

The reviewer says the book deals with “old issues” and presents “out-of-date information,” but gives no examples of either. Again, I was left wondering what the point was. The discussion of issues is based in large part on the surveys and analyses of repositories, conditions, issues, and needs carried out by a majority of the states during the 1980s and early 1990s with grants from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, on the archival literature, and on my own experiences. Indeed, I believe I am accurate when I say (p. 44) that “...the period since the mid 1970s might well be called ‘The Age of Archival Analysis’ owing to the dozens of surveys, analytical studies, profiles, and reports on historical records programs and archival issues.” The information in the book is as current as I could make it; as noted above, it is based heavily in recent and, I believe, very sound professional literature and practice. One may find *The Archival Enterprise* not to his or her liking, but I do not believe it is outdated—yet!

Ms. Duranti did not find much positive to say about *The Archival Enterprise*. That is her right as a reviewer, and I respect it. Open discussion and even debate may enrich and advance the profession. But too many of the points in this review seem unfair, too critical, less than accurate, or represent areas where she apparently simply disagrees with my views.

Thank you.

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## *Nesmith and The Rediscovery of Provenance*

### *(Response to Heather MacNeil)*

I want to respond to two points raised in Heather MacNeil’s review of my *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*. (See her “Archival Studies in the Canadian Grain: The Search for a Canadian Archival Tradition,” *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994), pp. 134-149.) I respond to clarify my position for her and readers of *Archivaria* because a misimpression is left by the review. Before addressing these two points, however, I want to thank MacNeil for a very thorough, thoughtful, and generally fair and favourable review.

One of MacNeil’s two main criticisms of the book is that I am “selective” in interpreting the Canadian archival tradition. She says that in my introductory article in the book I state that the “rediscovery of provenance” is the achievement of those who have approached the study of archives by focusing on the origins, evolution, and original characteristics of records and the functions and activities of institutions and private individuals that create them, that is, subjects that are part of what I call the history of the records. MacNeil adds that I believe “that the use of ‘historical research methodologies and interpretive insights’ characterizes the Canadian contribution to archival studies...” MacNeil misreads me when she comes to this conclusion. I do not hold that view and did not present it in the book. On p. 144 of her review she quotes several lines from page 10 of my article to support her conclusion. However, she omits from the passage she quotes the portion

that permits a fuller view of my thought on the matter, which is that those who have approached the study of archives from the “administrative” side of the field *and* those who have done so from the “historical” side have both contributed in important ways to the rediscovery of provenance.

In the portion of my article that precedes the passage that MacNeil quotes on p. 144 of her review to support her contention that I do not recognize the diverse origins of the rediscovery of provenance, I outline in some detail the contribution to the rediscovery by those on the “administrative” side such as David Bearman, Richard Lyle, Mario Fenyo, Peter Scott, and Max Evans (see pp. 5-10 of my article). I refer collectively to their work as a major contribution to the “modern agenda” for the administration of archives. I then follow this directly with the statement that is left out of the quoted material on p. 144 of the review and that was intended by me to indicate one of the routes (the “administrative” one) taken by Canadian archivists to the rediscovery of provenance: “Canadian archivists have also contributed to the rediscovery of provenance. Influenced by American developments, Canadians too have pursued the modern agenda and found their progress impeded by unresolved and unanticipated problems related to the nature of provenance.” In the next sentence I refer to “another route” also taken, the “historical” one. I then immediately continue with explicit reference to both routes to the rediscovery: “The result of *both efforts* in Canada [emphasis added] has been a deepening of the knowledge of Canadian archivists of provenance information about recorded communication, records administration, and institutional history, as well as the emergence of an approach to archival administration and education which is shaped by this knowledge. The essays in this book have been chosen to illustrate this development.” My discussion or interpretation of each of the book’s articles goes on to show how in various major areas of pursuit of the study of archives in Canada, from whatever point the authors begin this study (“administrative” or “historical”), concern about the nature and meaning of provenance quickly emerged as a central issue. I do not see therefore how she can conclude that “It is not that Nesmith chooses to concentrate on certain aspects of Canadian archival studies—the historian of the record perspective is recognizably part of the Canadian archival tradition—it is more that he chooses to ignore other aspects equally as important.” I do not ignore them.

MacNeil’s second main criticism concerns my view of diplomatics. She contends that I disregard “the archivist’s use of diplomatics” as “a tool for understanding the characteristics of archival documents (their internal and external form, the processes and procedures they reflect)” and that I again ignore studies of important aspects of archival administration such as Luciana Duranti’s and Janet Turner’s approach to diplomatics. MacNeil maintains that I endorse instead “the historian’s use of diplomatics” and thus see it as “a tool for interpreting the meaning within [the documents].” This interest in “meaning,” she argues, is not the archivist’s concern. (144-46).

The topics and approaches of the articles that I selected for inclusion in the book—on the history of records administration, photography, documentary art, and cartography—fit within the framework of diplomatic and archival studies. I grant that they did not reflect in detail the approaches to diplomatics emphasized by

Duranti and Turner. Like MacNeil, I too think that Turner's article is a good one. Its absence, however, is not evidence that I ignore diplomatics in my thinking about archives. Turner's article offers a very basic, initial foray into diplomatics by, as she modestly says, "an apprentice, not a master of the technique...." (*Archivaria* 30, p. 91). As she also says, much more provenance information than she provides with her application of diplomatic analysis to the record she studies is required to manage it and other archival records. (The document in question is one used by a United Church congregation in British Columbia in 1946 to "call" a minister.) Turner writes that in addition to the provenance information she has provided,

It will be necessary to make a study of the **Law** which governs the United Church, in order to learn more about the procedures leading up to and following the call, and more about the powers vested in the various courts of the church. The **History** of church union, and the policies of the United Church's three founding denominations ... must be explored in order to understand the apparent contradiction between congregational authority and the hierarchical checks on it. Finally, although this document has been encountered in a somewhat artificial context, it is in fact part of a large archival accumulation. It will therefore be possible to corroborate much of what has been said about the documents and about the United Church through the application of **Archival Theory** to the document merged once more with the archives of the British Columbia Conference of the United Church of Canada. (pp. 100-101; emphasis in the original.)

Thus Turner's article, like many other good articles, did not contribute to the theme of the book, the rediscovery of provenance, as fully as others on the study of records that are in the book.

The decision not to include Turner's article ought not then to be taken as dismissal by me of diplomatics from archival studies. Indeed, I drew the reader's attention to Duranti's contribution to diplomatics in three places in my introductory article (pp. 11, 25, and 26). The second reference was given to explain that logistical reasons prevented one or more of the parts of her six-part series of articles in *Archivaria* 28-33 on the subject from appearing in the book, and where the reader will find the series and thus more information on diplomatics. That is far from ignoring her approach to diplomatics. The article that she does have in the book deals in part with diplomatics, and again refers the reader to additional sources of information about it. Furthermore, Duranti's series and Turner's article were the only Canadian publications on diplomatics available for consideration when the book was being prepared. (Parenthetically, I add that their articles are studied by my students in the master's programme in archival studies at the University of Manitoba as examples of aspects of approaches to the study of records. I recognize that MacNeil cannot be expected to know that as this fact is not directly related to the book and review. It does, however, help to clarify my view of diplomatics.)

The articles I chose to represent diplomatic themes remain valuable contributions to archival studies, even if they do not go into diplomatic territory as deeply as MacNeil would like, and even though their authors are interested in "the meaning" of the documents as well as their other "characteristics." In support of this

approach I refer to the ACA curriculum guidelines for masters programmes in archival studies. They state very clearly that archival studies students should be taught that “the way in which documents are created, selected, preserved, and used is determined by the political, philosophical, and juridical conceptions held by each society in any given time. The knowledge of the nature, origin, development, and diffusion of those conceptions provides a better understanding, not only of archival material but also of the archival functions, because every archivist acts in a determined social and intellectual context and is conditioned by it.” This desire *to understand* the documents is not limited in any way in the guidelines. This understanding of archival records is clearly not restricted in the guidelines to that narrow aspect of diplomatics defined by MacNeil as the domain of “the archivist’s use of diplomatics”; rather, it is approved as being well within the domain of “archival studies”—not outside it as “the historian’s use of diplomatics.” It is thus a legitimate focus for archival education, research, and publication about records. MacNeil’s analysis and exclusiveness of language do not therefore relate very much to what I said or believe, but rather betray an attempt to legitimize her own perspective as the one true “archival” perspective, by setting against it those whom she concludes differ with it, labelling them as “historical” or the “other,” but not archival.

This exclusiveness is oddly inconsistent with her own admirable plea for an inclusive approach to the study of archives, a plea made elsewhere in the same issue of *Archivaria* that contains her review. There she writes:

Natural and even necessary to our personal and professional formation is a certain fealty to a set of beliefs concerning the meaning and value of the work we do. Yet such allegiance should not prevent us from seeing that the validity of these beliefs—the truthfulness of our truths if you will—is necessarily constrained by the limitations of our individual perspectives: our truths are, at best, partial ones. We need for that reason to listen, attentively and tolerantly, to other, alternative, truths and as far as possible work toward their mutual reconciliation. Such attentiveness and tolerance will only enrich archival discourse, opening doors and windows for further exploration and transformations (p. 18).

Despite longstanding tensions in the Canadian archival community over the type, comparative utility, and interrelationships between aspects of the knowledge archivists should have, I remain hopeful that better understanding and greater appreciation of the merits of various viewpoints can be attained. I think *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* contributes to that aim. I encourage efforts to improve on its contribution. Although I am disappointed that in her review MacNeil views it as one-sided, I welcome the willingness she states elsewhere to see that there are various valid perspectives on the discussion of these viewpoints. Diversity of opinion, mutual respect, and civility are signs of a healthy profession. I hope in this reply to MacNeil’s review that I have been able to reassure her, at least on some of her points of concern, that I too am trying to see more than one side.

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