

## *Counterpoint*

### ***“Another Brick In The Wall”: Terry Eastwood’s Masonry and Archival Walls, History, and Archival Appraisal***

by TERRY COOK

I am saddened more than angered by Terry Eastwood’s Counterpoint essay in *Archivaria* 35: “Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies.”<sup>1</sup> His demeaning language, combined with an attack I can only characterize as personal rather than professional, leaves me very disappointed. My dilemma is how to reply—and here I can concern myself only with Eastwood’s extended attack on me, even though I am not his principal target. While much could be said, two things as a minimum need to be made clear. The first concerns the nature of scholarly discourse in the archival community. The second concerns Eastwood’s central and offensive caricature of my thinking over the past two decades.

Turning first to consider the nature of professional and scholarly discourse, I certainly have no fear of debate or of having my ideas challenged. I *want* to engage in discussion and *welcome* debate with peers who I respect and who respect me. That is the excitement of scholarship. That is the fruitful interaction of theory and practice. That is the way any profession moves forward. Yet such interaction must proceed in a civil fashion, where an opponent’s ideas are fairly recounted in context, their argument is challenged on the grounds of logic and reason rather than attacked with emotional hyperbole, and their motivation and institutional affiliation are respected rather than scorned. In this regard, Eastwood should have a chat down the hallway at UBC with his colleague, Mary Sue Stephenson, who has offered good advice to archivists.<sup>2</sup> Do *not* follow, she counsels, the road taken by librarians of building a wall between “those that do and those that teach and do research,” between the active profession and the universities. She notes that often there is

a big, thick, ugly wall full of dents from the occasional rocks they toss at each other. Practitioners live on one side, educators/academics live on the other, and the students [and graduates] have the rather challenging job of balancing on the top until they either fall off or decide which side to live on. Occasionally ... there are always those hardy souls who take up rock-climbing and manage to maintain homes on both sides....

Stephenson urges archivists never to build such a wall, for it would deeply divide the profession and significantly retard its development. With his missiles launched from the university bastion and singling out the National Archives of Canada's programme and staff—can he really think of no other archival writers holding the views he criticizes?—Eastwood supports just such a wall as Stephenson deplures, and now adds a great many bricks to it. On an individual level, as one who has tried over the years to be one of Stephenson's "hardy souls" maintaining a home both in personal-time archival research and theory on one side of the wall and in full-time archival practice and management on the other, I find Eastwood's higher wall very discouraging to continuing any further wall-climbing efforts. On a professional level, such vitriolic attacks on colleagues as Eastwood mounts should have no place in this journal or in scholarly discourse.

Secondly, I do want to make some bald and very broad assertions about my work. I certainly have no desire to burden readers with forty pages and two hundred end-notes of defensive rebuttals against, or an exhaustive cataloguing of, Eastwood's non sequiturs, his decontextualized quotations, and his personal insults. I do want to refute for the record, however, Eastwood's substantive charges concerning my ideas about the place of history in archival work and about the new approaches to archival appraisal that I have been advocating. And I must challenge his central view that my ideas since 1975 can be reduced to my imposing an historian's agenda on archivists, to my having articulated one long, sustained attempt to establish as the archivist's mission a kind of God-like role of determining consciously the future course of historical writing at the expense of protecting the organic character of archives as evidence of acts and transactions. Unlike Eastwood, I shall resist the temptation to address the nature of *his* personal motivations for writing as he does.

### *Historical Theory and Methodology*

I reject Eastwood's charge that I believe that (in his words) "the ideas of historical theory and method are the foundation of archival practice" (p. 248), or that "archival knowledge is founded on historical knowledge" (p. 243). What I have said—as long ago as my offending 1977 book review, in a phrase that Eastwood himself quotes—is that archival functions "rely heavily" on historical theory and methodology, which is not the same thing as being their foundation. I stand by that assertion, and I will say why momentarily. However, I have *also* outlined or referred to many other disciplines—philosophy, political science, literary theory, diplomatics, librarianship, computer science, etc.—as having important influences on archival work, in addition of course to archival theory and past archival practice. I *also* have long supported the essence of Eastwood's own fine prescription<sup>3</sup> about the nature of archival education being based on studying archival records and their context, although I may have been politically incorrect or less sophisticated than he in sometimes describing this kind of analysis as "the history of the record." As that "history" word in my lips seems singularly to annoy Eastwood, let me remind readers, and him, that I have long ago advocated that the focus of the scholarly work of archivists and thus of archival graduate education should be the context of archival records and the character of records themselves; indeed, in my major work on the subject, I recommended that even the "history of the record"

approach, which still has much to recommend it, be transcended by “the *study of archives*, as ... a unifying and central purpose for the archival profession in the next generation.” By explicitly setting the basis of our professional knowledge in a scholarly understanding and exploration of “provenance, *respect des fonds*, context, evolution, interrelationships, order,” I asserted, in a ringing conclusion, (and of course still believe) that “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.”<sup>4</sup> This *still* does not sound very much like an historian’s agenda to me! But let us indeed return to history, since fertilization from that discipline, when I advocate it, so upsets Eastwood. Since he himself<sup>5</sup> has characterized historical methodology and the history of administration as one of the pillars of graduate-level archival education and of the essential knowledge that an archivist must have, and since both along with historiography have been part of his UBC Master of Archival Studies curriculum since day one, and since he has strongly advocated (and practised) historical analysis of the archival profession itself,<sup>6</sup> I must really wonder what all his anti-history fury is about.

I will clarify and expand two “history”-related points, however. First, post-modernist theory, on which I have based much recent writing, extends far beyond “historical theory,” and Eastwood is wrong to equate the two. This point also extends considerably beyond our disagreement (in his mind) on the non-issues (in my mind) of history threatening archives, or of historical theory undermining archival theory. The subtlety of the methodology of post-modernist *subjectivity* in reading the narratives in texts—historical texts, archival texts, literary texts, call them as you will—to understand their context has no relationship whatsoever to *subject*-based research by historians. They are as distinct the one from the other as the proto-history of Schellenberg’s values paradigm is from Jenkinson’s evidential-objectivist model. My macro-appraisal approach is built on post-modernist contextuality (which many historians now use, yes, but so do many other disciplines’ scholars) supplementing Jenkinsonian evidential insights—*not* on historians’ traditional affinity for subject content. This is the core of Eastwood’s misunderstanding of my work, which he conveniently dismisses and misreads as pro-history advocacy rather than trying to understand it on the terms on which I have advanced it. There is a fundamental difference, which Eastwood blurs, between the intrinsic quality of archival documents as evidence of acts and transactions within their context of creation, on the one hand, and the need, on the other, to develop strategic approaches to appraisal, and to macro-appraisal, that are suitable, indeed even possible, for the era of the electronic record. Protecting the archival nature or the property of “recordness” evident in documents—about which Eastwood has been eloquent and will certainly find no argument from me—is not the same as the intellectual problem of deciding (appraising) which records are archival and worthy of that protection.

Secondly, I personally believe very strongly that the analytical skills and methods of the graduate-level-trained historian, especially the intellectual historian—*not* his or her knowledge of the subject content of the records—are very complementary to the analytical skills needed by the working archivist to research and understand the functions, programmes, activities, decision-making processes, record-keeping

systems, acts and transactions, and records of any complex records creator, now and over time, to support the *archival* functions of appraisal, description, and reference. If Eastwood rejects that observation based on my hiring and supervising almost thirty archivists over the past decade to do the actual work (and they do it very well), then he might again talk to Mary Sue Stephenson about what is happening on the other side of his wall. Along these lines, he might also recall that diplomatic analysis, the defence of which sparked his Counterpoint, developed as an auxiliary discipline to *history*, and for no accident. I also believe, however, that these essential analytical skills required by the archivist can be found/obtained from graduates of disciplines other than academic History *per se*, and that such skills and abilities should complement rather than replace, threaten, or challenge graduate-level archival education, which has long been in my view the profession's future. Is Eastwood so offended because I have tried to establish some continuity between archivists' past and (still often) present education in history and their (increasingly) present and future education in archival studies? Building linkages and encouraging convergences across generations strikes me as more helpful than drawing disciplinary lines and building professional walls.

### *Historical Subject Content*

I reject Eastwood's charge that I advocate that in-coming archivists or archival studies students should be trained "beforehand" in the "specialized 'subject' knowledge" (p. 248) of the actual, let alone potential, bodies of records which that archivist may encounter in his or her career. Eastwood is once again confusing my advocacy of the benefits of graduate-level or advanced exposure and mastery of historical methodology and historical theory, as *part* of an archivist's overall education, with the actual writing of history derived from subject-based research in a particular theme or time period. So let me make absolutely clear what has long been my position: archivists are not historians as the term is generally understood. Archivists do not write history, unless it be the history of the record. Archivists do archival analysis rather than historical scholarship, but in doing so they also use many of the same tools and methodologies of the historian, including textual narrative analyses of the post-modernists—as Rick Brown has suggested—as a means to discern context through "reading" text, and including diplomatic analysis—as Luciana Duranti has outlined—as a means to understand context through document structures, forms, conventions, authorship, etc. Archivists do share with historians an interest in subject content, but for entirely different reasons. Any archival record or aggregation of records has three crucial, interrelated parts: content, structure, and context. I am sure Eastwood would agree that archivists should ideally know as much as they can about all three parts if they are to do their *archival* work well. Because of all these factors, and a great many others I have outlined, there are very good grounds for cross-fertilization between archives and history—which does not mean that they or their practitioners are the same, or have the same ends, or that, by advocating this cross-fertilization, I personally cannot keep the two clear in my own mind, or cannot keep from my mind sinister thoughts of wanting to undermine a growing archival professionalism by turning the clock back to the good old days when Mother History ruled us all. Eastwood should find another strawman from whom to fashion bricks for his wall.

While I clarified—some ten years ago, and at considerable length—my views on the relationship of archivy to history,<sup>7</sup> along the general lines noted above, Eastwood chose to ignore that major statement of my position in favour of the much slighter 1977 effort, and to make much of my reference therein to archivists keeping in touch with the relevant “academic field.” All may be fair in love and war. In professional discourse, however, normally the evolution of an opponent’s views is admitted and respected, rather than decontextualized from earlier work. More than a little ironically, Eastwood himself prescribes in his *Counterpoint* a view that I have long held, but which somehow he thinks is contrary to my position. He asserts that, in terms of mastering a field in which the records fall, “the archivist must obviously seek the advice of the persons who created and used the records or who otherwise have the knowledge which the archivist may lack *in order to understand certain aspects of them* [emphasis added]” (p. 248). I trust Eastwood would allow into such a “knowledge” base for working archivists (not archivists in training!) any available official or scholarly histories of the records creator, its functions and structures, and their evolution over time; biographies and autobiographies of key players; political science analyses of decision-making processes and organizational behaviour; and scores of other such “academic” sources, to say nothing of the myriad of unpublished and near-published contextual sources I cite in my RAMP study and elsewhere as underpinning archival analysis during the appraisal function.

### ***Appraisal***

I reject Eastwood’s contention that my appraisal paradigm is based on advising “archivists to analyze records in order to make historical judgements” (p. 249). It is based on analyzing records to make archival judgements about which functions, programmes, activities, processes, records-keeping systems, acts, transactions, and therefore which related records give the best, most succinct, most focused evidence of the records creator’s essence. It certainly advises the archivist to look for positive and negative evidence of such functions, programmes, transactions, and so on. It certainly requires making judgements, but these are archival, not historical.

My whole approach to appraisal—that judgemental process—is explicitly focused, moreover, on creation and functionality, not on potential use. Over and over again, in many different contexts, I have for the past ten years rejected the Schellenbergian paradigm of determining value through actual or anticipated secondary use, especially use by academic historians. Over and over again, I have stated the vital importance in the macro-appraisal approach of focusing on the corporate records creator’s vital sites of records creation. My approach is thus explicitly and repeatedly provenance-based—a virtual or conceptual approach to provenance to be sure for our electronic age, but provenance nonetheless. It is emphatically not driven by making historical judgements, as Eastwood describes them, or by some “Olympian” dream (p. 249) to shape the writing of human history, or by some odious desire, as Eastwood accuses, to impose my own ideological agenda on the archival record or society’s understanding of the past.

Given the impossibility of trying to summarize here some 150 pages of my offending RAMP study and draft case file report to prove these assertions, I can

only invite readers to read the originals from which Eastwood takes my views on appraisal out of context to buttress once again his tiresome charge that I am a historian in archivist's clothing. It will have to be enough to say that, in commenting on one aspect only of many relating to the appraisal criteria I advance for case files (that is, as they may give evidence of distortions and variations, or "hot spots," from the original programme's intent, they acquire more value as evidence of the creator's overall activity), Eastwood is ripping apart a seamless whole. The reader of his *Counterpoint* would not guess that the appraisal of hardcopy case files, on one part of which he alone focuses, is in fact steps eight and nine of a nine-step appraisal methodology; that the seven previous steps in the methodology come first and offer quite different, but complementary criteria to assigning archival value; that these seven steps deal with the entire information universe of the creator, and not just case files; that the advisory to archivists to watch for evidence of programme failure and variation comes *after* steps advising them to document the programme's intent and successes and "normal" operations (thus striking an overall balance of *evidence* of activity); that my sampling and selection criteria for case files are based on an internal analysis (explicitly made analogous to diplomatics) of record and series organization, structure, and form, and explicitly deny imposing secondary user subject-based requirements on the process; and that this whole nine-step methodology is itself preceded by three-levels of macro-appraisal, with yet more appraisal criteria—all again determined by analyzing the provenancial functionality of the creator rather than anything "historical." The whole appraisal model or strategy, moreover, is grounded in a theoretical model of societal functions and how their structural implementation may be understood. For Eastwood thus to focus on one dimension only of this complex approach, pretending that it is the whole, and then, using that, to ascribe personal (and unflattering) motivations to me as a result is (at a minimum) not very helpful. Others who have reviewed my work have been somewhat more generous in not seeing it as undermining archival "integrity" (p. 249). Rather the opposite: David Bearman, for example, takes me at my word for my stated intent, concluding that my approach to appraisal is "grounded in the richest concept of *evidential* significance ever offered to North American archivists."<sup>8</sup> Eastwood believes a fairer appreciation is that I long ago got on a "slippery slope" (p. 249) as a history graduate student when I first entered the archival profession, that I then said all of substance I would ever think on these matters in my 1977 review article, and that every time I mention (or even allude to) the word history or historical methodology I am reverting to type as an historian *manqué* intent on undermining the very nature, indeed "integrity," of archival documents, archival evidence, and archival education. This is, quite frankly, an extraordinary misreading of my texts and published intentions, and of the policies and practices of the National Archives of Canada.

Let me once again, therefore, clear up any confusion that Eastwood has engendered: the new approach to appraisal at the National Archives neither ignores records nor injects the historian's perspective into the appraisal process; rather, the NA's approach resurrects the importance of provenance in the appraisal process, moves beyond the traditional structuralist *mentalité* of archival theory and strategy to a functional one, situates records for appraisal within that broader functional context of their creation, incorporates electronic records into a comprehensive, multi-media appraisal rather than treating them as isolated special projects, and

focuses on the contemporary processes and uses to which the records were put rather than on their anticipated research uses. I should have thought that such a radical departure from the Schellenbergian appraisal paradigm might have been welcomed by Eastwood, being an anti-Schellenbergian himself. At the very least, I might have expected that the new appraisal approach would have been respected as a major attempt by a major institution to address the complex contexts and media facing archivists in the electronic world—challenged if need be on the terms and logic it encompasses certainly, but not discredited and dismissed simply because of the alleged pro-history stance of its leading advocates.

### *Relativism and the Archivist*

I do not reject so much as find incomprehensible Eastwood's refusal to acknowledge that archivists are agents, conscious or unconscious, willing or unwilling, of the historical process in which they find themselves. What actor in the human drama is not? Eastwood himself has recognized that archives, as institutions and records, are "an expression of the society which created them ... [and] one must understand the political, economic, social and cultural milieu of any given society to understand its archives."<sup>9</sup> Precisely. And what is true of understanding past archives is just as relevant for our own. Yet Eastwood seems incredulous of my belief about (in his words) archivists' "appraisal actions actually belonging to the historical record" (p. 249). He thinks that this will somehow undermine future historical scholarship! That certainly would not be the opinion of intellectual historians now publishing on past cultural agencies, such as galleries, museums, or historic sites, where the records of decisions of such agencies' professional staff members are the foundation (rather than the antithesis) of stimulating historical scholarship. On the broader point, his neo-Jenkinsonian implication that archivists are neutral agents operating in some kind of objective vacuum—and if not, then they are evil National Archives' historians stealing the archival grail—is a misleading illusion. He might, in his own happy phrase, learn "a thing or two" from Brien Brothman about the relativistic rather than absolute nature of archival work, archival decisions, and, yes, archival concepts, archival assumptions, and archivally-imposed "orders of value" as these are now re-examined in light of the post-modern world in which we live.

On that final score at least, Eastwood is right. He advises me (although for the wrong reason) to learn "a thing or two" (p. 249) from Brien Brothman.<sup>10</sup> I am proud to say that I have. I suggest that every archivist, including Professor Eastwood, can as well—a point that the group awarding the W. Kaye Lamb Prize to Brothman evidently also supported. That award, I hope, reflected a maturing profession with enough self-assurance to entertain sometimes radically divergent renderings of the archival universe as part of its professional discourse. A sensitive probing such as Brothman's, which attempts to locate the mission of the profession within the broadest intellectual currents of post-modernist thinking, based on wide-ranging reading and deep reflection, and asking whether or not our most fundamental assumptions still hold, strikes me as a very welcome contribution to either side of Eastwood's wall. We should reach across our walls and celebrate such an accomplishment rather than throwing rocks at it.

### Notes

- 1 Terry Eastwood, "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 232-52. Page references throughout the text refer to Eastwood's Counterpoint. Those readers who are rock-and-roll literate will recognize in *my* title that in return for Eastwood's own expression (p. 248) and his wall metaphor, I am likewise taking "a little amusement" at his expense. "Another Brick In The Wall (Part II)" is copyrighted by 1979 Pink Floyd Music Limited, from Pink Floyd, *The Wall*, CBS Music Products, Inc., 1979.
- 2 Mary Sue Stephenson, "Deciding Not to Build the Wall: Research and the Archival Profession," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 145-51.
- 3 Terry Eastwood, "Nurturing Archival Education in the University," *American Archivist* 51 (Summer 1988), pp. 228-52.
- 4 Terry Cook, "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85), pp. 46, 49. Emphasis added.
- 5 Eastwood, "Nurturing Archival Education," pp. 248-49.
- 6 Among others, see Terence M. Eastwood, "Reflections on the Development of Archives in Canada and Australia," in Sue McKemish and Frank Upward, eds., *Archival Documents: Providing Accountability Through Recordkeeping* (Clayton, 1993), p. 27, and *passim*; Terry Eastwood, "R.E. Gosnell, E.O.S. Scholefield, and the Founding of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1894-1916," in Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, 1993), pp. 109-32.
- 7 Cook, "From Information to Knowledge," pp. 28-49.
- 8 Review of my RAMP study, in *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), p. 217 (emphasis added). Some modicum of modesty precludes me citing other, similar reviews, but it is safe to say that none of the others even hint that I am imposing a "history" agenda on archives.
- 9 Eastwood, "Reflections," p. 27.
- 10 See Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 78-100. Brothman is Eastwood's principal target in his Counterpoint.