

Counterpoint

The Archivist as Forensic Scientist - Seeing Ourselves in a Different Way

by ELIZABETH DIAMOND

Throughout the profession in recent years, there has been an increasing concern for formal archival education. Several new courses in archival studies have been started in Canada. The Society of American Archivists has finally produced guidelines for a Masters of Archival Science degree programme, after years of seeming to consider autonomous post-graduate programmes in archives unnecessary.¹ As a result, the nature of archival studies has become the subject of intense discussion. The American debate, conducted in print and by electronic mail, was described by Frank Burke in his presidential address at Montreal in 1992.² In Canada, the direction and nature of archival scholarship arouses strong opinions.³ Before we can resolve the debate, we must settle the question of what exactly an archivist is and the inevitable corollary, what an archivist is not. To do so, we must ask again what an archivist does and why; we must also consider what an archivist studies and how she or he practises. We must have a clear picture of ourselves and our relationships with other similar professions. Only when we have clarified our role in our own minds, can we go on to cooperate as equal partners with related professionals in a world flooded with information. Only then can we go on to create a wider role for our profession in the world at large.

Although the hoary old argument about whether or not an archivist should be a historian still lurks in the minds of many archivists, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is a distinct archival mind-set that distinguishes archivists from all other professionals. One of the chief purposes of archival education should be to establish this mind-set in the students' way of thinking, giving the archivist an approach that is different from a historian's. The archivist looks at a document and asks first "What *is* this?"—not, as a historian would ask, "What is this *about*?"⁴ The archivist's first concern is with the documents themselves, not with the information they contain.

Of course, good archivists will be interested in the content of documents. Their professional expertise, however, is embodied in that first question, "what is this?"

To answer it the archivist must ask and answer several subsidiary questions: "Who made it? When, where, how, and why?" In the process of responding to these questions, the archivist will discover not only what the document is about but, more importantly, the whole context of its creation. This is not to suggest that archivists should be uninterested in history or its writing. Quite the opposite: most archivists will always be interested in and informed about history. It is simply that the archivist approaches the raw material from which history is written differently.

An archivist attempting to define him or herself, especially in an academic milieu, encounters a problem. The assumption is still very frequently made that a full-time archivist is some sort of second-class historian. Simply denying that one is a historian does not suffice, and the attempt to explain that the study of archives is a separate, though related, scholarly discipline often fails. The following analogy, however, helps to clarify the differences.

If the whole field of historical studies could be viewed as a court of law, then the academic historian might be seen as the advocate or the prosecuting counsel. The historian takes a position, assesses the evidence, emphasises that particular evidence which best supports his or her position, and presents the argument in favour of his or her case. Other historians will argue other sides of the case. Posterity and the discipline as a whole will pass judgement on the arguments.

If the historian is the lawyer in the court of history, then the archivist is the forensic scientist.⁵ His or her job is to acquire, preserve, arrange, and make accessible, both physically and intellectually, the archival record—what Sir Hilary Jenkinson called the "material evidences"⁶ of the historical case. The services of the forensic scientist are available impartially to all sides in the case. A forensic scientist may have an opinion about the rights or wrongs in any particular argument, but does not express that opinion in an official capacity; she or he must avoid advocacy. This does not mean that a forensic scientist has a merely custodial relationship with the evidence. It is his or her major professional function to clarify the meaning of the evidence—to, as it were, determine the blood group of the stain, the brand of the cigar ash, and all the scientifically possible explanations of the circumstances without speculating whether or not the accused is guilty. The line between the facts that are clearly and indisputably part of the evidence and the interpretations that can be made from that evidence can be very hard to draw. No human being can be totally impartial; the legal system works by seeking a balance between different partialities. It is for this reason that forensic science, with its own distinct knowledge base and methodology, is a discipline separate from the lawyer's. To ensure that the deliberations of the court of history come as close as possible to the truth, the perceptions of both the forensic scientist and the advocate must be considered.

The professional duty of the archivist is to describe the context of archival records accurately and to make this context available and obvious to anyone who wants to use the records, either as evidence or as a source of information. The oil spill caused by the grounding of the tanker *Exxon Valdez* in Prince William Sound can provide a current example.⁷ The spill resulted in many studies of the effects on the wildlife of the area. While the scientists collecting the data were all reputable professionals, the conclusions of those working for the oil company on the one hand, and those working for the United States Government and conservation

groups on the other, were very different. The reasons for these differences will be a matter of speculation for years to come. When the various records are eventually made available to future researchers, the context of their creation will have to be very clear if they are to mean anything. It will be the archivists in charge of these records who will be responsible for transmitting this context without adding bias to one set of data or the other.

One means of doing this will be by providing good descriptions of what the documents are and the context in which they were created. The *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)* constitute one of the most effective tools yet devised for applying the archival mind-set to the problem. Using *RAD* forces the archivist to examine very carefully the exact nature of the records and their arrangement. Of all the required areas in a *RAD* description, only the scope and content note deals with the *subject* of the records. Even in that area the rules say “at the fonds or series level, give information on the functions and activities generating the records and/or their arrangement as the principle means of indicating the unit being described.”⁸ An accurate description of functions, which is part of contextual information, avoids those long lists of ill-defined subjects or idiosyncratic file titles that too often constituted the scope notes of the past.

The rules are based on the concept of the archival fonds, which Terry Eastwood describes as “the cardinal principle of provenance.”⁹ Writing the rules required the Canadian archival community to analyze the concept of provenance and clarify it in a number of publications.¹⁰ Actually trying to apply *RAD* is forcing archivists to define the structure of their records in new and more precise ways. We must look at archives with sharper and more acute vision. Before writing the *RAD* description of a fonds, we must, in Duff and Haworth’s words, “discern its arrangement.”¹¹ The effort to do so helps to keep us from destroying an original order the significance of which we might have failed to see with our former subject-oriented vision.

There is a great danger, especially as we try to automate access to archival material, that we will forget that archivists are not in the first instance concerned with information. Their primary concern is with the documents in which the information is embedded. This is because the context in which they were created is an essential part of the information. In a very real sense, “the medium is the message”—or at least a vital part of it.¹² As Terry Eastwood says, “archival documents are evidence first and information second.”¹³ We must remember that they bear witness not only to the intentional evidence for which their creators kept them in the first place, but also to the unintentional evidence which may tell us far more about the creators and the reasons for their creation. When archivists deal with researchers, they should be facilitating their search for information; they should also be providing them with access to the context in which that information exists.

It is more difficult to retrieve isolated pieces of information from archives than from libraries, and always will be. We should not forget that this is largely because of “the distinction between archival material, generated as the result of an action and library material, which is a synthesis of a wide body of information brought together by one or more authors.”¹⁴ Almost all subject access techniques have been developed for use on library resources—that is to say, on synthesized material.

Archival material contains, by nature, unsynthesized, raw information, which is much more difficult to handle. The archivist makes a synthesis in descriptions and finding aids, particularly the scope and content note, biographical notes, or administrative history. It is relatively easy to give subject access to these synthesized finding aids and descriptions. Beyond this level however, it becomes more difficult. In the case of single, discrete items of information, such as unpublished reports, photographs, or maps, we should, in ideal circumstances, be able to provide access as simply as does a library. We should remember, however, that very little information exists in archives in a totally discrete form. Inevitably, the context of its creation and the part it plays in the larger context of its fonds colours information and changes it. It is to that context that archivists should be striving to give access.

Computers give us the opportunity to create extremely detailed access to archival material. Far too frequently, however, this capacity is used to give access to single, isolated references, in which form the material can far too easily be taken without its context. If we set out to index, manually or with computers, only subjects, we may find the links to contextual information hard or impossible to make—particularly for researchers unfamiliar with the nature of archives. Yet those links are vital to the proper understanding of the information. The Subject Indexing Working Group of the PCDS has given us a very thorough report on subject indexing for archives.¹⁵ We must now begin to devise guidelines for indexing the contextual matrix in which that information is embedded.¹⁶ In many cases, however, the explanation of the context may be too complicated to be encompassed in any indexing method as we understand it.

One of the best examples of the archivist as forensic scientist in the court of history is given in an article by Catherine Bailey on electronic records.¹⁷ Because the electronic record is, as it were, stored in fragments, it is more difficult to answer the question “what is this document?” As a result, it is much more tempting to limit our thinking to the question “what is this document about?” Precisely because of this problem, we have to be even more conscious of preserving contextual information. Archivists, like forensic scientists, become expert witnesses, testifying to the nature of the documents. More and more often with electronic records this is actually the case, as Bailey points out. Instead of being able to discard traditional archival principles, as some archivists thought when they first encountered electronic records,¹⁸ it is necessary to use them even more scrupulously, as the context of the records is not immediately obvious to the user. The archivist must “translate” the records and be able to testify that they have not been tampered with or falsified. This expert testimony is essential; without it, the electronic record cannot be used as evidence. It is clearly a modern example of Jenkinson’s moral defense of archives.

While many people agree that “the traditional approach to retrieval with the archivist as essential intermediary between the user and the records is no longer viable,”¹⁹ it is important that we continue to provide that mediation in some form. The majority of the users of archives are not the academic historians or scholars who could be expected to be familiar with the nature of archives.²⁰ This being the case, the archivist must find other ways to make researchers aware of the context in

which the information they find was created. This is not a simple task in many cases. We almost need to be able to attach to all retrievals a warning notice: “Do not accept this information until you know where it came from.”

A good illustration of this problem can be found in the records of Lower Canada held by the Manuscript Division of the National Archives. RG4, B20 contains a number of original pardons, both absolute and conditional—that is to say, the original document given to the prisoner on his release, in the case of absolute pardon, as evidence that he had been legally pardoned. In the case of conditional pardon, the document was given to the official responsible for seeing that the conditions were carried out. A researcher with the historical approach encountering one of these pardons and focusing on what the document is about, would probably feel justified in assuming that the individual named had been pardoned. This assumption would be totally incorrect. The archivist, with an approach centred on the document itself, would recognize that the fact that the pardon remains in the files is evidence that it was never issued in that form. Therefore, the prisoner was *not* pardoned, at least not on that occasion or under those conditions.²¹ The archivist must find some way to share this insight, without having to sit down and explain it to each individual researcher.

Every archivist knows the frustration of dealing with researchers who do not read the introductions to finding aids before they start to search. They want instant access and are frequently too impatient to realize that they also need the contextual background. One of the most promising practical developments toward giving the researcher this sort of background is the use of relational databases such as GEN-CAT.²² Used with *RAD*, such a database can make it almost impossible for the researcher to avoid the contextual information in the Administrative History, Custodial History, and Scope and Content notes. A full text search capacity allows the researcher to find any phrase or key word in the database. In the past, when such a clue was provided by a manual index or some other reference tool, too many then simply went straight to the document, thereby missing the information that might possibly have changed, and would certainly have broadened, their understanding—as in the pardon case cited above. A relational database can be arranged so that the appropriate notes appear on the same screen, or at least in the same computer record, as the text containing the key word or the phrase. The links to context are so easy that even the most impatient researcher should be able to make them. *RAD* enjoins us not to repeat at a lower level information given at a higher one. As a result, we will have to be careful to tie the administrative history note of the parent description to that of its children in the chain of hierarchy. *RAD* already tells us to do this by using such a phrase as “This series forms part of the ____ fonds.” Perhaps we should add a further phrase, giving a simple command to bring up the appropriate parent’s computer record in every administrative history note.

The belief that archivists are, and should be, handmaidens of history—running a sort of service industry in which the customer is always right—is still held by many historians and some archivists.²³ They see many imperfections in archives and archivists arising from a failure to consider the needs of historians. What those who hold this belief have failed to realize is that the faults they have perceived in past practice arose not because the archivists of the past were not good enough

historians, but because they were sometimes too much historians and not good enough archivists. As Jenkinson put it,

Most of the bad, and sometimes damaging work, which has been done upon Archives in the past, from the "methodizing" of them down to the publishing of expensive calendars conforming so closely to the desires of one generation of students that they were quite useless for the purposes of the next—most of the bad and dangerous work done in the past may be traced to external enthusiasms resulting in *a failure on the part of the Archivist to treat Archives as a separate subject*.²⁴

Jenkinson is suggesting not that archivists should ignore the study of history, but that they should approach the raw materials from which history is written from a different starting point than do historians. The problem of how to ensure that sufficient records are acquired and preserved to illuminate all aspects of society and provide an information matrix for all schools of history, present and future, is a difficult one. It will not be solved, however, by simply giving the current customers what they want. In the long run, the court of history will be better served by evidence preserved by professional archivists who do not consider themselves servants of any other profession.

The necessity of maintaining an independent attitude in questions of acquisition is clear. Hans Booms, for example, sees acquisition and appraisal as the central function of the archivist.²⁵ He acknowledges the close relationship between archivists and historians, but does not see the archivist's duty as merely supplying current historical demand: "fluctuating historical demand, defined by historical theories is actually not a very dependable category for determining value, especially if one is interested in 'maintaining enduring values' (Rohr) For 'enduring values' are dependent not on the degree to which they satisfy the needs of present day research, but at best, only the needs of future research."²⁶ Booms proposes that archivists should formulate a documentary heritage "according to an *archival conception*, historically assessed, which reflects the consciousness of the particular period for which the archives is responsible and from which the source material to be appraised is taken."²⁷ He insists that "measuring the societal significance of past fact by analysing the value which their contemporaries attached to them should serve as the foundation for all archival efforts towards forming the documentary heritage."²⁸ It is interesting to note that Jenkinson suggested something very similar, following his famous criticism of archivists as historians with the statement that "the Archivist should be a modern only so far as strictly modern questions of buildings, custody and the like are concerned: for the rest he should be all things to all Archives, his interests identified with theirs, his period and point of view theirs."²⁹

The vast flood of records, particularly government records, rushing toward us in recent years has made Canadian archivists reconsider the nature of appraisal and the criteria on which it is to be based—to ensure that the archivally valuable part, and only that part, is preserved. In this, as in all archival activities, an archival point of view is a necessity. At the most simple level, it is obviously necessary to know the exact nature of a document or series in order to decide whether it is the best available and most complete record of the transaction. In some cases, such as

financial records, this knowledge is not as easily grasped as it might at first seem.³⁰ Such knowledge, however, is also vital at the more sophisticated level of deciding which transactions are worthy of preservation.

A historian involved in appraisal, would, in essence, ask “What could I (or another historian) use these records for?” To be true to the role of archival forensic scientist, guardian of the evidence, the archivist must instead ask first “What did the *creators* of these records use them for?” Only after answering that question can one consider what other uses they might have.

The distortion of appraisal through the use of too historical an approach can be seen in the case of the homestead files of the former Dominion Lands Branch of the Department of the Interior, now in the custody of the Saskatchewan Archives Board. These files were created to record the progress of each individual homestead claim through the various stages up to granting the land patent to the homesteader. In 1943, the Department of Mines and Resources, which had inherited the Lands Branch files, made plans to dispose of them. The historian A.S. Morton, who was trying to create an archival institution in Saskatchewan, examined them and told Gustave Lanctôt that most “would be pure routine and would have little or no historical value.... But a smaller proportion would involve correspondence... with people who, from some trouble or another, had not been able to make good their contracts.” He felt that this correspondence could have wide interest to economic and social historians. Because of the expense of weeding out the routine files, he recommended that they “keep the chaff for the sake of the wheat.”³¹ When the files eventually were transferred in 1956, most were stripped to the bare administrative documents: application for the entry on the land, application for the patent to the land, and the notification of the grant of the patent. One in twelve was left complete.³² These unstripped files show that a great amount of other documentation had been routinely placed on the files: records of liens to cover the cost of loans for seed grains and relief given by federal departments, records of tax claims by the provincial government, inspection reports, citizenship records, and a great deal of incidental information. They also prove that the files were still in use and that new documentation was still being added right up to the time of transfer. Today this chaff is in continuous heavy use by all sorts of researchers.³³ It is difficult not to feel that they were preserved as much by chance as by intention. With the much greater demand on storage space in today’s archives, we must ask whether our modern appraisal techniques would have done any better.

Two of the most interesting recent suggestions for appraisal strategies come from Terry Cook and Terry Eastwood.³⁴ We should speculate on how each would treat the homestead files if they came into their hands today. Terry Cook proposes a “macro-appraisal” approach, which involves “focusing first on the functions causing a record to be created and on the structures affecting the creation rather than on the record itself.”³⁵ When the most significant agencies or parts of agencies have been identified, then and only then can individual series of records and record-keeping systems be examined and appraised. The appraising archivist must not judge actual series by whether they will be useful to researchers, but “by how accurately the records project and sharpen the image of the citizen-state dialectic, and the separate actors, agents and functions involved in them.”³⁶ While Cook sets

out certain circumstances in which case files have archival value in their own right, he stresses the principle that, in most instances, the case files should be kept for "documenting the citizen-state interaction *per se* and *not* for documenting the programme or the agency or the citizen separately."³⁷

Since this approach requires historical and sociological methods of analysis of records creating agencies, it is all the more important to keep the archival point of view in mind from the beginning. Without a conscious effort, it will be difficult to avoid choosing agencies that project an image in terms of current historical theories. Controversial programmes, which Cook regards as most likely to generate significant records, will have to be deemed so by a historical judgement. The danger, greatly simplified, is that we may move from selection of material because it contains information about important political activities and government on the large scale, to selecting it because it contains information about important administrative activities or government on the smaller scale. The old archivist working through the political historian's mind-set may be replaced by the archivist thinking as an administrative historian.

Cook's method would undoubtedly have identified the function of administering the transfer of millions of acres of Crown Land to private ownership as significant. He, like Morton, would have acquired the policy files. As for the case files, it is very possible that his method would have led to the preservation of only those exceptional ones that Morton found interesting. The routine case files might well not have been kept because they do not add significantly to the understanding of the interaction between the government and the citizen. If they had been kept, it would probably have been for their informational value only, for what Cook calls political rather than archival reasons.³⁸ The question then arises whether these records really are of informational value only. Is there an appraisal theory that gives them archival value as well?

Terry Eastwood proposes use as the criterion for appraisal.³⁹ Not the use that might be made by future historians, but the use that was made of the records by their creators, and the use that society as a whole has made of similar records in the past and may be expected to make of these records in the future. An archivist adopting this method of appraisal would be starting with the archival question "What did the creators of these records use them for?" As Eastwood points out, past use is a concrete, measurable thing which does not require us to make value judgements about the importance of the contents of the record or its creators and their functions. To put it over-simply, a record that was widely used must have had value, no matter how mundane. What was valued by society in the past is very likely to have significance for society in the future. The archivist using this method of appraisal on the homestead records would first have to make some detailed study of the manner in which the records were used by their creators, by the claimants of homestead land, and by the general society of the time. In this case the use was substantial; the archivist would know that the records had value to the society in which they were created. We also know that they are heavily used today. Those various uses would, by Eastwood's argument give the homestead files an *archival* as well as an informational value. Moreover, the archivist would not have to judge whether the current uses were "worthy" ones. Archivists, like forensic

scientists, are not in the business of telling people what they ought to try to prove from the evidence they keep. Their role is to make the evidence available and as clearly understandable as possible for whatever use society, present and future, might have for it.

In 1981 Frank Burke stated that "American archivists have little or no claim to the development of any archival theory."⁴⁰ In 1992 he saw archival studies as merely "a part of the field of information studies"⁴¹—still, it seems, without distinctive theory to guide its approach to that information. Commenting on Burke and others who could not recognize a distinct archival scholarship, Terry Cook wrote in 1984:

These archivists do not get behind the procedures, methods and technologies of archival work to probe its deeper meaning, which is the study of records and their relationship to society at large. Historians will not do this, they are interested in the factual content and interpretation of records, not in the actual nature of the records themselves. But archivists can undertake such study; indeed it is the natural culmination of their work.⁴²

It is this past failure to recognize that this separate mind-set was the result of a distinct and separate scholarly discipline that led some archivists to insist that archivists are, and ought to remain, historians.⁴³ One of the reasons may be that much of the founding activity in Canadian archives was devoted to acquiring transcripts of documents the originals of which remained in Europe.⁴⁴ These were important collections for the study of Canadian history, but their main purpose was to make information available. Working with copies must have obscured the distinctness of the archival discipline: information took precedence over the values of the document.⁴⁵ Thus some of the earliest development of the archival profession in Canada took place under circumstances in which it must have been very difficult to perceive a distinct archival scholarship. As a result, many Canadian archivists still cling to the title of historian to maintain their status as scholars.

The distinct archival way of thinking also affects the way in which archivists conduct their research. We have always paid homage to the principles of provenance and original order. In recent years, we have begun to appreciate how the study of diplomatics can and must be applied to modern records.⁴⁶ The more work that is done on these traditional archival subjects, the more it becomes obvious that there is an ample body of knowledge here for a separate discipline.

The development of that discipline in Canada is well under way. In recent years there has been what Tom Nesmith calls a "rediscovery of provenance" in Canada.⁴⁷ Both established archivists and the students of the new Masters of Archival Studies programmes have been writing and undertaking research on specifically archival subjects, as well as adapting ideas from other disciplines to the archival milieu. In his new programme at the University of Manitoba, Nesmith takes the contextual approach to the study of archives defined by Hugh Taylor, himself an important contributor to the U.B.C. programme, as a starting point to reconcile archival and historical studies. He uses it to expand on the idea of the archivist as historian of the record which he first formulated in 1982. No one would argue with the notion that archivists should study the history of the record, its provenance and context;

nor would they deny that the study of administration is part of the history of the record. However, Nesmith will have to be careful to ensure that the problems are approached with the archival mind-set, avoiding the advocacy of the historian. As Taylor wrote over twenty years ago,

The study in depth of a department's records may perhaps be approached in two ways: as a history of administration, in which the works are taken apart and the entire operation analyzed in relation to its parts; and as administrative history, in which the impacts on the politics, power struggles and the public at large is considered. ... Both approaches are needed. The second is far more difficult; the first would be of greatest assistance to the archivist.⁴⁸

Nesmith suggests that the archivist should apply historical research methodologies not "to the contents of the records but to the records themselves and to the evidential context which gave them birth."⁴⁹ This study of the history of the record is harder to pursue than it is to define. The difficulty arises not from the use of historical research methodologies, which are essential to both historians and archivists doing historical work, but from historical interpretation of the results of research, which is the *raison d'être* of historical study but not of archival study. The historian is the advocate of a specific interpretation; the archivist must not be. Such studies as Ruth May's on the records of the Hudson's Bay Company and Barbara L. Craig's on hospital record-keeping practices, provide the sort of history of administration that Taylor spoke of and that archival scholarship needs.⁵⁰

The study of the history of administration is a challenge for archivists who wish to pursue their studies from an archival point of view. How can one write history unless it is from the perspective of the historian? The crux of the problem lies in the fact that often what archivists and users of archives actually need is the raw material of historical research, an assembly of data, rather than an analysis of the wider meaning of that data. The minutiae of administrative structures and their changes, while not very interesting in themselves, are essential to explaining why any given series of records exists in the form we find it. An archivist working from a historical perspective is bound to want to go on from the data collection to a wider interpretation of the results in the light of some current historical theory. At this point, interpretation may bias or restrict the data collected.⁵¹ We need accurate reporting rather than editorializing.⁵² Studies of that type will improve our understanding of the principle of provenance.

Recently the old debate over the role of history in archival thinking has taken a new and fascinating turn. Brien Brothman has been examining archives in the light of theories of intellectual history. His work has caused some controversy, which is worth considering at length in relation to the archival mind-set. For example, Brothman proposes applying historical methods to the study of the principle of original order. His work on the nature of value and order in archival arrangement is an example of both the advantages and the disadvantages of looking at archives from the mind-set of a historian, in his case specifically that of an intellectual historian. When he uses it as an outsider, looking in and studying the nature and behaviour of archivists, it is a stimulating and controversial exercise. When he uses it as an insider, looking at the nature of archives themselves, he encounters problems. One of these problems is a blurring of the lines between creator and creation.

The structure, ordering, and arrangement of the records in a fonds is an intrinsic part of the creation of that fonds. Brothman has recognized that the activities of archivists, especially appraisal and acquisition, give them a great deal of power to distort, select, and give artificial values to the archival records they control. The archival records, however, remain the creation of someone else; the duty of the archivist is to make clear the nature of that creator and his/her relation to the creation.

In his discussion of original order Brothman begins with the widely acknowledged fact that archivists do not always respect original order as carefully as theory would have them do. Then, because he blurs the distinction between the ordering that true records creators do and the ordering that archivists do, he questions the principle of respect for original order.⁵³ Recognizing that the concept of the record group was created by archivists as an administrative convenience, he dismisses all kinds of archival grouping as artificial: “original order and provenance are not coincident with any natural informational order, because there is nothing ‘natural’ or law-obeying about classification systems or file order.”⁵⁴ Later in the paper he equates documents with pieces of information.⁵⁵ There may indeed be no natural informational order for pieces of information; documents in context, however, are much more than that. Because he does not use the archival mind-set, he does not see that the original order in which documents come to the hands of the archivist *is* natural, in that it is part of the intrinsic nature of the records themselves.

Brothman sees documents as pieces of information—which explains why he lets himself slip into implying that they come to the archivist without any intrinsic form or arrangement. If such were the case, archivists would indeed be forced to create the form and the arrangement. On the other hand, if we see documents as things, as products of activity with context, form, and arrangement set at the time of their creation, the archivist’s role is not one of a creator but of a preserver and transmitter. While personal biases may still come out in acts of appraisal, selection, and description, when the archivist is preserving something that already exists, there is some hope of keeping the biases in check. When the archivist is “creating” the archives, that is impossible.

The study of modern textual criticism has led Brothman to realize that archivists select, appraise, and arrange records according to various biases and social habits inherent in the archivists themselves. The awareness of this fact and the elaboration of its consequences are what makes Brothman’s work stimulating. He provides, according to Luciana Duranti, “a fresh view of the archival world [and]... an important contribution to our scholarly literature.”⁵⁶

This inherent bias in all human activity is one of the reasons why a distinct archival mind-set is so important—because it aids the archivist in attaining a certain degree of detached objectivity. The question “What is this document about?” is, of its very essence, subjective and demands a subjective answer. The question “What is this document?” is objective and allows for an objective answer, however imperfect human objectivity may be.

Terry Eastwood’s reply to Brothman’s essay on value and order is very critical of the way in which Brothman and the other historians/archivists apply the ideas of intellectual history to the study of archives.⁵⁷ Eastwood sees archivists as “students

of the originary nature of archives,"⁵⁸ in other words, what documents actually are and how they are created. He objects to Brothman going beyond this study; archivists, he suggests, "properly leave questions of the meaning of the intelligence or information communicated by the archival document to posterity to investigate."⁵⁹ Working from an archival mind-set, Eastwood recognizes that Brothman's ideas are useful when applied to the archivist's efforts "to explain the character and make-up of the particular archives in question in terms which preserve it as the foundation of interpretation of the actions from which it arose."⁶⁰ So long as Brothman limits himself to using intellectual history to explain how archivists and the creators of archives think, he is on firm ground. It is when he moves on to "speak as if it were [archivists'] task to intervene in this process [of record-keeping] in order to turn it to some other account"⁶¹ that Eastwood objects. Thinking as the archival forensic scientist, Eastwood sees archivists as studying archives and their creation in order to better preserve them and the evidence they provide. Brothman sees archivists as taking an active part in interpreting and manipulating the archives in their control and, as a historian/advocate, cannot resist suggesting that this intervention is not only intentional but somehow appropriate.

If students in the Masters programmes acquire and understand the archival mind-set early in their careers, as many seem to have done, it will be easier for them to do the sort of archival research that is needed to give the discipline a broad base of literature with which future archivists can feel comfortable. Indeed, since neither the practicum nor the thesis are to be compulsory at UBC in future,⁶² it will be even more important to instill this distinct mind-set in the future generation of archivists. If we do not, there is a danger that we will all slip back into our old role as handmaidens of historians. They may be a different type of historian, sharing Brothman's interest in the nature and evolution of archives, but they will still be historians. To avoid this danger we must continue to develop a distinct archival scholarship dealing with both theory and practice.

The final area in which the distinct archival mind-set should operate is in the formation of our self-image. At present, when we argue that archivists are a scholarly profession, when we talk of archival scholarship, the majority of working archivists, who either do not publish at all or publish only rarely, feel that they are somehow being moved to a subordinate status. They begin to feel uncomfortable and refuse to consider the idea. This condition, which is well described for library science in Mary Sue Stephenson's recent article,⁶³ arises because we have too long used academic historians as our professional models and seen ourselves in their image. We should instead be using as a model one of the *practical* scholarly professions such as medicine, engineering, or, particularly, law. The legal profession has a strong sense of itself, understands the intellectual and scholarly component of its work, and yet does not rank its practitioners below its scholars. It recognizes the fact that a practical profession can afford to spend only a minority of its collective time on scholarly pursuits.

All lawyers who are proficient at their jobs must keep up with the professional literature in their subject. Many practicing lawyers never publish, and yet rise to the heights of their profession. If we take elevation to the judiciary as a recognition of professional worth in a lawyer, we will see that, especially in the English-

speaking tradition in Canada, the practitioners reach that height far more often than do the scholars. While there are disagreements and differences, neither side feels threatened by the success of the other.

Archivists have even less need to feel jealous or threatened. We are a small profession; very few of us can choose to pursue exclusively one kind of professional activity. What is most important for us to realize is that we are a separate, distinct, and worthy profession, not subservient to any other. More similar to each other than to any outside group, we have a definable mind-set that we do not share with any other profession. Not until we begin to recognize and encourage this distinctness among ourselves, will we be able to convince outsiders of our value and of our right to recognition as a separate and respected profession.

Notes

- 1 "Draft Guidelines for the Development of a Curriculum for a Master of Archival Studies," *Archival Outlook* (May 1993).
- 2 Frank Burke, "Letting Sleeping Dogmas Lie," *American Archivist* 55, no. 4 (Fall 1992), pp. 530-37.
- 3 See for example Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 78-100 and "Brothman on Authorship (The Author Responds)," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 4-7. Luciana Duranti "Brothman on Authorship: The Diplomatic Perspective," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 4-5, and Terry Eastwood, "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies," *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 232-52.
- 4 The author first heard this succinct expression of the difference between the two professions used by Luciana Duranti during a general discussion at the annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists held at Windsor, Ontario in June 1988.
- 5 Forensic science has been defined as "the application of science and scientific techniques with the object of providing impartial evidence bearing on the issues before a court of law." J.H. Phillips and J.K. Bowen, *Forensic Science and the Expert Witness* (Sydney, 1989), p. vii.
- 6 Sir Hilary Jenkinson, "The English Archivist: A New Profession: being an Inaugural Lecture for a new course in Archival Administration delivered at University College, London, 14 October 1947," *The Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson* (Gloucester, 1980) pp. 246-47. In this analogy and in Jenkinson's lecture, evidence must be taken to mean a far wider sort of evidence than that encompassed by the archivist's notion of evidentiary value. We must include all the information that can be used as evidence, whether or not it was created for that purpose.
- 7 Stephanie Pain, "The Two Faces of the Exxon Disaster," *New Scientist* no. 1874 (23 May 1993), pp. 11-13.
- 8 Bureau of Canadian Archivists, *Rules for Archival Description* (Ottawa 1990), Rule 3.7D.
- 9 Terry Eastwood, ed., *The Archival Fonds: From Theory to Practice* (Ottawa, 1992) p. 2.
- 10 For example Cynthia Durrance, comp., *Interpretation of the Concepts of Fonds, Collection and Item in the Description of Archival Holdings: A Position Paper*, Archival Standards Implementation Office, Archives and Government Records Branch, National Archives of Canada (November 1993).
- 11 Wendy M. Duff and Kent M. Haworth, "The Reclamation of Archival Description: The Canadian Perspective," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), p. 31.
- 12 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York, 1964), p. 24.
- 13 Terry Eastwood, Keynote Address at the Annual General Meeting of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Banff, 1991 cited in Bureau of Canadian Archivists' Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards, *Subject Indexing for Archives: The Report of the Subject Indexing Group*, Publication no. 4 (1992), p. 28.
- 14 Helen Forde, "Archives in the Information Age," *Society of Archivists (UK) Newsletter* no. 63 (December 1992), p. 10.
- 15 Bureau of Canadian Archivists, *Subject Indexing for Archives*.
- 16 Some very interesting ideas have been put forward in this area by David Bearman, particularly in "Who About What or From Whence Why and How: Intellectual Access Approaches to Archives and their Implications for National Archives Information Systems," in Peter Baskerville and Chad

- Gaffield, eds., *Archives, Automation and Access; Proceedings of an Interdisciplinary Conference at the University of Victoria* ([sl; sn], 1985). On page 40 he suggests that archival information systems should "provide documentary accountability ... not so much to tell us what is in the archives as to tell us how it came to be there; not so much to tell us what it is about as to tell us why it was created." See also Bearman, "Documenting Documentation," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), pp. 33-49.
- 17 Catherine Bailey, "Archival Theory and Electronic Records," in Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, N.J. and London, 1993), pp. 421-42.
 - 18 Lionel Bell, "The Archival Implications of Machine-Readable Records," *Archivum* 26 (1979), pp. 88, 91 cited by Tom Nesmith "Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance," *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, N.J. and London, 1993) p. 6.
 - 19 *Report of the Subject Indexing Working Group*, p. 23.
 - 20 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
 - 21 Samuel Webber, sentence commuted to transportation, original of conditional pardon, 9 June 1827, in RG 4B, 20. vols. 10-11, pp. 3630-31. Webber must have missed the boat, as another pardon, on condition of banishment, was issued 30 June 1827. As this pardon was actually issued, the evidence of its existence lies in the register in RG 68. A similar, unissued pardon for Simon Hubert can be found in RG 4B, 20 vol. 14, pp. 5520-23. These illustrations come from unpublished work by Patricia Kennedy of the Pre-Confederation section of the Manuscript division.
 - 22 The Archives of the University of the West Indies under Brian Speirs and the Saskatchewan Heritage Information Network are two of institutions working with the GENCAT Archives Prototype developed by Eloquent Systems of Vancouver.
 - 23 Fredric Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," *The American Archivist* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1981), p. 124 says that "archival practices and principles are not immutable. They are instead the product of the understanding of historical research prevalent at the time they were formulated." Peter Baskerville and Chad Gaffield, "The Vancouver Island Project: Historical Research and Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), p. 186, proposed for their database "an evaluative note section in which the relevance of particular records to current historical trends can be noted." The attitude is also present to a certain extent, though more subtly, in Tom Nesmith's statement that "the best archival service will always depend on understanding the purposes and source needs of researchers," even though he goes on to add that in future there should be more than that element to archival scholarship. Tom Nesmith "Archives from the Bottom Up; Social History and Archival Scholarship," *Archivaria* 14 (Summer 1982), p. 9.
 - 24 Sir Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London, 1965), pp. 123-24 (emphasis in original). Ironically, Jenkinson, the great exponent of traditional archival principles, seems to have anticipated social historians interests and would have enjoyed working with them. As early as 1947 he expressed the belief that "the inexhaustible possibilities of Archives are perhaps seen best of all in the opportunities they afford for the large scale study of small matters." (Jenkinson, *Selected Writing*, p. 243.)
 - 25 Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," Hermina Joldersman and Richard Klumpenhouwer, trans., *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), p. 71.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, p. 91-92.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, p. 105. Emphasis added.
 - 28 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
 - 29 Jenkinson, *Manual*, p. 124.
 - 30 Some practical works on bookkeeping systems for archivists would be very helpful.
 - 31 Saskatchewan Archives Board, A 18, A.S. Morton to G. Lanctôt, 16 October 1943 cited in Doug Boocking, "The Records Go West: Department of the Interior Records in the Saskatchewan Archives Board," *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987-88), p. 109.
 - 32 Personal communication, Maureen Fox, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon.
 - 33 For other studies of these files see Joan Champ, "Arthur Silver Morton and his Role in the Founding of the Saskatchewan Archives Board," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 101-113, and L. W. Rodwell, "Saskatchewan Homestead Records," *Saskatchewan History* XVIII (1965), pp. 10-29.
 - 34 Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 38-70, and Terry Eastwood, "How Goes It with Appraisal?," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 111-21.
 - 35 Cook, "Mind Over Matter," p. 59.

- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid., p. 57.
- 38 Ibid., p. 59.
- 39 Eastwood, "How Goes It with Appraisal?," p. 117, ff.
- 40 Frank Burke, "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *The American Archivist* 44, no. 1 (Winter 1981), pp. 40-46.
- 41 Ibid., pp. 40-46 and Frank Burke, "Letting Sleeping Dogmas Lie," p. 533.
- 42 Terry Cook, "From Information to Knowledge: an Intellectual Paradigm for Archives," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85), p. 45.
- 43 George Bolotenko did not recognize archival scholarship as distinct from historical scholarship in his seminal article, "Archivists and Historians: Keepers of the Well," *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), pp. 5-25. He did, however, point out that many of the sub-disciplines that are essential to traditional archival scholarship, such as diplomatic and palaeography, were considered irrelevant to the North American archival system by its founders (p. 14). This attitude did much to strengthen their belief that there was no distinct archival scholarship. Bolotenko tried to combine the qualities of both disciplines instead of acknowledging that archivists must look at their common subject matter in a manner different from that in which historians do so.
- 44 For example, see Carman V. Carroll, "Developing 'an Historical Laboratory: The Genesis of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 178-211.
- 45 Ironically, Wilfrid Smith in "'Total Archives': The Canadian Experience," in Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, N.J. and London, 1993) p. 135, footnote 9, mentions in passing that copies made by Louis-Joseph Papineau while he was in exile in France, form part of the material deposited in the NA by the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec. To examine those copies from the archival mind-set would be a truly interesting archival exercise, quite separate from any historical study of the contents. How accurately did Papineau copy, are any errors or omissions significant, was he allowed to make any précis? Was he in a position to decide which documents were worth copying and what if anything does this say about the final product and Papineau himself?
- 46 Especially Luciana Duranti's series "Diplomatics: New Uses for Old Science," *Archivaria* 28-33 (Summer 1989 - Winter 1991-92).
- 47 Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, N.J. and London, 1993) This recent anthology, which he describes as "a collective history of the intellectual development of the archival profession in English-speaking Canada," could serve as an introductory text for the course. Unfortunately, either he or his publishers have made a significant omission. The "provenance" of the essays in the book is badly obscured. It is difficult or impossible to discover from the book itself exactly where and when the essays were originally published. An extra footnote in each essay would have been a useful addition to an excellent collection.
- 48 Hugh A. Taylor, "Administrative History, An Archivist's Need," *Canadian Archivist* 2, no. 1 (1970), p. 5.
- 49 Tom Nesmith, "Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance," in *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, p. 14.
- 50 Ruth May, "The Cycle of Commerce: York Factory Records of the Hudson's Bay Company Supplies for the Northern Department, 1843-1845," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), pp. 47-68 and Barbara L. Craig, "Hospital Records and Record-Keeping, c. 1850-c.1950: Part I: The Development of Records in Hospitals," *Archivaria* 29 (Winter 1989-1990), pp. 57-87 and "Part II: The Development of Record-Keeping in Hospitals," *Archivaria* 30 (Summer 1990), pp. 21-38.
- 51 In his stimulating article on the work of Jacques Derrida, "The Limits of Limits: Derridean Deconstruction and the Archival Institution," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 208, 217, Brien Brothman makes the point that the very act of interpretation can be seen as an act which limits the possibility of other interpretations.
- 52 For example, an archivist working with the records of a Canadian city will first look for a history of that city and writings on the nature of municipal government. Even if they are lucky enough to find a history of the city, it is most unlikely to answer the sorts of questions the archivist will ask. Faced with a new series—perhaps records generated by the process of issuing debentures—the archivist's task is to fit them into the pattern of administration, to describe which functions they record, what legislation brought them into being and how they connect to other records. In practice this is often very difficult to do because historians are, quite rightly, interested in the wider aspects of city

finance and do not write about administrative detail. Diplomatics will help and eventually the archivist will work out the patterns from the records themselves. The paradox is that the archivist's research into the process for financing local improvements by debenture will provide the historian with the contextual information that will allow him or her to write the kind of history that the archivist wanted in the first place. In this sense, if in no other, the archivist and the historian are in, as Brien Brothman says, a thaumotropic relationship.

- 53 There are numerous different meanings of the word "order," at least two of which are significant to this discussion. The first, and the one with which the archivist is primarily concerned, is "a sequence, arrangement, the way one thing follows another" (*The New Lexicon: Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* [New York, 1972], p. 705). Another of Webster's meanings also applies: "the condition in which everything is controlled as it *should* be, is in its *right* place, performing its *correct* function" [emphasis added]. This is the definition Brothman seems to favour and which leads him away from the archival mind-set. While we might wish that archives come to us in both sorts of order, the important principle of archival theory is that we preserve the original sequence or arrangement. Words like "should," "right," and "correct" must be treated very carefully because the original order, whatever it was, if it was genuinely the original order, is by archival definition right, correct, and as it should be. None of this is to deny that there are times when it is necessary to interfere with the order in which archives come to us, either by selection or to clarify confused arrangements. Fortunately, automation allows us to re-arrange original order "on paper" without destroying it.
- 54 Brothman, "Orders of Value," p. 84.
- 55 *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- 56 Luciana Duranti, "Brothman on Authorship," p. 5.
- 57 Terry Eastwood, "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall," pp. 232-48.
- 58 *Ibid.*, p. 243.
- 59 *Ibid.*, p. 244.
- 60 *Ibid.*, p. 239.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 240.
- 62 Terry Eastwood, "Revised MAS Curriculum at UBC," *ACA Bulletin* (May 1994), p. 16.
- 63 Mary Sue Stephenson, "Deciding not to Build the Wall: Research and the Archival Profession," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 145-51.