

Letter to the Editor

Archivists can read my book *The First Generation of Electronic Records Archivists in the United States* (Haworth, 1994) and Thomas Elton Brown's "Myth or Reality: Is There a Generation Gap Among Electronic Records Archivists?" published in *Archivaria* 41 (Spring 1996) and decide for themselves the merits of either or both arguments. However, I would ask that archivists and other readers keep a few things in mind as they read these publications.

First, my book is about the profession, not the United States National Archives (NARA); Brown's inability to distinguish between the two may be a telling comment about the perspective of the author and his institution. How does the activity of NARA relate to the electronic records work of archivists and records managers in other archival institutions?

Second, Brown's criticism of my book does not take into account the long evolving court case known as the PROFS case and the National Archives' resistance to the court rulings, perhaps another telling piece of evidence about some of the points made by myself in the book. The many accomplishments detailed by Brown in his essay need to be considered by asking if these activities are the ones we have needed or need now. The most recent complaint in this case (Public Citizen v. Carlin: Complaint Challenge GRS 20, Submitted 12/23/96) states that the proposed and then adopted General Records Schedule 20 (for scheduling electronic records) ignored the critical comments that the schedule "would result in the destruction of valuable Federal records" by allowing copying to "paper or microform for recordkeeping purposes" and allowing the deletion of the "only electronic version of agency records" after such copying. This has been the crux of the case since its start eight years ago and several rulings against such approaches to the management of electronic records. How does this case figure in Brown's litany of NARA electronic records accomplishments?

Third, Brown's criticism of my portrayal of a lack of accomplishment in managing electronic records by archivists, my use of such evidence as job advertisements, and my supposed lack of use of a "rich literature among conference presentations and among the photocopies of reports in filing cabinets in archives" can only be answered by archivists looking around at what is going on in their profession in the management of electronic records. After all, I am not the only one critical of both the National Archives and the profession; for example, an article coming across my desk as I was writing this letter suggested that NARA "has gone for almost a decade without

producing a significant records management guideline" (Ira Penn, "Information Management Legislation in the Last Quarter of the 20th Century: A Records Management Disaster," *Records Management Quarterly* [January 1997], p. 9). Records professionals might also examine the recent electronic records research projects (visit the homepage of the 1996 research agenda conference held at the University of Michigan School of Information —<http://www.si.umich.edu/e-recs/Research/>) and electronic records policy work being carried out in other countries (for example, see the Australian Law Reform Commission's review of the *Archives Act 1983* at <http://charlotte.anu.edu.au/alrc/ip19/ALRCIP19.html>) for contrasts to the work of NARA. How could such different work be going on in light of Brown's unabashed defense of his institution?

I do continue thinking and writing about the broader archival mission and the impact of electronic record-keeping systems, all of which builds off and, in some cases, modifies what my 1994 book represented. This writing includes "The Record: Is It Evolving?" *Records & Retrieval Report* 10 (March 1994); "Archives and Archivists in the Twenty-First Century: What Will We Become?" *Archival Issues* 20, no. 2 (1995), pp. 97-113; "What's In A Name? Archives As a Multi-Faceted Term in the Information Professions," *Records & Retrieval Report* 11 (March 1995); "The Record in the Manuscript Collection," *Archives and Manuscripts* 24 (May 1996), pp. 46-61; "Redefining Electronic Records Management," *Records Management Quarterly* 30 (October 1996), pp. 8-13; "The Record in the Information Age: A Progress Report on Research," *Records & Retrieval Report* 12 (January 1996); "Computer Literacy for Records Managers and Archivists," *Records & Retrieval Report* 12 (October 1996); "The Importance of Records in the Information Age," *Records Management Quarterly* (forthcoming); "Blown to Bits: Electronic Records, Archivry, and the Corporation," *Appraising the Records of American Business* (forthcoming); and "More Than Diplomatic: Functional Requirements for Evidence in Recordkeeping; A Final Report (of sorts)," *Records Management Journal* (forthcoming). Readers of this journal will also find useful the writings of Rick Barry, David Bearman, Terry Cook, Luciana Duranti and Terry Eastwood, Margaret Hedstrom, John McDonald, Sue McKemmish, David Roberts, and Frank Upward (among others), all of which provide different and needed perspectives about electronic records management.

Sincerely,

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