

Letters to the Editor

Archivists and Records Managers: Natural Enemies?

There is one very good idea in David Gracy's paper "Is There a Future in the Use of Archives?" (*Archivaria* 24). That is his suggestion that we give up referring to archives as "noncurrent" and emphasize, rather, their "enduring value." It leads on to the thought that we ought to distinguish ourselves from *current* or *short-term* records managers by describing ourselves as *long-term* records managers.

However, it is obvious that these usages would be tantamount to that emphasis on "use in the future" which Gracy rejects. One cannot have "Records from the Past Working in the Present" if one does not also have "Records from the Present Waiting for the Future." It is all very well to be helping people draw from the well — and being paid and thanked for that. Can we, at the same time, persuade them to help us to replenish the well for the benefit of future users? Gracy has not solved that problem by playing with words to make it disappear.

Of course, it isn't altogether a problem. One often manages to strike a spark of interest by pointing out the paradox that one's immersion in the past relates to a concern for the needs of the future. Indeed, both the future and the past have an appeal to reflective people. However, the people we need to impress — bureaucrats under pressure — are usually rather unreflective.

For them we certainly need to make the most of what we can do for the present — with particular reference to our work in the storage, retrieval, and disposal of semi-current records. The trouble is — as Wilcomb Washburn put it ("The archivist's two-way stretch," *Archivaria* 7) — that we thus expose ourselves to "the danger of accommodating a scholarly purpose to an expedient method."

The same danger has to be addressed in interpreting Gracy's motherhood proposal to bridge the gap "between archivists and records managers." Obviously, we do have a lot in common, being managers in tandem of the same materials at different stages of their existence. But that doesn't mean we should seek to deny the radical difference in our respective concerns and expertise — less still, that either party should seek, or be invited, to take over the territory of the other. We are, in a sense, natural enemies, and the best hope of peaceful coexistence and cooperation

lies in a recognition of that fact, leading to the establishment of clear boundaries and clear agreements as to who decides when what can be destroyed, and who does what in the no-man's-land of semicurrency between our territories.

To "bridge" the gap is fine. To fudge the difference, however, in the hope of appeasing or hoodwinking persons preoccupied with current concerns to the detriment of archives — is not.

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Canadian Peacekeepers in the Yemen: Setting the Record Straight

In his review (*Archivaria* 26) of my book *In the Eye of the Storm: A History of Canadian Peacekeeping*, Brereton Greenhous cites Leonard Johnson's *A General for Peace* as describing the truth about the Yemen Observation Mission of 1963-64. The fact is that Johnson paid a three-day inspection visit to UNYOM during its beginnings and offers his reminiscences and views of it based on that brief experience. My account was based on the UNYOM Diary, headquarters reports, and interviews with a cross-section of those involved during the entire mission of one year and three months.

Squadron Leader A.I. Umbach, who commanded 134 Air Transport Unit, feels Johnson's description of the breakdown of discipline and disintegration of morale is "grossly exaggerated." The forced repatriation early of only four Canadians of more than one hundred who served there bears this out.

I hope this letter will be reprinted in your next issue to help rectify in the minds of the readers a distorted view of the overall performance of our troops in the Yemen.

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