

Archivists and Historians: Keepers of the Well

by **GEORGE BOLOTENKO***

*Ye may draw up my waters,
And ye may drink them free:
But keepers of this ancient well
Ye never more can be.*

New Archivist to Historian

In his tributary introduction to a collection of Margaret Cross Norton's writings on archives and archivists, Ernest Posner commented approvingly that

it was she who was instrumental in 'putting us on the right track' when as early as 1930 she warned against letting the historians preempt the field of archival care and preservation, pointing out that records are the product of governmental activity and primarily destined to serve governmental needs.¹

Although Norton was working within the narrower American concept of "archives," that is, the government record to the exclusion of all else, and not within the more expansive European continental and, one hopes, Canadian understanding of archives as both the record of public institutions and private persons, a ringing tocsin sounds shrill throughout much of her writings on archives and archivists — beware the enemy, beware the historian-archivist working with documents.

One meets this warning time and again in writings on archives; in fact, Norton was echoing the words of Sir Hilary Jenkinson who, earlier in the twentieth century, had decreed as an article of archival faith that "the Archivist is not and ought not to be an Historian."² Felix Hull, an English archivist writing in 1980 and paraphrasing

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1 E. Posner, "A Tribute to Margaret C. Norton," in T.W. Mitchell, ed., *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival Records and Records Management* (Carbondale, Illinois, 1975), p. vii.

2 Sir H. Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration* (re-issue of 2nd revised edition, London, 1965), p. 125.

Jenkinson's injunction, averred that the "Archivist should not be an Historian."³ Several speakers on the curriculum of the 1981 PAC Archives Course argued very much the same idea.⁴

Why this pronounced dread, in certain quarters, of the historian as archivist? This paper will address this question, time-worn and clichéd though it may be, and will argue that, melodramatic tocsins aside, the historian still makes the best archivist. It will suggest some of the reasons why some archivists dearly wish for the separation of archivist from historian; it will review the European historical-archival tradition to point out how this separation is perforce contrived; it will demonstrate that Jenkinson and Norton's attributions of archival misdeeds to historians is hardly convincing; it will deal with the question of archival education within the context of the struggle between the historical and the modernist (Library Science and Records Management) camps; and, finally, it will close with the argument that, willing or not, the archivist must be a historian, at least by inclination, and preferably by calling.

I

First off, however, some prefatory comments. It has been said before, but bears repeating: the preservation of documents and manuscripts is the preservation of the collective memory of society, the *summa* of the human past.⁵ The past, as much as the future, both excites and confuses man who seeks to know the whence and the whither of human existence. Poised in the ever-fleeting and eternally renewing interstice between "was" and "will-be," man seeks to find some comprehension of self, of society, of his universe; in so doing he must always return to the record of the past. This is the foundation of history; and, as C.P. Stacey puts it, "if history goes, many other things go. Our history is the prop of our national spirit; it makes us what we are; it is all that makes us different from other parts of the human race."⁶ Carl Nylander, writing about archeology but with equal relevance to history and archives, worded it very well:

Man has always looked back as well as forward. He has been fascinated by the past and in different ways occupied himself with a *recherche du temps perdu*. He has sought inspiration, insight and consolation. Bewitched, he has listened to the voices and words of those who have already fulfilled their destiny and vanished into the darkness which awaits him also. But the past speaks with many tongues. Voices and words come to us from clay tablets, papyrus scrolls and inscriptions. To listen for them and try to understand them is the [historian's] task.⁷

3 F. Hull, "The Archivist Should Not Be An Historian," *Journal of the Society* 6, No. 5 (April 1980): 253.

4 PAC Archives Course 1981. Particularly H. Bowsfield, in his lecture on the history of archives.

5 Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, Direction des Archives de France, *Manuel d'archivistique: Théorie et pratique des archives publiques en France* (Paris, 1970), p. 89.

6 C.P. Stacey, "The Public Archives of Canada at the End of its First Century," *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers* (1972): 14.

7 C. Nylander, *The Deep Well*, Joan Tate, trans., (New York, 1967), p. 17.

“Deep is the well of the past”⁸ which holds the *temps perdu*, in which the voices of the vanished, however faintly, still sound. Above all others, it is the historian who most often draws up the waters from the well; strange, then, that some, perhaps many, archivists today, say historians may indeed draw upon the waters from the well, but they should never be its keepers.

One might suggest several reasons for such a proposition. Archivists have, in all certainty, been abused by historians demanding too much of them; again, in all certainty, they have received too little recognition, both from historians and public alike, for the very good work they do. And while “the historian remains a pretty shadowy personage, ...let’s face it, the archivist stands one step further back in the shadows than the historian. After all, he is the fellow who passes the ammunition” and not the one to whom people turn, with deference and acclaim, as the big gun goes off.⁹ Perhaps, too, not a few archivists in their time have been, *horrible dictu!*, failed historians. Is this modern banishment of historians from the role of keeper of the record not in some measure the conscious or subconscious revenge of the “little brother” against “big brother”?

Moreover, living in an age which puts a very high premium upon technology, specialization, and “professionalism,” archivists are seeking to carve out some specialized niche for themselves in keeping with the tenor of the times. It’s trendy. As H.A. Taylor points out, “the archivist, having remained free for so long, is seeking the right of other professions to a recognized and recognizable pigeon hole.”¹⁰ J.H. Hodson adds:

As might be expected in a ‘new’ profession like archives, its members are rather self-conscious, constantly asking themselves and each other, what are archives?, what is an archivist? ...where is he going? ...what sort of relations should he have with his employer, with his public, with historians?, how much of a historian is he himself?¹¹

There is, however, a danger in this search for professional identity.¹² The archivist who surrenders to the siren song of “professional identity,” who seeks to shake off the fancied albatross about his neck in an antithesis to the historian, who seeks to tear the umbilical between himself and the academic calling which gave birth to the office of archivist, may find himself torn out of his natural matrix. In the definition of his novel independence as an identifiable “professional,” he may end up as a priest of some new and artificial obscurantism or, even worse, as a speaker of barbarous bureaucratese which, once scraped away, leaves nothing. For when all is said and done, without the training in history, without the eye of the historian, without the desire of the historian to serve the record of the past, there can be no archivist.

He may very well end up like the “new” historians, whom Pessen rightly admonishes in his article, “A Historian’s Perspective.” New historians, under the

8 T. Mann, in Nylander, *Deep Well*, frontspiece.

9 Stacey, “The Public Archives of Canada, pp. 14-15.

10 H.A. Taylor, “The Discipline of History and the Education of An Archivist,” *American Archivist* 40, No. 4, (October 1977): 896-97.

11 J.H. Hodson, *The Administration of Archives* (Oxford, 1972), p. 41.

12 See, for example, W. McKee and W. Ormsby who, in their response to the Wilson Report, speak about the need for “professional” elevation (“Canadian Archives: Reports and Responses”, *Archivaria*, 11 (Winter 1980-81): 27, 29).

press of scientism — a requirement of this age, it seems — have begun to travel the road of quantification, pseudo-sociology, psychohistory, and so on. To impress their relevance upon society, they “appear to delight in using a language incomprehensible,” writing “not in English but in gibberish”¹³ — as if the more incomprehensible, the more learned! Archivists, in their rush to crystallize themselves into a fully-defined professional species, are quite in danger of beginning to speak a similar gibberish, of giving vent to trendy windbagery beyond which lies, at worst, nothing, at best, but very little.

II

Archivists, in search of an identity, would do well to remember their beginnings. Modern, rational, “scientific” (if one requires the term) history — the history of Friedrich Meinecke and Heinrich von Sybel — was predicated upon the use of original sources. It is no surprise then that modern archives were born contemporaneously with modern history, born of the same fathers who were as equally adept at organizing archives as they were at writing history, “no less renowned for ... historical writings than for ... organizational and administrative talent.”¹⁴ For example, Max Lehman, serving under von Sybel in the Prussian State Privy Archives in the early 1880s and seeing the butchering of record units which, in his time, were still dissected and pigeon-holed into pre-1815 categories based on subject classification (the *Reposituren*), was the champion of *provenance*, the principle which governs all modern archives.¹⁵ A trained historian, Lehman reflected the “‘historical thinking’ of a generation that had come to the archives from the classes of Ranke, Droysen [and] Sybel,”¹⁶ a generation which shaped not only modern historiography and historical methodology, but modern archivy as well.

Posner, pointing out how happily Lehman fled the archives for the sweeter groves of academe, wrote that “it seems ironic that one of the most far-reaching changes in archival theory and practice was brought about by a man to whom the archives profession was only a second-best choice.”¹⁷ One might add that it seems doubly ironic for Posner to make such a statement. Despite his approbation of Norton’s expulsion of historians from the temple of archivy, Posner himself was from the time of his arrival in Washington as a German refugee as much a living example of the complete archivist-historian as Lehman had been. Before his active life came to a close, he had been many things — archivist, historian, professor of history and, finally, Dean of the Graduate School at American University. In short, his career, though transplanted out of Europe to America, was also multi-faceted, “[an] academic career — in archivy, in history and in administration,”¹⁸ a career dedicated to “scholarship in general.”¹⁹

13 E. Pessen, “A Historian’s Perspective,” *Prologue: The Journal of the National Archives* 7, No. 4 (Winter 1975): 243.

14 E. Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest: Selected Essays by E. Posner*, K. Munden, ed., (Washington, D.C., 1967), p. 37.

15 *Ibid.*, pp. 37-41.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-12.

19 P.C. Brooks, “The Archival Contributions of E. Posner,” *The Indian Archives* 18, No. 2 (July-December 1969): 8.

Thus, as demonstrated by the careers of Lehman and many others in Europe, of Posner, Buck, and Schellenberg in the United States,²⁰ of Doughty and Lamb in Canada, one need not hermetically seal off the two callings — archivist and historian — from each other. In fact, given the generic connection between the two, one cannot do so. And yet, the injunction against combining the two callings stands and, seemingly, is attracting ever more and more adherents. The appearance of records management, the computer revolution, the flowering of library science, the coming of “information services” — all this novelty and more, especially in conjunction with the urge to define the archivist as an independent “professional,” often through the agency of these changes — points to the separation of archivist from historian.

III

The agencies of separation may be novel, but not the desire, as expressed by Jenkinson and Norton in the 1920s and 1930s. They, in contradistinction to continental European theory and practice, wrote in favour of separation on the grounds of principle, arguing that historian-archivists brought actual harm to records in their care. One might reflect upon their observations to establish whether or not they make a viable claim.

Jenkinson allows that the archivist will require some knowledge of history; he may even have a personal interest in it:

but [Jenkinson admonishes] his duty is to his Archives, independently of any research subjects (of which at present History is the most prominent); and therefore an interest in any of these subjects, since it might give him a prepossession in favour not only of a subject but also perhaps of a school of opinion within that subject, might be more than inconvenient or inappropriate, it might be positively dangerous.²¹

In short, the archivist-historian being too rapt up in history, may organize archival material to the detriment of true impartiality, injecting into its organization an ideological colouration, disturbing the pristine evidential order, distorting the record of the institution which created it. “Most of the bad and dangerous work done in the past,” he concludes, “may be traced to external enthusiasms resulting in a failure on the part of the Archivist to treat Archives as a separate subject.”²²

In fact, short of modernizing methods of care and stepping outside to eat and sleep, the archivist, in a Dilthey-like psychological return to the historical era of the records in his care, “should be all things to all Archives, his interests identified with theirs, his period and point of view theirs.”²³ In this manner, argued Jenkinson, an archivist — the pure essence — could retain his impartiality and remain true to his documents, distorting nothing, imposing no artificiality, carefully nurturing the voice of truth which spoke of its own accord from the record.

20 F.B. Evans, “Postappointment Archival Training: A Proposed Solution for a Basic Problem,” *American Archivist* 40, No. 1 (January 1977): 60-61.

21 Jenkinson, *Manual*, p. 123.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4. Original emphasis.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 124.

To Jenkinson's argument one might make the following rejoinders. Even should an archivist steer clear of all other endeavours and interests other than archivy, there is no guarantee of impartiality: no archivist can be sequestered like a jurymen for the duration of his life so that no distortion occurs in his mind. Moreover, factors of everyday life, so accepted that they are not detectable, can distort values and colour an archivist's approach to his material. Perhaps it is far better to be fully aware and informed of the historian's trade, to be aware of all its weaknesses, distortions, and movements, and to arrive consciously at impartiality, at the resolution to serve no movement and no school, but to serve the record faithfully. Thus, against Jenkinson's impartiality born of ignorance in the so-called "pure" archivist, one might posit the conscious impartiality of the archivist-historian. And to his implication that archivist-historians did at one time distort the record, disturb *respect des fonds* and *provenance*, one can respond that it was also archivist-historians who after the trial-and-error attending the birth of archivy laid down these very same principles which are the foundation of archival methodology.

Less reserved than Jenkinson, certainly more strident, Norton also aimed barbs at the archivist-historian. Norton was a vociferous member, one observer has noted, of "a counter group to the historically oriented founders" of American archivy which developed in the 1930s, a group one could safely call "proto-records managers", whose members, in pursuit of a "professional identity," came to stress different skills based upon a different vision of archives. To Norton and her cohorts, the record was primarily "the legal and administrative documentation of the state," which only "secondarily [constituted] research material for the historian;" the *raison d'être* of the archivist was to serve his employer, not the calling of history.²⁴ Not surprisingly, she began to proselytize on behalf of a new creature — the archivist as administrator or bureaucrat. When she spoke of the archivist-historian, it was in a language bordering on the venomous.

"The archivist," she wrote, "should be a public official whose first interest is business efficiency, and only secondarily should he be interested in history;"²⁵ any reversal of these primary and secondary roles will lead to disregard for *provenance*, the breaking up of archival units, the application of subjectivism to the record as the historian in the historian-archivist selects the more interesting papers and rearranges them in some contrived artificial order.²⁶

It is a weak argument, if such at all. To repeat, *provenance* as an archival principle was fixed by European archivist-historians. There is no cause to assume that the historian will compromise *provenance* — quite the contrary, training in history teaches respect for historical context; in fact, anything out of context is not history. Incidentally, one might recall again that the dawning awareness of the importance of historical context was the inspiration behind *provenance*; for if historians were to honour von Ranke's dictum to "tell it like it is," they could do so only within historical context: hence the need to preserve the purity of record, *provenance*. To return to Norton, however, and the above-quoted instructions, given that an archivist's "primary" concern is "business efficiency," one shudders to think what harm this might do *provenance*.

24 W. Washburn, "The Archivist's Two-Way Stretch," *Archivaria* 7 (Winter 1978-79): 138.

25 Norton, *Norton on Archives*, p. 5.

26 *Ibid.*

To demonstrate her point, that is, that historians bring harm to historical records, Norton gives as evidence gruesome tales of the disregard for provenance by early historical societies and, in fact, of their destruction of the physical record itself. What compromised evidence! As if the occasional failings of amateur lovers of history are to be addressed to the door of the trained historian.²⁷ On the abilities of historians as archivists, one might keep in mind Posner's observations that the National Archives in the United States were originally staffed wholly by historians who had not only adapted well to the archival calling, with no preappointment training, but "had in fact brilliantly performed in a *terra incognita*."²⁸

Finally, given that for Norton historical training is no great asset, one might ask — whence comes *her* archivist? She explains:

The difference between a file clerk and an archivist is that the archivist has a sense of perspective. He knows that the documents have two phases of use; their present legalistic use, and their potential historical value. His experience [sic!] teaches him that some records which seem very unimportant now will be priceless later on, while others much used today will be worthless tomorrow.²⁹

How very simple — a bingo theory of the genesis of an archivist. Experience alone will transmogrify a file clerk into an archivist — perhaps the ultimate in Jacksonian "archival democracy." Precisely how this will happen, however, remains a mystery. How, one might ask, can a file clerk develop the requisite "experience" by which to identify documents which might have "priceless" value for future research — something, incidentally, wholly unconnected with his primary obligation, which is to preserve the record almost solely for its legal value to the state — if not through an awareness of history? Without historical training, no clerk will be able to sift the kernel from the chaff with respect to the future, and even present, research value of documents in his care. And by an incongruous and puzzling mental circumlocution, Norton arrives at a wholly untenable contradiction: leave the care of records in the hands of untrained clerks, in the hands of amateurs whom she herself so roundly excoriates elsewhere as enemies of record preservation and foes of archivy!

Felix Hull has his own reservations about an archivist-historian; like Jenkinson, he fears an historian's bias in the selection and organization of material, but he is sufficiently candid to suggest that while not all historians are biased, neither are all archivists free of bias.³⁰ However, the basis of his reservation lies elsewhere, that there is an information revolution in the offing, that traditional preparation for a vocation in archives will call for new learning (as opposed to a foundation based on history and its ancillary disciplines). Fair enough, until he throws in a *non-sequitur*: the archivist should not be a historian, "but he must have a sense of history, which is a very different matter."³¹ To have a sense of history, one might counter, is to be a historian, at least by disposition and in outlook if not by writing for or teaching in the historian's vocation.

27 *Ibid.*

28 Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest*, p. 63.

29 Norton, *Norton on Archives*, p. 9.

30 Hull, "The Archivist Should Not Be An Historian," pp. 253-54.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 257.

In brief, the arguments against historians as archivists are not at all convincing. The archival identity seekers, though, have lost sight of this. They strive mightily to establish the criteria for the separation of archivist from historian and, furthermore, on the basis of these criteria to fix a comprehensive programme of archival training to produce the new archivist. It might be instructive to deal with this question of archival education, however fleetingly, for it follows logically that if the separators can establish a viable curriculum devoid in large part of history, historical methodology, and the ancillary historical disciplines, they may have a valid claim to archivy in its own right, cleansed of the “ancient dross” of history.

IV

Archival education, like archival practice, was born in Europe; hence, a brief overview of Old World practices in this regard will serve to set this discussion in historical context. Specialized archival training began in several European countries in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Almost everywhere, in the great schools of Paris, Berlin and Vienna, archival training was in the nature of post-graduate education, with the Berlin Dahlen Institute requiring a Ph.D. for admission. The preliminary study of humanities and history was a *sine qua non* of admission; even the British Public Record Office, until then freely drawing archival graduates from virtually any university faculty, from 1929 on began to hire only those with a history or classics background.³²

Posner, a European archivist transplanted to the New World, writing on the subject of archival education, observed in 1940 that “it is almost everywhere accepted [in Europe] that a preliminary training in the humanities, with the emphasis on history, should precede that offered at the archival school.”³³ Without such a preparation in history, he warned, an archivist was ill-prepared: “there are examples of archivists without such qualifications sitting among scattered heaps of records, like Marius on the ruins of Carthage, unable to master them.”³⁴

Admittedly, archives and archivists have changed much in the generation since Posner wrote the above: the explosion of processed papers, the multi-media record, the information revolution, and more impose new demands upon archivists. In fact, Posner himself, in his transplanting to the United States, seems in some of his writing to have changed, trading in the mantle of the European academic-archivist for the sleeker image of the administrator-archivist idealized by Norton.

Europe, however, adjusted to the new exigencies and demands without sacrificing the historical-humanist foundation of archivy. The new legislation of 1979, governing the prestigious French Ecole des Chartes, gives ample proof of this: admission to the Ecole is only through a high-level examination (testing in languages, modern and mediaeval history, historical geography, and similar fields); the curriculum of the Ecole admits newer studies (records management, for example), but not at the expense of the traditional historical ancillary sciences such as paleography, diplomatics, archeology, and so on; and at graduation the

32 Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest*, pp. 45-52.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 47.

successful candidate is recognized as an archivist of the first rank. (The Ecole also provides courses of study for lesser levels, for *documentalistes* and technicians.)³⁵

Whether this curriculum should be much more modernized is a question which disturbs some French archivists; however, one such archivist admits of no further change:

What we shall continue to maintain vigorously is that at the Ecole des Chartes one learns a methodology of labour which is irreplaceable, the application of a rigour, of a precision and of an intellectual honesty which is the honour of his [archival] reputation.³⁶

And such rigorous preparation is necessary because of the almost generic connection between archives and history, archivist and historian. "By reason of the documents which they hold, archival depositories are closely linked to historical research,"³⁷ and, almost generically and by training, the French archivist conserves and researches, and classifies and organizes, and "actively and regularly participates in historical research and ... publications of historical works."³⁸

In Europe, the die of the historical-archivist was cast in the nineteenth century with the inception of modern archivy and this great Franco-German tradition lives on, secured institutionally in the structured programmes of archival training, as evidenced by the French statute of 1979. This is not to say that the continent takes no note of the need for specialized technicians,³⁹ and that it is not aware of the fact that "archival depositories now contain a good many fonds that can be arranged, described, and serviced properly by persons of non-scholarly training, if they are properly supervised."⁴⁰ But the archivist of the first order continues to be much more than an arranger-describer-service person; he remains an archivist-historian firmly grounded in the historical science. C. Kecskemeti, Secretary of the Conseil International des Archives, underscored this connection, writing that "the intellectual formation [of the archivist] is assured most often by studies in history, because it is there that one acquires most easily the knowledge fundamental to the exercise of the calling;" only after that can come the relatively straightforward theoretical and practical apprenticeship into archivy.⁴¹

While North American archivists never formalized a structured programme of preparation of archivists on the European model of the historian-archivist, they nonetheless adhered to it religiously up to the period of World War II. In the United States, for example, W.G. Leland, at the first conference of archivists held in 1909, stressed "historical and legal training" for the archivist.⁴² The suggestion for an archival manual proved abortive; only one chapter was ever completed. But the

35 M. Duchein, "Archives in France: The New Legislation of 1979," *Archivaria* 11 (Winter 1980-81): 133.

36 Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, *Manuel d'archivistique*, p. 87.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 624.

38 *Ibid.*; see also W.J. Orr, "Archival Training in Europe," *American Archivist* 44, No. 1 (Winter 1981): 27.

39 Duchein, "Archives in France," p. 133.

40 Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest*, p. 52.

41 C. Kecskemeti, *La Formation professionnelle des archivistes* (Brussels, 1966), p. 1.

42 Evans, "Postappointment Archival Training," pp. 58; Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest*, pp. 59-60.

question of training assumed ever sharper relief as some wondered whether the European programme and tradition were applicable. In short, need the archivist be prepared as a scholar? American history was not cast in the thousands of years, but only in the hundreds. It was much less complex than European history (there was no Alsace-Lorraine, for example, with all the problems attendant upon dealing with documents from an international wash area where historical tides ebbed and flowed). There was little difficulty with documentation in foreign languages (some French or Spanish sufficed) — why then paleography, and latin, and diplomatic history, and so on? Moreover, the central governmental archives were late in being organized. There had been little structural organization to its antecedents and, therefore, little call for the development of a pool of trained historian-archivists ready to serve the future centre. Thus, when the National Archives were finally organized, the ethos of the records manager, presaged by Norton in the 1930s, was in the air, a countering current to traditional European archival norms.

For these and other reasons, the scholar-archivist of the European mould never quite monopolized the American archival scene. However, the tradition did take firm root in the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century, during which time the archival profession was created, led and nurtured by historians.⁴³ When American archivists withdrew from the American Historical Association in 1936, they organized a committee, headed by S.F. Bemis, to prepare a programme for the training of archivists. Not surprisingly, Bemis, “an authority in the field of diplomatic history” and thoroughly acquainted with European archives and the continental archives tradition,⁴⁴ recommended that American archivists continue the traditional historical foundation of archivy, graft on archival instruction at the graduate level at any respectable university, introduce the European apprenticeship system, and, in indicating that archives were to be a scholarly as well as a preservative institution, draw heads and senior staff only from historians at the Ph.D. level, who, by virtue of research experience, were thoroughly aware of the nuances of archival records and use. Specifically warning against novelties such as “library science,” Bemis reaffirmed the historian-scholar-archivist tradition of European practice.⁴⁵

The report led to the first courses in archival methodology in a post-graduate format at the American University in Washington, D.C., which were taught by Solon Buck, “an academically-trained historian” then on staff at the National Archives.⁴⁶ From the time of Bemis on, “there was ... complete agreement with regard to the role that a good general education and a solid knowledge of ... history and government would play in the upbringing of an archivist.”⁴⁷ Not the European tradition whole hog, but an historian-archivist nonetheless.

The historian-archivist was even more firmly implanted in the Canadian archival tradition from the early twentieth century onwards. Arthur Doughty, for example, was a rounded scholar, a “literary critic, a historian and former assistant-librarian of

43 Washburn, “The Archivist’s Two-Way Stretch,” p. 137.

44 Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest*, p. 63.

45 Evans, “Postappointment Archival Training,” pp. 58-59.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

47 Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest*, p. 63.

the Legislative Library of Quebec."⁴⁸ In fact, he was so much the scholar that, "so as to encourage civil servants to do research at the archives, he expressed his intention to open the office until 8 or 9 p.m. at least once a week during the winter months."⁴⁹ In 1907, as the Public Archives were crystallizing into form, the government created the Historical Manuscripts Commission so that " 'historical scholars of recognized attainment' could take part in 'the task of shaping and executing a systematic plan' for the activities of the Archives."⁵⁰ The scholar-archivist tradition in Canada was further evidenced in the appointment of Doughty's successor, Gustave Lanctôt, " 'a recognizable scholar and a noted historian,' "⁵¹ as Dominion Archivist in 1937, and in the subsequent appointment of W.K. Lamb.

This tradition is confirmed by Stacey who, recalling his experiences in the Public Archives in the 1930s, wrote the following:

When I first knew the Archives ... the institution commanded respect; and this was simply because its staff included a number of people of genuine scholarly distinction — people like Norah Story, and J.F. Kenny, and A.G. Doughty himself.⁵²

"This," he adds, "is part of its tradition which the modern Archives must never lose sight of."⁵³ And the archivist must be a historian by preparation; speaking of the Massey Commission, which reported on the Archives in 1951, Stacey noted the following:

[it] recognized that the Archives stood in great need of a large increase in staff; but it emphasized that it was essential that only 'properly qualified persons' should be hired. It recommended forcibly 'that the present policy of engaging for professional archival duty only those with adequate historical training be continued.' This is a principle on which there should be no compromise.⁵⁴

V

And yet it is precisely on this point that many archivists today seem prepared to compromise. For example, an Australian archivist while in agreement with Schellenberg that " 'the best preliminary training that an archivist can have ... is advanced training in history,' " recently emphasized that a knowledge of history is not the "only," or even "main" prerequisite for archival training.⁵⁵ Many archivists in Canada, in their search to systematize, to "professionalize" their calling, are similarly inclined to see little value in the historical foundation of archivy.⁵⁶ This,

48 B. Weilbrenner, "History of Archives", PAC Archives Course Papers, 1971, pp. 3-10.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-11.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 3-16.

52 Stacey, "The Public Archives of Canada," p. 21.

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*

55 P. Orlovich, "Some Basic Assumptions Underlying the Education and Training of Archivists," *Archives and Manuscripts: The Journal of the Australian Society of Archivists* 6, No. 6 (February 1976): 220, 221. Original emphasis.

56 Cf. comments of certain respondents to the Wilson Report in "Canadian Archives: Reports and Responses," pp. 3-36.

certainly, has much to do with the ethos of this age of technology, an age which lionizes technical services and technicians, an age which displays a discernible anti-humanist streak and a marked crassness towards scholarship in its own right. Society worships new gods, and so must the archivist. Many are under the spell of Schellenberg who, in his preface to *The Management of Archives*, wrote that “the principles and techniques [of archives practice] should be systematized.”⁵⁷ He noted that “the library profession, in the United States at least, has developed into a precise and well-defined discipline. Its techniques ... are systematized and standardized.”⁵⁸ This, in his view, should be the sacred aim of archivists, to put an end to certain abuses, to rationalize the diverse methodologies of individual depositories, and so on — and, of course, to define the archival calling “professionally.” To do so, Schellenberg thought that “there are two things that must be done to develop the archival profession — the same two things that were essential to the library profession. The first is to define the principles and techniques of the archival profession; the second is to standardize them. For a profession, in the proper sense of the term is the application of systematized or classified knowledge of principles and techniques to some field of activity.”⁵⁹ This systematization, Schellenberg adds, can only come through the methodology of library science; library schools are his favoured institutions, not only because of their methodological professionalism, but because of their longer and better experience in serving the public. The new archivist — that is, the “professional” archivist, according to Schellenberg — will rise through the agency of a graduate-studies-level school of library science with, of course, the addition of some archival content to the curriculum.⁶⁰

The matter of the library science-archives connection is an issue of substantial debate at the present.⁶¹ In fact, as Michael Cook suggests, archivy is at a crossroads today; will graduate archival programmes continue to revolve around graduate history departments, with their commitment to scholarly research, or will they go to the schools of library science, with their stress on “technologically efficient information service,” which would signify no less than the “surrender [of the] archives to the information industry.”⁶² Cook further suggests that to go wholly in either direction would be to build in a bias, with “probably stultifying long term effects.”⁶³ One can argue, however, that to go the way of library science is a potentially more dangerous route for the archivist.

As mentioned earlier, Schellenberg is a strong proponent of methodological fusion between library science and archives. Systematization is good in itself. Uniformity in approach, theory, and practice, regardless of the institutional and physical form of documents, will bring immeasurable good to archives and, not

57 T.R. Schellenberg, *The Management of Archives* (Chicago, 1965), p. ix.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

61 Besides Schellenberg, see M. Cook, “Professional Training: International Perspectives,” *Archivaria* 7 (Winter 1978-79): 28-40; N.E. Peace and N.F. Chudacoff, “Archivists and Librarians: A Common Mission, a Common Education,” *American Archivist* 40, No. 1 (January 1977): 57-74; and L.J. McCrank, “Prospects for Integrating Historical and Information Studies in Archival Education,” *American Archivist* 42, No. 4 (October 1979): 443-55.

62 Cook, “Professional Training,” pp. 35, 39.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

incidentally, also help define the archival “profession.”⁶⁴ Schellenberg’s work was, as one commentator put it, “the first significant challenge” to the Bemis report, which had spoken of “the distinct danger of turning over archives to librarians who were not at the same time erudite and critical historical scholars.”⁶⁵

Library scientists, not surprisingly, happily approve of such a direction. Peace and Chudacoff suggest that the archivist must join ranks with the library scientist for a number of reasons. They argue, for example, that library scientists and archivists have a common purpose, “to collect, organize, conserve and provide access to information.”⁶⁶ They take exception to the 1977 SAA-approved guidelines for the training of archivists which, in their opinion, continue to separate colleagues in “information services” and are too narrowly conceived within the context of the larger question of “information control” (trendy words — perhaps Pessen’s “gibberish”). Citing R.L. Clark, they point out that “librarians and archivists are of the same family.”⁶⁷ Developing this similarity further, Peace and Chudacoff suggest that the SAA definition of an archivist supports their contention; according to it, an archivist is “a person responsible for, or engaged in, one or more of the following activities: appraisal and disposition, accessioning, description, reference service, exhibition and publication.”⁶⁸ The library scientist does the very same, save only that the method of description differs. Thus, if the goal of archives is the same and if archival activities are the same, archivists should have an education similar to that of the library scientist, that is, in library science schools with an increased archival component.⁶⁹

This done, the archivists will be the recipients of real benefits. They can keep their own finding aids and record groups, but in addition to this they will have the added control measure of the AACR, a standardized and broadened information network locking into library services, standardized subject access systems, and other such-like advantages. Moreover, as Peace and Chudacoff maintain, the administrative theory, the reference service work, questions of security, and research techniques are the very same for the two callings.⁷⁰ Therefore, why not the final step?

And then, finally, with this done, archivists will find their “professional” identity. In fact, Peace and Chudacoff point out that some archivists have long advocated that archival training be transferred to schools of library science, but most have contrived to emphasize the “unique character of the archivist.” From the time of the Bemis report, archivists — despite their recognition of the need for professional training — have lingered in the twilight between academe and technician with the “emphasis on scholarly credentials.” They have perceived library scientists as rather lowly in relation to the academic world. Hence, association with them would signify a lowering of status.⁷¹ “Recognizing that they cannot be purely academics, yet not wanting to be defined as librarians, archivists have shied away from prescribing

64 Evans, “Postappointment Archival Training,” pp. 60-61.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

66 Peace and Chudacoff, “Archivists and Librarians,” p. 456.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 456, 458.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 458.

69 *Ibid.*

70 *Ibid.*, pp. 459-61.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 457.

whether archives education should take place in history departments or in library schools.”⁷²

The archivist, however, has, or should have, good cause for concern about too close an association with library science, if Peace and Chudacoff’s arguments for closer integration of library science and archivy, partially supported by Schellenberg, are about all one can say in favour of such a union. To Schellenberg’s yearning for systematization, one might say that there is nothing sacred in it. It is most certainly a feature of the modern ethos, this drive to rationalize and standardize, and without doubt it will help to define the archivist as a “professional,” to distance him from the archivist-historian, by introducing into archival practice a specific jargon, a specific methodology, and the like. However, how crucial it is to the archival calling is another matter. The real question here is one of efficiency; what matter if various institutions have various finding aids and classification systems as long as the record is well-arranged with respect for *provenance*, well-described, and easily retrievable. Surely this is a case where content and recall is more important than outward form.

To Peace and Chudacoff’s observation that both archivists and library scientists have similar roles, that they are of the same family, one might answer briefly — how very facile. To be of the same family is not to be identical twins; and one and the same family can produce both an Einstein and a mongoloid. There are very basic differences in the very nature of the material each preserves: as Posner points out, “archival material, because of its nature and uniqueness, call[s] for the use of techniques different from those of a librarian;”⁷³ and Schellenberg himself writes that “archivists cannot arrange their material according to predetermined schemes of subject classification,” for then they run the risk of losing sight and meaning, losing the context, of manuscripts and records.⁷⁴

Moreover, each archival *fond* is in fact a living organism, of variable importance, but an organic thing which grows, alters, and changes even in the process of creation of the record. Each manuscript is a unique creation.⁷⁵ In dealing with it, one requires not a systematizer, but a historian schooled in the historical context which produced that organism, and an archivist who knows of *respect des fonds* and *provenance* to preserve the record in its natural form. The techniques of library science, which concern themselves but little with historical context and have nothing to do with *provenance*, perforce would do much more harm to manuscripts than good; and truth to say, library scientists who might try to work with manuscripts “will not,” in Schellenburg’s own words, “find this easy to do, for the differences between archival and library methods are difficult to bridge.”⁷⁶

The other bonus which Peace and Chudacoff suggest will accrue to archivists in their fusion with library sciences — improved accessioning, description, and the like — are not likely to follow; in fact, library techniques are hardly applicable. B.E.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 458.

73 Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest*, p. 63.

74 T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago, 1956), pp. 22, 63.

75 J. Favier, *Les Archives* (Paris, 1965), pp. 5-6.

76 Schellenberg, *Management of Archives*, p. 69.

Josephson, addressing the question of archival training in library schools, wrote that

... training in library science ... is not adequate preparation for ... [archival work] except in the limited capacity of book cataloguing; museum objects, archives, manuscripts, and maps offer problems which no Dewey or Cutter could answer to satisfaction. In addition to absorbing the methodological training received in library schools, an archivist should be well grounded in history and should, for the more important positions in his field, hold an advanced degree in the social sciences.⁷⁷

The matter of advanced degrees in social sciences brings one to the accursed, dare one say “historical,” matter of the identity of archivists and their relationship to academe, an association which Peace and Chudacoff regret. Many, however, agree that library science training “cannot provide the historical background archivists have traditionally seen as crucial for the profession.”⁷⁸

The best preliminary training that an archivist can have [wrote Schellenberg] is advanced training in history. This provides him with a knowledge of the development of his country.... It provides him with training in research methodology, which is needed in all the work he does rationalizing public records.... Since the formulation of the basic archival principle of provenance in the middle of the last century, archival institutions in all countries have stressed the importance of historical training for archivists.⁷⁹

In the above, Schellenberg confirmed the generic connection between history, and the practice of history, with archivy, the historian-archivist link, not the library scientist-archivist connection. Right up from the very fundamental question of physical form (the librarian’s discrete units as opposed to the archivist’s collective, organic ones), through the matter of classification and description (the librarian’s subject cataloguing as opposed to the archivist’s description with due regard for *provenance* and *respect des fonds*), to the question of the clientele served (the librarian, much more the mass public; the archivist, much more the specialized researcher), the separation of library scientist and archivist is markedly pronounced.

In fact, in large degree, there is an antithesis in mind-set, in disposition, as well as in training between a library scientist and an archivist with preliminary training in history. Library science is a methodology concerned with the manipulation of physical things, with rigid subject cataloguing which the nature of the print medium allows. It can, and must be, precise. Archivy, concerned with *provenance* and historical context, is more analytical. It never can approach the precision of library science. And even though it should never rise to the subjectivism of historians, it remains, even in approach and disposition, closer to the less systematized exercise of history than to the standardized practice of library science.

77 B.E. Josephson, in Schellenberg, *Managment of Archives*, p. 70.

78 McCrank, “Historical and Information Studies,” p. 444.

79 Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, p. 131.

VI

The archivist perhaps should not be an historian, but he should always be an archivist-historian. Ideally, he should be a representative of the world of research in the world of administration — skilled in the trends, techniques, personalities, and developments of that world.⁸⁰ Archivist and historian, in their work, labour very closely in tandem.

Basically, the historian and archivist are engaged upon the same task, which is to discover and convey the truth about events and personalities and issues of the past, to isolate and arrest from the flow of time some point or area of human experience, to learn what it meant to those who took part in it, and to distil and pass on what it can mean to us now.... The facts are in our keeping. The whole aim of the archivists' work is to preserve ... them. Without the historian's 'imagination and art' these facts can remain, as we all know, a valley of dry bones; but without the archivist's 'science and research' the historian will not know either what the facts are or where they are to be found.⁸¹

The archivist and historian are in fact in symbiosis; indeed, one might say that even as a good archivist needs to be, in some part, an historian, to know the world which interprets the facts in his keeping, the good historian must also be, in some part, an archivist, to understand the world which preserves for him the manna of his calling. Archivist and historian are obverse sides of the same coin which has currency in the same realm. Therefore, while the archivist should learn what he can, use what is useful, from the library scientist, he should never, in the sometimes supercilious search for a unique "professional" identity, turn away from history in the broad sense of that term or lose his academic connection. "The responsible post of archivist should not be occupied without an understanding and involvement in the intellectual movements and debates of the nation, or those of the international sphere."⁸² If that precludes a more "professional" definition of an archivist, and inhibits the standardization of his calling, it is no great loss.

VII

In this matter of professional identity, of rationalization of the calling of archivist at the expense of his traditional association with history, of updating the archivist's image, some suggest a closer association with library science; others, in pursuit of definition and status, have tilted towards the "records manager" and "archival management." Schellenberg has been as seminal in this development as he was in the matter of seeking a closer accommodation between archivy and library science. Under Schellenberg's influence, most American schools teaching archival practice and methodology have committed themselves to teaching not archivy but "archival management.... [There is a] growing acceptance of the concept of archives as a managerial occupation rather than as a branch of interpretative scholarship, the traditional base of Franco-German training."⁸³ Behind this development is a

80 Cook, "Professional Training," p. 34.

81 R.H. Ellis, "The British Archivist and History," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3, No. 4 (October 1966): 159-160.

82 Cook, "Professional Training," p. 37.

83 *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

revolution in the making, not yet run its course; it moves fully counter to the Bemis report, to the archivist as a member of the intellectual community, by recasting the archivist in the mould of an office manager.⁸⁴

One can readily agree with Posner and Schellenberg that records management is a useful development, and very much necessary given the extraordinary penchant of present-day governmental and private institutions for excreting Himalayas of paper. The archives, particularly those charged with handling the record of central government institutions, require managers who can survey a given situation, isolate problems of retention and storage, devise requisite strategies to overcome them, and marshal the skill and resources to effect such strategies.⁸⁵ Behind all this lies Jenkinson's worthy imperative to save the record in its evidential, organic order:

Documents have ... a structure, an articulation and a natural relationship between parts, which are essential to their significance.... Archive quality only survives unimpaired so long as their natural form and relationship are maintained.⁸⁶

Unfortunately, it seems that the archivist has to choose one of several roads: to pursue his calling as archivist-historian, or to swing ever more into the newer form of records manager as a purveyor of data, an "information scientist." Of course there is no reason at all why he cannot serve in both capacities,⁸⁷ save for the fact that today's archivists — in pursuit of a unique identity (from out of the shadow of the historian), in keeping with the tenor of this technology-oriented era (the gibberish of a relevant calling), and in the unschooled tradition of the Nortonites — seem to be rejecting far too rapidly their former identity: the archivist as historian and scholar. By so doing,

by emphasizing the housekeeping and administrative functions, the archivists have played into the hands of those whose values are not those of the founders of the profession. Those values are the dictates of scholarship: maximum scholarly access to the greatest number of sources, and the obligation to truth above all values,⁸⁸

and not, as records managers would have it, bureaucratic efficiency.

There are further dangers to the well of the past, to the memory of the nation, in this turn of events. Schellenberg himself admits just how different, perhaps even at odds, the archivist and records managers are, from something as minute as the types of forms each uses to something as fundamental as arrangement and description. The ethos of the two are antithetical: the records manager seeks to destroy, the archivist to preserve. The former bends his talents to the rapidity with which he moves out large quantities of paper (efficiency of time, space, and money), while the latter concerns himself with a meticulous search and analysis of records, retaining as much as possible.⁸⁹ Stacey, in a passage worthy of repeating in its entirety not only because of its message, but also because of the colour of its expression, says the

84 Evans, "Postappointment Archival Training," p. 69.

85 Cook, "Professional Training," p. 30.

86 Jenkinson, in Schellenberg, *Management of Archives*, p. 92.

87 Evans, "Postappointment Archival Training," p. 69.

88 Washburn, "The Archivist's Two-Way Stretch," p. 139.

89 Schellenberg, *Management of Archives*, pp. 72-73.

following about records management, which is coming to occupy so central a role in archives and in the definition of the archivist as well:

Looking at the Records Management process from the point of view of the historian, my chief worry is the danger of important historical records being destroyed. This is not an imaginary danger, many people ... including myself, could cite specific cases of destruction of groups of files that certainly ought to have been preserved. It is an undeniably difficult problem, and in the light of the enormous number of items that have to be processed we shall probably never be fully protected against the loss of the odd significant file; but we should not accept as legitimate the possibility of loss of an important group of files. The only protection against this is a combination of eternal vigilance and sound organization. The vital matter is to ensure that no recommendation and no assessment of the value of files is ever made by anyone except a person with historical training. I have long believed that every government department should have a small historical section, which, in addition to dealing with inquiries and the like, could advise on the scheduling of the department's records. In the absence of such trained departmental personnel, the Archives of course must do the job. No mere administrator should be allowed within a mile of decisions or recommendations on destruction of files. We have all known administrators whose one idea concerning records management was to destroy as many files as possible. These people are descendants of the ancient Thugs of India. They are servants of Kali, the Destroyer; and like the Thugs they should be stamped out wherever found. The Dominion Archivist and his staff should never forget that they are servants of Vishnu, the Creator and Preserver. If it is necessary to hire more historians in order to provide against the destruction of valuable historical records, then that is what the Government ought to do. I understand the people are available.⁹⁰

It is a telling commentary which, without reservation, comes down firmly in favour of the archivist-historian, the archivist-scholar of the Canadian archival tradition. Truth to say, Stacey's observations, though they may have had real relevance in the 1950s and early 1960s, are somewhat dated now, at least insofar as they apply to the Canadian scene. For example, no "mere administrator," at the federal level, is allowed to unilaterally determine the fate of government files or of group records; archivists trained in history exercise effective authority in this regard, in determining what will be destroyed, what retained. One must confess, moreover, that Stacey today comes across as too florid, perhaps even quixotic, tilting away at straw men.

However, potential danger to the historical record, of the kind against which Stacey warned, still lurks and, unfortunately, is increasing in direct proportion to the modern archivist's search for an updated, modernized, "professional" identity. For example, if archivy draws close to library science with its "scientific" methodology, with its indexing and cataloguing, with "systematization" as the new ethos, to the exclusion of history, where then is the historian to assess the significance

90 Stacey, "The Public Archives ...", p. 16.

and value of the government records? Similarly, if the archivist goes the way of the records manager, concerned largely with the physical flow, disposition, and control of paper, is there not a possibility that Stacey's Kali and the Thugs may be let loose again among the historical record? Posner, writing in 1956, commented that "a good many [still] conceal the archivist's sheepskin under the shinier and more expensive hide of the records manager wolf."⁹¹ One certainly hopes he's right, but he wrote almost a generation back. Since that time, under pressure to establish "relevance" and "professional identity" in an age which cares little for humanistic scholarship in its own right and to emulate the bureaucracy which he serves (and falling prey to its gibberish), it's more the case that the archivist as records manager is becoming much more the manager than archivist.⁹² As Stacey writes of the Canadian experience which, one hopes, has not surrendered as fully to records management and archives management as has the American,

I find myself suspecting that there are some persons connected with [archives] who really believe that its main reason for existence is the part it plays in that great inter-departmental game of records management, in which people spend their days pushing around files in whose contents many of them have no interest and whose significance or lack of significance they are frequently quite incapable of assessing.⁹³

In the search for archival identity, for "professionalization" of the calling predicated on denying the historical-scholarly foundation of archivy and its transmutation into a modernized vocation replete with peculiarly distinct vocabulary and methodology, the pendulum has swung too far the other way in the separation of the archivist from the historian.⁹⁴ Programmes to prepare records managers and archives administrators will produce managers and administrators (both necessary); the adoption of a more systematic approach modelled on library science will produce cataloguers and indexers (again necessary); but what lies between the administrators and technicians, if no archivist-historians remain? Or as Washburn writes,

Archivists can take either the scholarly or the administrative paths that now co-exist within the archival profession. I, for one, would urge that archivists take to heart Ernst Posner's warning ... in 1957 ... never 'to separate the umbilical cord that connects us with the mother body of the historical profession.'⁹⁵

VIII

A few words now in summation. Modern archives and archival practice arose in nineteenth-century Europe contemporaneously. Whatever harm historians originally may have done the record, they fixed the contours of archivy and publicized the value of the historical record, making it a *desiderata* in the European intellectual matrix. Their errors were the errors of pioneers, but their contributions were the

91 Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest* ..., p. 162.

92 G. Dodds, "Back to Square One: Records Management Revisited", *Archivaria*, 2 (Summer 1976): 91.

93 Stacey, "The Public Archives of Canada," p. 22.

94 T. Cook, "Clio: The Archivist's Muse," *Archivaria*, 5 (Winter 1977-1978): 199.

95 Washburn, "The Archivist's Two-Way Stretch," p. 143.

very stuff of archivy. The European tradition of the scholar-historian-archivist was, and remains, a valid ideal both for the training of archivists and the practice of archivy. And this ideal served North Americans well long into the twentieth century.

Under the exigencies of the modern era, responding to the demands of the *geist* of technology which has so suffused the last several decades and continues to do so ever increasingly, some archivists, especially in the United States, resolved to seek a newer, sleeker image, a new archival ethos. This required perforce the separation of the archivist from the archivist-historian, or rather, the transmutation of a compound calling out of its turn-of-the-century humanistic form into a more “relevant,” “scientific,” “professional” calling. It sounds so much more current, progressive, and, perhaps, in the eternal game of loosening government’s purse strings, amenable to receiving increased budgets.

Hence the search for a *modus vivendi*, if not outright amalgamation, with library science. Hence the stress upon records and archives management. Hence the creation of a new technical terminology (and, at times, a new gibberish). Hence the great debate about the nature and form of archival education. Underlying all of this is the turning against the historian, the archivist’s love-hate relationship vis-à-vis the historian, occasioned at times by petulant jealousy and at times by good cause.

One might ask: what profit in this, if archivists arrive at a new ethos based upon the negotiation, or in the very least upon the denigration, of the historian within. They will have their modernized and updated self-definition, a salvaged ego, and they will be part administrator and part technician — but they will not be archivists.

True, they will be much updated, and, perhaps, will feel much the better for it. Yet modernity alone is not, or should not be, the great criterion which reshapes and determines the contours of the archival calling. Some things, despite their age, are worth preserving against the onrush of this age of science which is levelling all which does not conform to its ethos. Burckhardt, Weber, Nietzsche, and many others rightly warned against this danger at the close of the nineteenth century. The coming of technology and science signified, for them, a new cultural barbarism, slotting, specializing, and pigeon-holing humans, cog-like, into societal juggernauts. They may have overstated the case, but they were right on the mark when they sensed that the new order entailed the certain demise of the humanities. Nietzsche, in denying the barbarism of the dawning scientific age, and in speaking on behalf of culture and the humanities in his lectures on educational institutions in Germany, defiantly declared: “How useless we were! And how proud we were of being useless!” Rather that, than the final subjection to scientific professionalism.

It its own small way, the European tradition of the archivist-historian, and its later reflection in North America, defied this atomizing, neo-medieval guildism of scientific and professional exclusivity. It is worth preserving, so that the archivist-historian remains the keeper of the well, and in the words of a French archivist “serve[s] in all its aspects the science of history.”⁹⁶ This is not to suggest that he serve only historians; he should serve the public as well, in every way possible. But it is largely historians who cull the knowledge stored in archives, who interpret and

96 Ministère des Affaires Culturelles. *Manuel d'archivistique*, p. 89; see also F.G. Burke, “The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States,” *American Archivist* 44, No. 1 (Winter 1981): 46.

make public that knowledge; circumstance alone suggests that archivists deal largely with historians, whether professional or amateur.

Perhaps one other word on the archivist-historian. The archivist need not have a Ph.D. in one of the humanities or social sciences although, as H.A. Taylor noted, while “higher degrees do not necessarily make for better archivists ... they often do and this should be recognized.”⁹⁷ Certainly, the eye and mind of the historian, the training in historical methodology, the immersion in history in general, cultivates in him the historicist approach, the awareness of historical context. This is indispensable for any one who has archival material in his care:

In working with documentary materials the historical approach (*the principle of historicism*) presupposes profound study of documents, beginning with the peculiar features of that concrete historical situation ... which gave birth to them, paying [proper] attention to the time and place of their creation.⁹⁸

Whether full-fledged or not in the European tradition and whether teaching, researching, writing, or not, the archivist should be an historian. At least he should be one in the sense of having an historicist’s disposition, that is, the interest in knowledgeably looking back to understand the context of record creation. For without context, nothing is truth. Stacey, writing much in this vein, declared:

My advice to the Archives is to pursue the old academic ideal: it should seek to be a *community of scholars*. Not merely a unit in the public service (though of course it is that), not just a group of technicians (important as technicians are in this technological age); and certainly not a gaggle of administrators. Administrators are a necessary evil, but they should be kept in their place. The archivists who set the tone for the Public Archives of Canada must be scholars if they are to retain their own professional pride and standing and if the institution they serve is to continue to command its old distinction.⁹⁹

Perhaps this is the desirable egress out of the matter of archival identity: forget this burning question which is not as important as some would make it seem. Preserve what is good, and there is much of that, in the old European and Canadian archival tradition, train the necessary administrators and managers and technicians, as bureaucratic and technological pressures demand — but leave room for the archivist as well. Instead of rigorously defining him, let the archivist define himself within the broad parameters of the old tradition, in a small corner of the bureaucratic monolith where the humanist tradition can survive. If this disappears, we shall be left with information managers of various sorts, with a “professional” title appropriate to today, but we shall have no archivists. And without archivists, one wonders how these new “professionals” will keep the well of the past.

97 Taylor, “Discipline of History,” p. 396.

98 L.A. Nikiforov and G.A. Belov, *Teoriia i praktika arkhivnogo delo v SSSR* (Moscow, 1966), p. 8. *Original emphasis.*

99 Stacey, “The Public Archives of Canada,” p. 22. *Original emphasis.*