naturally, if not exclusively, into the archivist's domain since archivists, as the first to assess the documents and as their sole custodians, must make their appraisal and stewardship intelligible for those who follow — either as successor custodians or as users of archives. Archivists cannot and should not master the innumerable subject areas documented in the records in their custody; conversely, by the same token, they cannot expect social scientists, lawyers, policy planners, genealogists, or even historians to have a clear grasp of the intricate process of documentation which has produced the records. There is a natural but not rigid division of labour between archivists and users of archives. This division means archivists must be able to account above all for the history of the documentation they turn over to the researcher since they have been solely responsible for its place and care in archives up to that point. The boundaries of the researcher's principal sphere of work begin with this transaction. The archival accounting is based mainly on a general understanding of the history of the society in which the documents were created and used. It proceeds to greater depths of understanding by focusing on the nature of the documents themselves. As Lawrence Geller makes clear in an article in *Archivaria* 16 on the history of archival education in Belgium, study of the history of society, public administration, and archival documents has been the foundation of the discipline of archives in Europe. Its continuing importance there can be observed in Donato Tamblé's note in *Archivaria* 19 on the Schools of the State Archives in Italy where, informed by paleography, ancient languages, diplomatic, and the history of archives, historical knowledge is the core of a curriculum designed to prepare archivists to care for the pre-eighteenth-century documents which form most of that country's archival heritage.

The value of such European experience with archival documents is evident in Michael Clanchy's article in *Archivaria* 11 on the evolution of medieval records. Clanchy reveals important general themes in the study of records, particularly the impact on their characteristics of the tensions in society arising from the movement from a reliance on one means of communication to another (in this case from oral to written documents). Canadian archivists obviously have less direct purpose for extended study of records as old as most of those in Europe; however, the documentary base of Canadian archives in nineteenth- and twentieth-century material is part of the enormous body of post-medieval records which, argues British archival educator Christopher Brooke, begs for analysis.¹ As Terry Cook shows in a masterful analysis in *Archivaria* 19 of the nature and purpose of the discipline of archives, this appeal has been echoed by such leading archivists as Michael Roper in Great Britain, Michel Duchein in France, Hugh Taylor in Canada, and Frank Burke in the United States. The need for a modern intellectual support for archival work which is rooted in the European tradition has also been identified by the recent president of the Society of American Archivists, David B. Gracy II, who said, "We guard everyone's history religiously and disregard that of our own field cavalierly. What do we know of the development of means and patterns of communication, which govern the nature, content, and methods of setting down the information we strive to save, not to mention where we look for the information and how we find it? What knowledge have we of the historical development of archival techniques

1 Christopher Brooke, "The Teaching of Diplomatic," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 4, no. 1 (April 1970), pp. 1-9.

in Europe, the cradle of modern archival administration? Precious little indeed.”² As Gordon Dodds states in the lead article in number 17, it is to this movement in archival thought that *Archivaria* has above all attempted to contribute.

The outpouring of diary-writing which Thomas Mallon discusses was only one stream feeding a flood of new documentation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Articles in *Archivaria* 19, for example, by Bill Russell, Patrick Dunae, Jim Burant, Graham Lowe, Carolyn Gray, and myself give some indication of the tremendous amount of energy, time, and material resources devoted over the last 150 years to devising, producing, distributing, and managing documents of all kinds and to educating people to use and trust them. The need to record information and control documents became an important force in society which influenced education, the labour force (with the emergence of thousands of clerical workers and new professions such as in statistics, photography, filmmaking, and advertising), and institutional developments as governments and corporations turned greater resources to creating and keeping documentation in distinct agencies established solely for those purposes, such as the Dominion Bureau of Statistics set up in 1918. The most advanced work to date in *Archivaria* in this field has been the pioneering contribution of the National Photography Collection of the Public Archives of Canada to the study of photography in Canada in the special issue of the journal devoted to photographic archives (*Archivaria* 5) and the articles in *Archivaria* 17 on the collection's recent major exhibition *Private Realms of Light: Canadian Amateur Photography 1839-1940*. (The publication which accompanies the exhibition is reviewed favourably in the current issue.) Articles on film by Ken Larose in *Archivaria* 6 and Sam Kula in number 20, the records of radio broadcasting by Jo Langham in number 9, television by Paul Rutherford in number 20, documentary art by Brian Osborne in number 17 and Ludwig Kosche in the lead article in this issue, and the special issue on cartographic archives (number 13) suggest something of the range of the journal's exploration of the world of documentation. The history of archival institutions and records management programmes — as additional results of the expansion of documentation — has been examined in articles by Jay Atherton and Barbara Craig in *Archivaria* 8, Ian Wilson in *Archivaria* 15, and Don Macleod in *Archivaria* 17.

The study of documentation as outlined above is so large a field and so central in archival work and research that the editors of *Archivaria* have launched a new section of the journal, beginning in this issue, which is intended to encourage greater numbers of shorter articles on the history, structure, evolution, and research value of archival material. The first contributor to the new section — which is entitled “Studies in Documents” — is Mark Walsh, the Archivist for the City of Windsor. His study of the records-keeping practices of the Hudson's Bay Company's British Columbia District Manager at the turn of the century reflects the broader trends mentioned above. The company embarked on a major administrative review which had the installation of a new records creation and maintenance system as its centrepiece. These changes required a new type of business manager who understood modern correspondence and records-keeping methods. These men pursued administrative and other changes designed to facilitate the expanded reporting and records-keeping requirements. The transition was far from smooth. The rising young business managers faced resistance from the old guard

2 David B. Gracy II, “Our Future is Now,” *The American Archivist* 48, no. 1 (Winter 1985), p. 15.

of officials schooled in the fur trade rather than modern office management. As with all studies in documentation, Walsh's findings are not only of interest to a few Hudson's Bay Company archivists and their clients, or even to a few more business archivists dealing with very similar records. Given the general insights of his study into process, tensions, social dynamics, and internal arrangement, such findings should be applicable to other kinds of documents in every type of archives.

Just how tension between the managers who wanted greater emphasis on doing business by relying more heavily on correspondence and proper records keeping and the officials who resisted them might have affected what was recorded and kept remains to be discussed. How such factors might influence the historical record is of crucial importance, however, and has been broached by Jerome Clubb of the Inter-University Consortium for Political Science and Social Research at the University of Michigan. Clubb sees a need in social scientific research for closer study of "the operations and functions of historical bookkeeping systems:"

If more was known of the functions of historical administrative systems, for example, improved capacity to estimate the kinds of biases and error that are likely to characterize the data which they gathered would be gained. Most historians have encountered shifts in time series which might signify change in production levels, in the incidence of violence, or in rates of voter participation but which might also reflect no more than change in recording procedures or in definitions or classification systems. Better knowledge of the operation of social bookkeeping systems might provide clues for the interpretation of such changes. And much the same can be said of information preservation. If more was known of the function that information preservation was intended to serve in past situations, then historians might be better equipped to estimate the representative quality and the limitations of surviving records.

Clubb foresees in this work the emergence of "a new form of historiography ... one that is concerned with the nature and properties of historical sources." The benefits for and role of archivists are clearly implied in his suggestion that "more effective use of the evidence of the past would require, in other words, larger and more systematic investment of energy and talent in activities that are now often seen — quite wrongly — as preliminary and essentially ancillary to the actual research process."³

Study of the history of society and its documentation — focused in the specific institutions, areas, and people archives serve and filtered through archival practice — allows a distinct archival contribution to knowledge and thus societal well-being. This contribution constantly arises from and informs the four major features of the archival intervention: appraisal or selection, arrangement and description, public service (which conveys the former two to a wider audience), and administration. It takes preliminary form in reflection on these aspects of archival work. This may be most obvious in the application of principles of arrangement and description archivists employ to organize the contents of archives. Rick Stapleton's article in *Archivaria* 17 on Sir Hilary Jenkinson

³ Jerome Clubb, "The 'New' Quantitative History: Social Science or Old Wine in New Bottles?" in Jerome Clubb and E.K. Scheuch, eds., *Historical Social Research: The Use of Historical and Process-Produced Data* (Stuttgart, 1980), pp. 22-23.

and Theodore Schellenberg introduces the topic of arrangement and description with a comparison of the two main exponents in Britain and the United States of much contemporary archival doctrine. Jenkinson and Schellenberg are, however, hardly household names. And the issues they address are understandably little known concerns since they verge on the sort of in-house technical discussion of special interest only to members of a particular profession. The decisions reached in these circles do, nevertheless, have profound significance for users of archives. (Fortunately, some of the latter are coming to that realization.)

Of necessity, archivists must intervene to arrange and describe archival holdings. Documents cannot be allowed to pile up indiscriminately — identified only by the sign “ARCHIVES” on the building door. What then is to be done with documents which arrive in archives in states ranging from almost complete disarray to precise classification in highly sophisticated filing systems? Should they be left undisturbed or organized in some fashion and indexed, or even re-indexed, to render them more accessible for particular purposes? Some of the difficulties created by the wrong answers to these questions are dealt with in Jean Dryden’s account in *Archivaria* 6 of the early work done to arrange the King Papers. Archivists have enshrined their usual caution in these areas in the principles of *provenance* and *respect des fonds*, but these guidelines place no premium on inaction. As Carl Vincent points out in *Archivaria* 3, their practical application in creating record groups for public records is far from straightforward and, as a result, archival practice has varied and evolved. Vincent’s work leads naturally to the article in *Archivaria* 16 by the Inspector General of the Archives of France, Michel Duchein, on the need for careful research into the records in order to determine their original source and structure. His concluding comments on this task are well worth repeating: “An archival finding aid cannot, indeed, limit itself to ‘describing’ baldly the documents which make up a *fonds*. An introduction to the agency from which the *fonds* comes, 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*. If the study is carried out correctly, all the difficulties associated with the application of *respect des fonds* are resolved. It is in this direction that it is necessary, in our opinion, to advance the research and work of archivists.” (p. 82.) Taken another step, the information obtained in unravelling the *provenance*, order, and interrelationships of archival materials sheds light on the ways in which documents were created, used, organized, and, thus, can now be best understood.

Although an archivist may take pride in discovering the origins and resurrecting the initial order of a body of archival material as if it were some beautifully restored Model T, researchers wanting to travel to specific types of information may ask why *they* must turn the crank of contemporary registers and indexes to start the motor and learn to drive the antique. Why, they might ask, can’t the archives install a modern ignition and automatic transmission in the form of new subject indexes to move them to their subject destinations more quickly, comfortably, and directly? Or, as Peter Baskerville and Chad Gaffield of the Vancouver Island Project ask in *Archivaria* 17, how might *provenance* be retained for what appears to them as its main purpose — the archives and donor’s administrative convenience — while overcoming its limitations for research purposes? Their solution for describing sources unearthed by the Vancouver Island Project is extensive subject indexing tailored to the needs of the researchers the Project will serve — academic and “public” historians as well as policy planners. Archives have not been unresponsive to the problem. In *Archivaria* 17 Michel Roberge describes SAPHIR (Système, Archives,

Publication, *Histoire, Inventaire, Recherche*) — the automated inventory description of the holdings of the Archives nationales du Québec. Researchers will not only be able to obtain access to these materials in the conventional ways by referring to the title of the record group, manuscript collection, and series as well as the medium of record but also by broad, general subjects such as political science, education, history, geography, agriculture, and philosophy. Baskerville and Gaffield criticize the SAPHIR approach to subject indexing in *Archivaria* 17 for not being flexible enough to serve changing research interests. But what is adequate? The most recent developments in this debate in Canada occurred in March 1985 at a conference on archives, automation, and access organized by Baskerville and Gaffield. Terry Cook of the PAC participated as commentator on their keynote address and prepared a report on the conference which appears in this issue. He says the most striking contribution to the discussion was made by David Bearman of the Smithsonian Institution. Bearman argued that the immense difficulty of obtaining agreement on standard terms for all the subjects to be indexed and, even more importantly, the sheer impossibility of indexing subjects as found in records precisely and extensively enough to satisfy most research needs means that archives ought to index the key elements in provenance-based arrangement and description — the name of the office or institution which created the document, its mandate, its functions and responsibilities, and its various components. Following this approach, if the contents of a repository's inventories were indexed, some general subject terms could also be caught in the net which, when combined with indexes created by the original users of the records where these exist and backed up with file lists, would yield considerable returns for researchers without archivists having to read tens of thousands of files searching for internal subject information — an impossible luxury for most archivists now. This solution, of course, attaches even greater importance to Michel Duchein's call for more attention to the study of the origin and structure of archival materials, since such research provides the main building-blocks of archival indexing. It is of more than passing interest that in-depth probing of provenance as a means of access to specific subjects was the only practical approach to the vast holdings of the Vatican Archives for Monique Benoit and Gabriele Scardellato in their search for any material related to Canada for the period 1600 to 1799. As their article in this issue indicates, examination of a block of records maintained according to *provenance* and *respect des fonds* — in this case the series *nunziatura di Francia* — and identified solely by its creator and original purpose — the conduct of the foreign relations of the Roman Catholic Church by the papal nuncio in France — produced a wealth of information about the early French Catholic mission in Canada.

The fourth and final aspect of the archival intervention is the management of archival institutions. Too often in archival circles it is wrongly assumed that administration involves mainly routine procedural and technical matters. However, the impact of administrative structures and decisions on the character of the archival records and, thereby, on the use of archives is far from inconsequential. For example, as Michael Swift, Director General of the Archives Branch of the PAC, points out in an article in this issue on the managerial aspects of archives, good administrators establish clear boundaries for the mandate of the repository, set specific goals within the mandate, assign particular priorities, and approve certain methods and technical systems to accomplish those goals. In effect, the archival administrator's chief task is to discriminate between various and often competing responsibilities, purposes, methods of work, and technical resources. Swift adds that these decisions must be made within the decreasing perimeter set up by the current climate of economic restraint. Given the growing importance and

sophistication of management in contemporary archives, it is necessary to understand how particular administrative decisions and the general administrative orientation of an archival institution shapes the acquisition, care, description, accessibility, and uses of documents.

To take a few examples, absence of appropriate legal authority for the mandate of an archives can seriously weaken acquisition efforts. Sensitive public records are thus likely to be retained by government agencies which cannot be compelled to transfer them to the archives. Outside the archives they will probably remain in an environment inimicable to research and permanent conservation. The archives must also have clear authority in the area of records management to protect the archival record. Furthermore, archivists need a general understanding of records management techniques in order to distinguish the archival wheat from the administrative chaff. Records management, through separation of routine from operational records at the point of document and file creation and classification, can be the first stage in archival appraisal. Familiarity with records management coding systems and filing procedures will not only reveal how the system works, but also what idiosyncracies it may have developed which need detection or exposure to identify archival material. The legal and administrative aspects of access to archival records is another crucial part of the overall management of archives which in very obvious ways impinges upon the uses to which documents may be put and the types of records archival institutions receive. And inadequate conservation and micrographics programmes mean the inevitable physical deterioration of archival holdings with all that implies for archival research.

Archivaria, the archival profession, and users of archives could greatly benefit from more study of the relationship between archival management theory and practice and the documents and research they affect. Although articles by Eldon Frost and Bryan Corbett in *Archivaria* 17 on records management in the federal government, Terry Eastwood in number 4 on the disposition and accessibility of ministerial papers, and an entire special issue (number 18) on archives and the law deal thoughtfully with aspects of archival administration, articles by Terry Cook in numbers 9 and 12 and Andrew Birrell in number 10 are the best examples of the approach suggested here. Cook examines the affects which an administrative structure in archives — in this case the PAC's internal organization around divisions defined principally by the medium of the documents they contain — has on everything from acquisition and public service to proper understanding of the documents in research. Cook's article is a model of archival scholarship because it skilfully blends several aspects of the archival intervention. It is grounded in knowledge of the process of documentation; this becomes the basis for recommending particular applications of *provenance* and *respect des fonds* to reflect and protect that process; and these proposals lead to discussion of administrative structures which best sustain this understanding and arrangement of the documents. Cook argues that division of archival holdings by media fosters a distorted view of how documents are created and interrelated which, therefore, cannot but infect our understanding of the reality they convey. His conclusions did not go unchallenged. Andrew Birrell of the PAC's National Photography Collection defended the system of media separation. Here again, it is as important to note how Birrell's analysis proceeds as it is to grasp the details of what was actually said. He, too, rests his case on interpretation of the original pattern of document creation and applications of custodial theory and appropriate administrative supports.

Investigation of the archival intervention may legitimately follow any of the many paths mentioned above. Their common goal — understanding how the intervention may best illuminate what may be known through archival documents — unites the various approaches and the various camps in the Canadian archival profession. Every facet of archival work affects the pursuit of information and knowledge in fundamental ways. There can be no valid division of the work — as some have argued — into purely procedural, technical, and managerial matters on one hand and purely theoretical, historical, and scholarly elements on the other. As the debate between Cook and Birrell demonstrates, procedures, administrative structures, and archival services rest on subterranean intellectual foundations which need to be exposed. If the first principles of our administration of archives are not constantly examined, archival institutions run the great risk of actually becoming impediments restricting an understanding of their holdings. A fog of thoughtless planning arising from sheer ignorance would engulf us. Archival work, which grants so much control over the raw material of human knowledge, can never be simply reduced to disembodied procedures, techniques, and functions.

From this perspective there comes into view some common ground on which to reconcile the varying positions in the debates within the Association of Canadian Archivists and recently in *Archivaria* over the nature of archival work. If archivists cannot yet agree on the priorities they should establish in their work or on the means to achieve these goals (and in this regard see counterpoints by Richard Kesner and George Bolotenko in this issue), they might at least agree on the central question facing them. If archivists ask how their handling of archival documents affects the knowledge which may be obtained from the documents and then pursue the answer wherever the evidence leads, they would have at a minimum begun to ask the right question of their work and to act upon it.

It is to that questioning and to that search for answers that *Archivaria* has been devoted for the past ten years. As I have tried to suggest, all aspects of the archival intervention in the life (or death) of recorded information have found a home in the journal's pages, from administrative and managerial studies to theoretical treatises, from technical and procedural practice to media-specific discourses, from examinations of current problems to the history of records, their creators, and their custodians. Perhaps the next ten years of the journal will reveal that the greatest insights into the significance of the archival intervention come more from one of these areas than from others. Perhaps that is the challenge of the next ten years of archival scholarship. But whatever the route and whoever the participants, the goal for all archivists remains a fuller understanding of archives to benefit keeper and user alike.

Tom Nesmith
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