

From the Editor:

DEAD OR ALIVE?

The health of any profession can most clearly be gauged by the degree of vigorous intellectual debate it fosters. As Frank Burke has reminded us, before the archival profession can transcend the pragmatic and descriptive stage to enter the contemplative and theoretical one, before it can begin to answer “why” rather than merely “what” and “how,” it will be “necessary to attack the basics, identify problems and reveal and air opposing views....”¹ Alas, this rarely happens. Even archival journals, which should be the cutting edge of such debate, are not often “noted for the frequency of articles expressing dissent or a questioning of the assumptions of the profession.”²

The lead article of this issue by George Bolotenko challenges these assumptions in a fundamental way. Rejecting the new “professionalism” of archivists as a blind rush after technological wonders and a less-than-admirable craving for dubious status and identity, spurning the “new archivist” of Margaret Cross Norton and all her ilk of records managers and super-clerks, Bolotenko argues persuasively that history above all should define the archivist and archivy. His is not the mad ranting of a crazed Luddite, but the thoughtful—and well researched—conviction that archivists are taking the wrong turn. His arguments, in part, are supported by Lawrence Geller’s historical narrative of European archival education in the early twentieth century. But Bolotenko (like Geller) is implicitly rejected in Terry Eastwood’s description and defence of the first graduate degree programme in archival studies ever offered in North America. And Tony Rees, taking the exact opposite position from Bolotenko, argues in classic Nortonian cadences, that the archivist’s first duty is to provide administrative/ records management services to his parent institution, even sacrificing, if need be, service to researchers and cultural concerns—a position certainly rejected by Brian Osborne in his commentary on Rees’ article. Mark Hopkins and John Smart equally challenge basic assumptions of Canadian archivists. Both politely but firmly declare that archivists have shirked their responsibilities regarding, respectively, records management and freedom of information. If archivists hope to be true professionals in the 1980s, they must overcome these blind spots. And, finally, the Applebaum-Hébert Report. Following

1 Frank G. Burke, “The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States,” *American Archivist* 44, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 45 and *passim*.

2 Wilcomb Washburn, “The Archivist’s Two-Way Stretch,” *Archivaria* 7 (Winter 1978-79): 140.

on the heels of Symons and Wilson, the *Report* of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee is another spotlight shone on the Canadian archival landscape. The contours revealed and the recommendations made are accepted or spurned, emphasized or modified, by our invited commentators.

Such controversy is welcome, but it must be nourished. Ideas must be pulled, twisted, tested, rejected and accepted (as Michel Duchéin does in his stimulating analysis of *respect des fonds*). How? *Archivaria* has always encouraged responses to its articles through its "Shorter Articles" and "Counterpoint" features. Starting in the next issue, a "Letters to the Editor" section will begin. If writing a two or three page response for "Counterpoint" is not always possible, write two or three paragraphs in a "Letter," challenging authors, agreeing with them, adding information, launching trial balloons. For if most Canadian archivists, after a cursory browsing, complacently shelve their copy of *Archivaria*, if they remain uninvolved in the debates it tries to foster, the profession will become more dead than alive. And, unlike the desperadoes advertised on old western posters, the profession is *not* WANTED: DEAD OR ALIVE — only alive.

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