Review Article

Professional Convergence:
New Bindings, Old Pages

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Archives and Library Administration: Divergent Traditions and Common Concerns. LAWRENCE J. McCRANK ed. New York: The Haworth Press Inc., 1986, 184 p. ISBN 0-86656-590-6.

"Whither archives and archivists?" Debate on this question has a peculiar way of surfacing from time to time in almost cyclical fashion. This has happened over the last several years in Canada. Judging by the advent of Lawrence McCrank's new volume on archives and libraries, the question remains vital in the United States as well. The archival profession is still debating itself. What are the bonds amongst archivists, librarians, records managers, and all others involved in "information handling"? How are these relations influenced by automation, which now is an incipient reality in most archival institutions? While the questions are old, the new context of automation within which they are posed imparts to this volume a special significance.

McCrank's declared purpose in bringing together the ten essays of this book is to provide archivists with an update of Frank Burke's well-received *Archives — Library Relations* and to stimulate a much-needed dialogue between librarians and archivists concerning the ways in which their mutual concerns and differences affect managerial decision-making. McCrank's work does not address in broad terms the question of archives-library relations, but is specific to the United States, where perhaps the majority of archives find themselves lesser partners within a library environment. The work may be a true reflection of the conditions under which many American archivists labour, and of the concerns which exercise them as they care for specialized collections within library structures. At the same time, this approach makes the work less universal in its applications, and in the lessons which archivists can draw from it. McCrank sought out the "viewpoints of archivists who by the nature of their placements in libraries and by virtue of their functions and activities, could share with library administrators their professional viewpoints from 'down under' in typical library administrative hierarchical structures" (p. 9). This is hardly a fair discussion of a relationship between equals which one would like to see. Given that archives within library structures are at times within "hostile" bodies, with libraries playing out, in McCrank's words, the role of

"proverbial stepmothers", one wonders to what degree the spokesmen of such archives are speaking as candidly as they would like.

The key concern of this collection of essays is the extent to which "symbiosis" exists, and the benefits which can accrue to both professions from active pursuit of fuller co-operation. Perhaps more importantly, is symbiosis avoidable in the future, given the press of new information technology? One can legitimately ask the question: do archivists come to support symbiosis as equal partners, or is this a forced consequence of that inferior position within which archivists, in a library setting, find themselves?

To their credit, the contributors to this collection seem to speak frankly, to hold to archival principles, despite their ambiguous position within library systems. Concomitantly, however, one senses that at times they strain to hit the right note in commenting on library-archives relations, to be true to the logic of their presentations while at the same time recognizing the political reality of their subordinate position.

The work consists of four parts: "Archivist Perspectives on Library Administration of Archives;" "Resource Sharing: Archival and Bibliographic Control;" "Cooperative Program Development at Institutional and National Level;" and "Education and Professional Development." Archives within a library setting, according to Paul H. McCarthy and David J. Klaassen, two contributors to the first section, are in a somewhat anomalous situation, and archivists do experience some strain under administrators who are not themselves archivists.

There are many differences between archives and libraries. Public perceptions of the two differ, with the library having a much greater public profile; clienteles served also differ radically, with the library serving a much larger and less selective clientele. The nature of documentation held in each type of institution constitutes a crucial difference; unlike the cataloguable discrete book or book-like unit, archives hold record bodies which are unique, where provenance is of prime significance, and where knowledge of the context of documentation and of the organic interconnections amongst documents is an absolute necessity to understanding records. Methods of appraisal for content, networking, and particularly description and control are, therefore, substantially different. There can be no universal classification, and no item orientation, with archival material; the stress is, rather, on analysis of the process of creation of the record. Solicitation of records, collections-building, is also a process requiring significantly different approaches by the two types of institutions.

The differing personnel and training requirements of the two professions must also be mentioned. Although archivists are approaching the day when, like librarians, they will have a degree accreditation, the subject-field preparation remains a significant requirement. Additionally, both pre- and post-employment patterns differ substantially. This said, however, both McCarthy and Klaassen argue for the "convergence" of archives and libraries. Both institutions strive to preserve the collective memory. Acquisitions policies, technical services and reference services are roughly analogous. Both archives and libraries deal with information largely in written form, and both seek to provide an orderly arrangement to facilitate retrieval of this information. Most significantly, while there may be hindrance

to a "professional" convergence, it is being forced upon both professional communities by revolutionary change in information management technology.

This new technology will impose upon both professions new roles. Archivists will need to develop a standardized, context/provenance-rich control format (perhaps already here in the MARC AMC format), and librarians a more provenance-based format if their own subject/name classification structure is not to collapse under its own weight. The future of the two professions will include significant change as both acquire new roles as information specialists. As McCarthy points out, however, "even as allied professionals," archivists and librarians are likely to remain distinct, their activities conditioned by "the 'culturally' sacred character of the book and intrinsic importance of records" (p. 25). Klaassen adds that, administratively, "archives will always be something of a square peg in a round hole" (p. 43), given that its procedures, ranging from appraisal and aquisition right through to supplies required, will always remain different. At the same time, he continues, "there is no need to challenge the rational basis for placement of archives under library administration" (p. 45), suggesting that the two have enough in common to co-exist peacefully, while remaining sufficiently distinct to provoke more considered applications of their respective principles to their respective tasks.

Section Two, "Resource Sharing: Archival and Bibliographic Control," deals with automation and networking in the archival world. David Bearman's contribution provides a useful retrospective on the history of library attempts to apply computerization to bibliographic control, a prerequisite to networking. While cognizant of differences in the methodologies and approaches of the two professions, and aware of the fact that archives were simply too insignificant and underfunded to follow libraries in this activity, he argues that many archivists felt that the material in their care simply would not lend itself easily to systematization. Vocabularies and lexicons, finding aid formats, indexing and description — all these areas of activity were held to be beyond the pale of control standards. Additionally, archivists, "while attracted to the success of libraries ... were repelled by library imperialism" (p. 103) which sought to extend library standards into the archival world. With the advent of MARC AMC, archivists are now armed with a sufficiently flexible tool to systematize their approach to intellectual control over their holdings. Bearman makes some good points: MARC AMC is free of Library of Congress centrism; it is flexible enough to be manipulated to serve a variety of control needs for archival material; and it is less a format to describe a particular medium than an intellectual framework to describe any organic, collective information resource.

What is required now is a shift in thinking on the part of the archivist, which will allow archival networks to connect with library networks. If one thinks in terms of "forms" and "functions", with "functions" corresponding to orderly scheduling of records and "forms" reflecting the form of material and, consequently, indicating at least part of its content, one can, with the flexibility of MARC, arrive at systematized control vocabulary which will allow for computerized networking in the archival world.

Richard Szary seems to be much in accord with Bearman, suggesting, however, that sufficient differences exist between library and archival practice to demand real and flexible enhancements of intellectual control systems before archival and library networking becomes possible.

McCrank's own essay is a sweeping, thoughtful contribution, which addresses what future automation in all its complexity will mean for the archivist. He warns that automation is no panacea for resolving problems of archival control, and that archivists cannot lose sight of real methodological, intellectual, philosophical, professional, political and human aspects of archival management. Manual or automated, the key questions still stand for archivists. He discusses knowledgeably a variety of subjects within the context of automation, such as classification (pp. 64-65), the MARC AMC format (pp. 80-86) and control problems common to both archivists and librarians (pp. 67-68).

Automation requires mental reorientation, a rethinking of both what constitutes documentation, and its relationship with description, intellectual access, and physical control. This done, however, one can overcome many former limitations, such as strict adherence to original order and respect de fonds. Perhaps, McCrank suggests, the versatility of automation will lead to whole inversals of hallowed archival procedure; for example, one may soon begin the process of arrangement with an intellectual sort, physically leaving the material in whatever order it may have been acquired. He reminds us to keep our feet on the ground, pointing out that archivists will find no automatic answers in library procedures and automation.

In the third section, "Co-operative Program Development at Institutional and National Level," several contributors discuss the question of archives-library cooperative activities at several levels. Richard Cox points out that, given the present minimal cooperation between archives and libraries, there is much uncoordinated overlap in programmes, and suggests that it is archivists who are culpable; as a consequence of loose educational standards, they have failed to develop a theory which suggests cooperation. To demonstrate where such cooperation is both feasible and possible, he chooses to study the treatment of government publications by both libraries and archives.

Both types of institutions, he suggests, have been remiss in this area. For example, archival arrangement of government publications by issuing agency, document type and title, has validity; at the same time, such approaches have been weak on providing subject access to those records. Libraries have not done much better; they have paid no attention to provenance/original order and, because of the perceived need for physical order, have not done well in providing subject access to the contents of government publications. Like many of the other contributors, Cox sees that automation will dictate closer cooperation. Moreover, as machine-readable documentation grows, government publications may soon arrive in new electronic formats, which will tend to eliminate the traditional distinction between original and copy, enabling both archivists and librarians to metamorphize into something new — information handlers.

John F. Dean argues that, within the context of reduced resources, libraries have to rethink priorities in, for example, collections development, and may have to become much more proficient in conservation, an area where they may learn from archives. In fact, both types of institutions, acting in concert, could markedly lessen their financial burdens in conservation, and thus free up additional resources for other activities.

George L. Vogt's article is an interesting update on the reality of the rather unpleasant political/fiscal situation facing American archives. There may soon be very few federal financial resources allocated to libraries and archives, a development which may well dictate an end to archives and libraries revelling in their own individuality, maintaining highly-specialized cataloguing and accessing systems, and utilizing idiosyncratic lexicons for evaluating their activities and services. Shared preservation problems and the imminence of automation should occasion serious thought about standardization, informational networking, shared appraisal techniques, and wider cooperation in research projects. Both types of institution can then avoid duplication of effort and join forces in rousing public pressure through advocacy groups to serve the laudable goal of a national approach to preserving the historical record.

In the final section, "Education and Professional Development," Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and Robert M. Warner turn to the ever-vibrant question of archival education. In the last decade, the formal education of the archivist has become a subject of intense concern. Archivists, according to Warner, are now "in transition;" Blouin sees them at a "crossroads." Caught between two forces, they envision a separate identity and discipline based on uniqueness of their institutions and the records they maintain, yet the inexorable advent of technology and new conceptual models of interactive informational systems indicate that the archivists' own problems and issues are far from unique. In training, outlook, methodology, and philosophy, archivists and librarians are "historically dissimilar." Times, however, and the societal environment, are changing. Archives need a new vision of the future, one which suggests not uniqueness but convergence with those professionals in allied fields. Before the press of the information age, where format and medium may soon become irrelevant, new concepts to govern the archival profession are inescapable imperatives.

Blouin proceeds to compare the approaches of archivists and librarians to their tasks. Provenance rules archival activity. Because the placement of each unit item within its context is as significant as its content, access to archival material cannot be solely by means of name/subject cataloguing. Provenance is also crucial to arrangement, for "one must understand the nature of the activity which generates the record in order to best interpret the content of the record itself" (p. 161). In fact, "the provenance-based approach ... to information ... has given archivists their particular identity and defines the archives discipline" (p. 161). Such an approach, suggests Warner, is much more comprehensive than the "how to" approach of the librarian. To better understand the nature of the generating organism behind the record and the uses to which it was put requires a different approach, one which "points to the traditional link between archivists and history, suggesting that the selection and appraisal of the records of the past cannot be accomplished without some deeply-rooted sense of historical study and broadly-conceived trends" (p. 162). Differences mark library and archives approaches in such other areas as access, confidentiality, and copyright. In sum, archivists as professionals constitute a distinct profession, based on a small body of theory, principles, and practices, and "the fact of these unique principles must be acknowledged and preserved" (p. 162) wherever the training of archivists or archival activity occurs.

However, the new EDP world calls for adjustment and change. Although archives and libraries are dissimilar worlds and, as Warner points out, problems specific to each will continue to exist, information issues of this new age, issues such as organization and selection of information, access, preservation, and freedom of information touch both worlds directly. Preservation, for example, will require concerted effort to stave off what Warner calls the "quiet disaster," the self-disintegration of documentation held by both archives and libraries. Archivists can provide leadership to librarians, while librarians in turn teach archivists something about cataloguing, with the proviso that they (librarians) become somewhat more flexible in this regard. Interestingly, as Blouin points out, the more we move away from format-based information, "the more relevant the archival model becomes" (p. 163) for libraries. Something of both approaches may be the answer for intellectual control in the future, which may come only if each is "recognized not simply as a variation of a theme, but rather fundamentally different" (p. 163). It may well be that, as Warner suggests, both librarians and archivists may become, over the next decade, sub-components of the larger discipline of information handling.

At the same time, neither Warner nor Blouin offer any concrete programme for the training of future archivists; their discussion of the question remains largely philosophical, indicating perhaps that the whole question of archival education is still very much too complex and plastic to admit of easy resolution, even within the futuristic framework of the new archivist.

There is much in this volume to commend. In addition to thoughtful treatment of significant issues there are many vignette-like passages throughout the work which are functionally instructive in their own right. However, there are some aspects of the book which are very disturbing. There is an apparent adherence to a "party line" which, given the evidence presented by the contributors themselves, is not always tenable. This is most evident in their treatment of fundamental differences between archivists and librarians. One after another, they note differences of substance which have resulted in the "divergent traditions" which characterize library and archival activity. From the very nature of the source documents handled, to selection and control, to acquisition and collection development, to clientele served — in all these areas the differences are visible to all. Furthermore, as Blouin rightly puts it, "archivists as professionals are unique" and "the fact of these unique principles must be acknowledged and preserved" (p. 162). Yet all the contributors somewhat inexplicably adhere to a kind of ideological orientation, or perhaps simply belief, in a "symbiosis" of the two professions. They squeeze milk out of lemons. The "symbiosis" of which they speak is less a defensible position borne out by practical reality than a statement of wishful thinking based on political reality. After all, many archives and archivists are physically located in libraries, and administratively under library control. Symbiosis is political reality.

I should add here that, by symbiosis, I understand a state in which two organisms live together in some attached manner, contributing to each other's maintenance and support. In other words, it is less a matter of two entities cohabiting out of pure choice for purely frivolous reasons, than it is a matter of entities who have a real need for each other. Given the imprecision with which the contributors to this volume treat symbiosis, what kind of relationship is it, and to what degree does it accord with the above definition of the term? McCarthy argues that the challenge

for archivists in a library setting is to adopt/adapt library approaches and technol-
ogies in ways appropriate to the unique nature of archival materials (p. 31). Where
in this proposition do we find symbiosis, as the term is normally understood? Szary,
after exhaustively noting the differences between librarians and archivists, suggests
that archivists have now realized the "commonality of interests between themselves
and the library world" (p. 49). Such statements raise the question of a two-
way street, inherent in the concept of symbiosis elaborated by Klaassen
(p. 44); until now, librarians have been as particularistic as archivists, and if we are
to have symbiosis, even of a forced nature, both archivists and librarians must work
together. But Klaassen muddles the matter by holding to this notion, because he
really speaks, not of symbiosis, but of reciprocity wherever useful. In fact, most
contributors to this volume, when speaking of symbiosis, seem to be talking about
little more than the old-fashioned term, cooperation. As if new phraseology means
new substance!

On the basis of the record presented by these commentators, there has clearly
been little symbiosis in the past because of the substantial differences separating
archival and library activity; it may have occurred perforce in the management of
archives located within library structures.

If not symbiosis either in the past or present, what then of "convergence" in the
future, another prominent sub-theme of this volume? All the contributors equate
imminent convergence with the technology of the future which is upon us. Warner,
for example, posits that the new technology will inevitably mean the reduction of
long-cherished concepts from immutable principles to mere provincialisms (p. 176).
Both librarians and archivists will become subcomponents of a larger discipline —
information handling within which the distinctions of media and form, so crucial to
defining the two professions, will become meaningless (p. 172). As McCarthy sug-
gests, "the culturally 'sacred' character of the book and intrinsic importance of
records are likely to remain" (p. 22); nevertheless, automation and computerization
herald a new information age which will force both professional groups into a larger
commonwealth of allied "information professionals" (p. 22).

Certainly one can agree with most of the commentators when they write that
automation heralds, not only major dislocation and adjustment, but also many bene-
fits for archivists. Perhaps, as McCrank suggests, the physical rearrangement of
record bodies will be replaced by computer sorts (pp. 75-76); appraisal methodolo-
gies will change as archivists will perforce need to pay much more attention to
technical considerations of form and format, particularly of new EDP-based
records, and not deal with content analysis alone (p. 65). Certainly, archivists will
have to look afresh at the relationships among description, intellectual access, and
physical control of records (p. 80). Perhaps MARC AMC will prove to be that
breakthrough to allow multi-type networking embracing libraries and archives
(McCrank, p. 61; Cox, pp. 119-121). And as Blouin suggests, archivists, spurred on
by automation, will be forced to rethink what constitutes "information", a rethinking
which may occasion dramatic changes in conceptual approaches to the selection,
organization, preservation, and use of information which will be extremely fluid in
format (Blouin, pp. 156-157).

Do these future probabilities, however, really portend convergence of the two professions? Truth to tell, all commentators treat only the "how-to" questions of convergence — how to network; how to index/describe/catalogue holdings; how to track and monitor use; how to maintain locational control. In short, the kernel of their convergence theory is as follows: archivists, like librarians, will be using a new tool, the computer, which opens fantastic new vistas; they share certain difficulties of an administrative nature, particularly in those instances where archivists are subordinated to library control; and cooperation in many respects is intrinsically good. It all boils down to a forced end-run around symbiosis: what symbiosis could not accomplish in the past, the computer will force into existence in the future.

Not all authors argue that convergence means that librarians and archivists will lose their distinct identities. Nonetheless, they do foresee a much greater future intimacy between the two professions. How, though, do we make the quantum leap to even limited convergence, given the fundamental differences between librarians and archivists? And the differences, based on substantially diverse principles, cannot simply be wished away, as Warner and others seem to imply, by recourse to the technological imperative. The appraisal of an organic record group will still require, after all is said and done, the unique approach of the archivist. Description and reference service will still call for an archivist rich in the knowledge of subject areas. Books, regardless of format, will require a librarian. And records management will still require the special skills of a records manager. What all commentators in this volume seem to ignore is the matter of who is inputting what into databases and for what purpose, considerations which very much condition the nature of the profession of the "inputter". Some of them may believe, in fact, that a representative of the future order of "information handlers" may be sufficiently skilled to perform archival, library and records management activity equally well. Perhaps, and that is a laudable objective. But it seems that they are saying that particularisms will become almost meaningless as a result of the technological imperative. That is an ideologically-coloured proposition which wholly ignores the facts of both past and present, and the trends for the future as well. It is an argument structured on a confusion of ends and means. Because we will now share the same tools, we will now all become the same, blissfully ignorant of the reasons which make each of us — librarian, archivist and records manager — very much what we are. The "big fix" of automation will homogenize everyone into an undefined plastic entity known as the "information handler." How this transformation will happen is left unclear. What is one to make, for example, of Warner's contention that those working in libraries, archives and records management will all become generalists in the information world, while increasingly each will continue to require his particular skill (p. 175)? It is doubtful that we can have our cake and eat it too.

In speaking of convergence and of the new "information server or broker" (McCarthy, p. 31), the commentators deal with the question of old relationships, and often address the archivist-historian nexus. Cox, while seeing a shift over the last decade to closer archives-library cooperation, notes that archivists have stronger professional ties to historians than to librarians (p. 111). Szary suggests that in areas like collections development and reference there is need for archivists who can best judge what represents an "accurate historical composite record" in

dealing with archival record groups, which are so much more nebulous than other information sources (pp. 53, 56). Klaassen notes that in an exercise such as content indexing, so unlike library activity because of the imprecision of an archival record, the archivist must conceptualize the universe of records, and address the questions not only of "what has been written", but also "who would have had a reason to write", and with what consequences. In a word, the act of creation is as significant as the record created, and consequently, provenance and historical knowledge (though Klaassen does not say so) remain indispensable to the archivist (Klaassen, p. 40).

Blouin, particularly strong on this subject, posits, "One must understand the nature of the activity which generates the record to best interpret the content of the record itself" (p. 160). And in the very significant activity of appraisal, archivists require "better understanding of the nature of organizations which generate records and the uses to which these records are put. This points to the traditional link between archives and history, suggesting that the selection and appraisal of the records of the past cannot be accomplished without some deeply rooted sense of historical study and broadly conceived trends" (p. 162). In fact Warner, writing of the new archivists of the future, insists that "they will not be technocrats or systems engineers, but will still be humanists committed to humanistic values" (p. 175).

Are we to have convergence into one homogeneity, or into a homogeneity with significant particularisms — those basic principles which have for so long occasioned distinctiveness — still preserved? If so, use the phrase "convergence of professions," instead of "increasing cooperation afforded by automation."

The contributors do not resolve the question of how we create the new "convergent" archivist. The question of an accreditation degree is left unresolved, largely because many see the degree as a "shortsighted" proposition (Blouin, p. 165). Archival education remains within library schools: they are, by default, the logical places (Warner, p. 173) and provide, in their core courses, useful training grounds for archivists (Blouin, p. 163). Library schools themselves, however, should critically examine and adjust their own curricula, very much an imperative of the moment as we move away from format-based information, and should offer new core courses in information studies (Blouin, p. 163; Warner, p. 173). Yet, if that is all, one is left to wonder: whence and why convergence?

McCrank's volume is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate of "whither archives?" Its contributors address significant questions and, in the small and the particular, provide both interesting and even intriguing commentary on developments in the archival world, and specific resolutions to problems of substance.

In addressing larger issues, however, they build sandcastles. Archivists have had a type of symbiosis with librarians in the past which in fact was not at all a symbiosis, and we are now experiencing a convergence based on the computer's reduction to insignificance of principles which have long separated us. In other words, in sharing the same tool we are becoming one. And yet, at the same time, those principles which differentiate the two professions will unquestionably remain valid in the future, a fact which gets us back to the point at which we began, and the start of the fairy dance once again.

It would have been enough to argue simply that we have much in common, that cooperation is valuable, and that with the computer we can do so much more to serve the public. That approach would at least have saved this volume from two substantial failings — its ideological orientation (a fault of choice, or perhaps lack of choice), and its confusion of form and substance, of ends and means (a fault of cluttered vision).