

immediate future,” I think it is. What is lacking is the bringing together of the administrative entities involved in information creation and management. Unless this is done, archivists must continue to compensate for the deficiencies in the information system.

As to administrative histories, there is a danger in getting staff bogged down in compiling them. Restraint should be exercised, and their compilation should be restricted initially to establishing provenance. If there is time and need, later, to elaborate, fine and dandy. It's a luxury few institutions can afford.

As to the record group concept, whatever its deficiencies, it is not a “physical shelf-order classification” system, and few archives that I know try to concentrate records of one record group together except when there is an opportunity to do so. Archivists long ago recognized that “honeycombing” of the stacks would be the result, and that this would be at an unproductive cost. Location records are sufficient for such administrative purposes. As a concept, the record group provides the initial control of a record series, and it will always be useful for this reason. Information in any series is always implied by the nature of the record group with which the series is administratively linked. If the reader thinks of the record group as “record creating agency” this feature will be obvious. Whether it relates to hierarchy is really of little significance.

I must confess to even more puzzlement by Bearman and Lytle's statement at the bottom of page 24: “If the archivist's use of provenance in arrangement and description — which establishes links backwards from records to creating activities — is reversed, a potential exists for a practical and powerful means of gaining access to and managing information.” Do Bearman and Lytle really mean that description should precede arrangement? If so, we are entitled to know what inferential powers of provenance — in their usage — can be unlocked in the process. As such the statement is merely a bald assertion. They need to explore the relationships between arrangement and description before making what appears to me as an absurd statement.

One last comment. Bearman, particularly, continues to have a fixation on inter-institutional exchange of administrative information. This problem is miniscule compared to that of providing intellectual control. Let's get our priorities straight.

(I am now retired, and I really mean it. This is the last piece I shall ever write on archives. No, I will not respond to Bearman, nor to Lytle, should he join in.)

**Richard C. Berner**  
Seattle, Washington

## ***Visual Aid in the Computer Age***

Jim Burant is to be applauded for his letter in *Archivaria* 19 (“Archivists Need Visual Aid”) which noted the failure of most members of the archival profession to employ audio-visual tools or other non-textual aids when delivering papers at conferences. Indeed, considered overall, the profession has proven reluctant to embrace these tools and remained less than imaginative concerning the inherent capabilities engendered by these

new technologies. Certainly few could find fault with Burant's assertions that "we live in an electronic age, and a visual age" and similarly that the use of the "wonderful gadgetry of modern technology" could at most times clarify our subject matter and enhance the overall impact of our presentations.

This being the case, however, Burant seemingly refuses to carry this trajectory forward by suggesting the role other presentation media might play as non-textual aids. To what extent for instance can optical videodiscs, digitally produced pictures, computer graphics, and animation contribute not only to our work as archivists but also to our professional presentations at annual conferences and other gatherings? The combination of graphics, interactive systems, and the computing power of the microprocessor have earned computer graphics their rightful place in other professional settings why, therefore, should archivists refrain from using similar technologies as illustrative techniques in their professional seminars and presentations. For if it is true that we live in an electronic age, it is equally incontestable that we live in an automated one as well. Having accepted this fact, as professionals we should not flinch before such new technologies but instead seek to harness their potential to our professional activities. Burant has already pointed out our failure to readily employ non-textual aids, are we to be similarly castigated in future for our collective refusal to reap the harvests of the technology?

**Rodney Young**  
Federal Archives Division  
Public Archives of Canada