

# Archivy *Ad Portas*: The Archives-Records Management Paradigm Re-visited in the Electronic Information Age

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Since its advent in the United States in the years following World War II, records management in North America has evolved, as an occupational concept, into something related to, but decidedly separate and distinct from the archival endeavour. Ensnared within what has become an independent profession, the rise of records management as an autonomous body of practices and approaches has been a major factor preventing archivists from establishing a strong presence throughout the complete records continuum.<sup>1</sup> Archivists have thereby been unable to step with both feet into the oft-described but seldom attained age of “post-custodial” archives information management. All too often, the archivist has been left a passive, or at best semi-passive recipient of the records manager’s efforts.<sup>2</sup> Yet on closer scrutiny, distinctions between the concepts of records management and of archival practice, and the corollary notion of independent records professions, lack viability. This contention is hardly novel, but in the era of electronic records assumes a heightened immediacy. The difficulties of managing and preserving electronic records, arising principally from the growth and physical character of digital information, necessitate a thorough re-examination of the essential functions and activities of the record-keeping professions, and of their underlying theoretical, methodological, and practical bases. In this most recent manifestation of recorded information, where records and data exist only in “virtual” format, it becomes increasingly evident that archivists must concern themselves more with the analysis and management of functions and processes than with physical records. This necessitates an interventionist approach wherein the archivist acts as a record-keeping system creator and/or auditor in order to ensure the integrity of electronic records from systems design stages onward. Such an approach fits very well with the archival practitioner’s classic concern with context, but more significantly, underscores a forgotten truth inherent in the archives profession’s traditional core ideas about the nature of records: from a functional perspective, archival records, and archival activities, encompass the totality of the records continuum from creation onward. Thus, examination of

the nature of records in general, and electronic records specifically, demonstrates that the line separating records management and archival functions (concepts which are themselves already ambiguous) is practically invisible. This highlights the artificiality of the original split between archivists and records managers. In a nutshell, archival functions and records management functions are one and the same.<sup>3</sup>

The implications for the traditional split between records managers' and archivists' roles are clear and stark. An obsolescent, often counterproductive strategy for management of recorded information based on little more than the prevailing supremacy of an archaic division of labour developed by the National Archives of the United States some half century ago, and perpetuated to a substantial degree by the archival profession's ongoing affinity for the discipline of history, becomes untenable. At an absolute minimum, the evident nonviable nature at the turn of the twentieth century of the production line approach to recorded information management functions (i.e., the strict distinction between records and archival management), begs much greater archival input into the record continuum as a whole. As David B. Gracy II observed a decade ago, "the separation between archivists and records managers needs to be bridged."<sup>4</sup> On a more radical, and perhaps more useful note, this situation also suggests the necessity of renouncing conventional roles and their attendant divisions of labour in favour of a single, truly integrated approach. The archivist, in rising to the challenge of electronic information management, and in so doing being compelled to re-address an old problem, stands at the threshold, poised to lay to rest once and for all this anachronistic vestige of the "Custodial Age" of recorded information management: the records management-archival paradigm. The inevitable consequence seems to be the emergence of a new profession combining the total functions of the records manager and the archivist. Welcome the new documentation or recorded information management specialist, a new information professional charged with managing records from point of creation onward.<sup>5</sup>

There is much yet to be done. In 1971 in an attempt to delineate the functional differences between the archivist and the records manager, Union Pacific Railroad Records Manager Gerald Brown posed the following notions:

The archivist serves the needs of the scholar, the historian, and posterity, whereas, the records manager serves the needs of business which is usually profit motivated and which is interested only in information that contributes to or protects that profit or the goals of the organization. To put it another way, the records manager is basically a business administrator and the archivist is basically a historian.<sup>6</sup>

This basic definition of records managers' and archivists' comparative roles, while fraught with inaccuracy, still holds true and is accepted in many circles, particularly in the United States.<sup>7</sup> For the most part, such viewpoints

find their greatest expression among records managers, but more important, also tend to hold sway among corporate decision-makers and resource allocators, not to mention many archivists. Born of administrative expedience and perpetuated by misconception and bureaucratic inertia, the concept of the records manager as business engine continues to inform existing perceptions, to the exclusion of archivists.

The historical origins of this situation lie with the United States' National Archives. In early 1941 this institution inaugurated a "records administration program" with the view to assisting "in developing throughout the Government principles and practices in filing, selection, and segregation of records that will facilitate the disposal of or transfer to the National Archives of records as they become non-current."<sup>8</sup> The program's basic intent was to facilitate the "process of selection for preservation" as "early as possible in the life history of records."<sup>9</sup> Conceived as a creature to serve archival ends, records management, or "records administration" in the parlance of the day, was a typical construct of post-war American efficiency engineering. What occurred here, in essence, was the identification of separate, specific archival functions, paradoxically reflective of the archivist's need to control the totality of records' life cycle. In a fashion typical of the American industrial mentality, it was reasoned that the most effective means to archival command was division of labour. Thus, rather than redefining and expanding the role of the archivist, the efficiency experts drew lines of demarcation between traditional archival practice and the development of new methods to address the burgeoning records of the American government. It was not long before this essentially artificial division received official sanction and a new information profession came into being. As early as 1950, at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, the Archivist of the United States, Wayne C. Grover, announced the establishment of a federal records management staff separate and distinct from the staff of the National Archives, "but within the single organizational entity known as the National Archives and Records Service."<sup>10</sup> Commenting on the emerging records management functions at NARS, Grover observed:

There is and will always be, I hope, much overlapping between current records management and archival activities. But each has a basically different emphasis and requires different qualifications, no matter how closely the activities and individuals involved are related to each other in common purpose.

Speaking by and large, academic qualifications in history and social sciences are essential for the archivist, if he is to develop such subject-matter competence to perform his professional chores intelligently. On the other hand, management outlook and experience are essential to the records management specialist. ... In a word, the whole field of dealing with records has progressed sufficiently to demand a certain amount of specialization.<sup>11</sup>

Not all American archivists and records managers embraced the functional divisions associated with the new records management paradigm. 1955 saw the establishment of the Association of Records Executives and Administrators and the American Records Management Association. Nonetheless, Morris Radoff, President of the Society of American Archivists, echoed the sentiments of some when, in response to Grover's promotion of professional division, he stated, "There is nothing between heaven and earth to prevent an American records management specialist from being called an archivist and vice versa."<sup>12</sup> More significantly, Robert Shiff, President of the National Records Management Council, asserted that the functions of archivist and records manager were not merely related, but interchangeable. He went on to note that the NRMC was not able "to maintain any viable distinction between archivists and records managers," and had in fact found it necessary that members of its constituency "be both archivists and records managers."<sup>13</sup> Offering an insightful and frighteningly prophetic perspective, Shiff concluded that if the trend toward functional distinction was to continue, "then most of the business world will remain outside the sphere of archival influence." "To have a general archival and records management consciousness in business," he asserted, "it must be in conjunction with the ability of the archivist and the records manager to serve the combined need."<sup>14</sup> From a slightly different angle, another records manager argued that to combine archival administration and records management was to "present a united front whose total impact toward professional betterment is many times greater than the sum of efforts separately pursued."<sup>15</sup>

Despite such views of an enlightened few, by the late 1950s and early 1960s the writing was on the wall. Records management had increasingly been accepted as the best, most appropriate means to deal with recorded information of an "administrative nature" in business and government, supplanting the role of archives in many instances by minimizing archival input or preempting "archival functions" altogether. In so doing, records management applied techniques often devoid of archival perspective, with detrimental consequences for the very record that the discipline purported to serve. Even in agencies where archives and records management ostensibly co-existed, the relationship was often far from equal, with archives frequently relegated to subordinate positions in terms both of status and influence over information management policy. This trend would persist unabated over time. Its continued pervasiveness today can be gauged in part by comparing the relative number of records management and archives programs (or combined archives and records management programs) in non-government organizations in North America.<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, archives rarely come out on top.<sup>17</sup> Equally revealing is a comparison of the numbers of practitioners in the two professions. A recent publication by the Canadian *Alliance of Libraries, Archives and Records Management* (ALARM) indicated that in 1994 there were 11,500

archivists employed in Canada, in some 700 archives, as opposed to approximately 114,000 individuals “employed in records management” (although not all, perhaps, at the professional level).<sup>18</sup> These figures speak volumes about relative importance and influence.

Strangely, these developments have failed to elicit anything even remotely resembling a concerted response from the North American archival community. On the contrary, North American archivists have quietly embraced them. Traditionally, Jay Atherton observes, archivists have viewed themselves as scholars on a par with professional researchers and historians. To protect their essentially nascent status, archivists have tended to be dismissive of administrative and management activities as “unprofessional.” Conversely, records managers have embraced these activities, seeing them as central to their stated ends of enhancing efficiency and developing effective records management systems. At the same time they have displayed little understanding of, and even less interest in the “loftier” endeavours of the archivist.<sup>19</sup> This dichotomy of views has assisted in the evolution of that uniquely American concept, the “manuscript curator,” wherein archivists in the employ of historical societies, theme-based archives, and the like focus predominantly on the needs of scholarship.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Richard Cox observes that the American archival profession, emerging from the historical profession between 1900 and 1940, has “maintained an extremely close alliance with its historian colleagues,” noting that “there are many individuals working in archival positions that consider themselves historians.”<sup>21</sup>

Canadian archivists, too, have contributed to this condition, as witnessed by their long struggle with professional self-definition, well chronicled in the litany of debate which appeared in *Archivaria* during the 1980s. The issue reached its zenith and found a focal point in George Bolotenko of the National Archives of Canada. In a number of articles Bolotenko argued eloquently, if not quite convincingly, for the position of the “traditional archivist as historian and scholar.” Bolotenko viewed the latter as an entity under siege by parochial technocrats posing in the guise of archival professionals. These “technicians” sought to divest the archival profession of its substance by severing its cultural/historical connection from the education and outlook of archives practitioners and usurping control over the direction and character of programs within archival institutions. In extolling the virtues of professional and technical competence and focussing on the use of archival materials for practical purposes, these “cultural Visigoths” were perceived as posing a direct and profound threat to the vision of archives as cultural agency, an integral component of the Canadian concept of “total archives.”<sup>22</sup> As Bolotenko asserted, “the overriding purpose which society has always found in archives is precisely cultural.”<sup>23</sup> In fact, some critics observed that Bolotenko went so far as to infer that “one can become a finer archivist if, in addition to the correct disposition, one has formal training in history.”<sup>24</sup> Emanating from this view, and having

direct implications for the present discussion, is Bolotenko's position regarding the "natural" dichotomy between archives and records management (which echoes the perceptions of many Canadian archivists). Bolotenko avers that "the ethos of the two are antithetical: the records manager seeks to destroy, the archivist to preserve."<sup>25</sup> Even enlightened Canadian archivists such as Jay Atherton, who advocates a streamlined, integrated system for recorded information management, seem to have been at least touched by the historian's brush. Atherton's model is hinged on joint records management and archives involvement, to varying degrees, in all aspects of the records continuum. But Atherton and others fail to go far enough in their approach. Atherton advocates the development of a "symbiotic" relationship between archivist and records manager rather than a merging of the two disciplines, asserting that the "intellectual training and historical perspective of the archivist will enrich the practical, immediate concerns of the records manager."<sup>26</sup> This reflects the prevalence among Canadian archivists of the view that the full measure of archival involvement in the records continuum can, and should be achieved through increased cooperation with their opposite numbers in records management. Much the same may be said of those American archivists who have deigned to wrestle with the issue of relationships between records management and archives. In 1983 in his monograph on the development and state of American archival theory and practice, Richard C. Berner called for ongoing, wide-ranging cooperation between the two fields in all aspects of records creation, use, disposition, and subsequent administration. This would facilitate "responsible records use and administration."<sup>27</sup>

Thus, while some have come tantalizingly close to identifying the root cause of the basic problems of professional identity and functional division besetting practitioners of recorded information management, and have even, somewhat by happenstance, posed moderately workable solutions, the resolution has remained elusive. So has a clear understanding of the problem.<sup>28</sup> In essence, varying degrees of historical orientation continue to inform what is a rather narrow interpretation of archival functions, thereby limiting the capacity of the archivist to participate fully in managing the records continuum. Nor is any help likely from today's records managers. Indeed, with archivists still suffering, to varying degrees, from what might be termed the "handmaiden of history syndrome," the field of records management has become irretrievably wedded to this erroneous, grossly oversimplified definition of archival function. Viewing archives almost exclusively as repositories for historical and cultural material, the contemporary records manager has come to perceive the archivist with, at best, amused acceptance and at worst, disdain. Historian, or otherwise dusty relic of a by-gone era, it matters little which: his or her place in recorded information management is necessarily and justifiably peripheral. In sharp contrast stands the role of the "real" recorded information management professional, that paragon of functional pragmatism, the records manager.<sup>29</sup>

This outlook finds a vigorous exponent in the person of Ira Penn, a prominent figure in American records management. In an article in a recent edition of *Records Management Quarterly*, he articulates his views on the position of the records manager. In “response” to an ad for a “Records Co-ordinator” in a previous issue, Penn, the journal’s editor, decries in great detail the placement of a records program administratively under the Division of Special Collections and Archives in a large American state university, subordinating the records program coordinator to the university archivist. His “observations” are enlightening:

If we were dealing with an institution of higher education in some third-world country still wrapped in the vestiges of colonialism, such a placement might be understandable. To this day, records management programs in England, and throughout most of the countries that were formerly a part of its empire, still function under the archival umbrella. But this is a North American university. In North America it is understood for almost half a century that archival preservation is but one phase of the records life cycle. For the records management function to be subservient to that of archives is completely backwards.<sup>30</sup>

Penn goes on to decry the fact that the Certified Records Manager (CRM) designation is not required for the position under consideration and that the chief criterion for the job is a Master of Library Science degree. He also chides the university for not seeking, at least, a certified archivist for the position. A certified archivist, he points out, “while not a records manager, is at least cognizant of what records are.”<sup>31</sup> Penn proceeds to note that many MLS programs fail to include a records management or even archival component and therefore (despite the university’s clearly indicated preference for candidates experienced in records management) likens the university’s hiring practice to trying to fill a vacancy for a plumber with an electrician.<sup>32</sup> Yet, on the whole, his invective is overkill, much like swatting a dead fly. As noted earlier, the records management profession, with the possible exception of some university archives and certain government institutions, has come to dominate recorded information management in North America. Resource allocators in government and the private sector, even when aware or cognizant of archival functions in information management, view archives as low priority administrative entities. Among other reasons, archivists, for them, “hark to the past, seem passive” – less important when “compared to more current, ongoing, aggressive demands on the budget.”<sup>33</sup>

However, Penn, while no doubt sincere in his beliefs, might have done well to consider a number of additional factors. First and foremost is the fact that archivists, in tacit recognition of their role as professionals who deal with the whole of recorded information, are educated in the nature of recorded information in all its manifestations from point of creation onward. In Canada the

“industry standard” for appointment as a professional archivist is a Master of Archival Studies Degree,<sup>34</sup> or its equivalent in education and experience. In the United States, the pattern is to require graduate degrees in Library Science or History, with specialization or concentration in archival administration, which includes a records management component – with a shift towards degrees on the MAS model beginning to appear. In both countries, the goal is to impart professional knowledge concerning the whole of the recorded information continuum.<sup>35</sup>

It is in this basic object of archival education that we see the emergence of a solution to the contemporary archivist’s identity problem and to the weaknesses inherent in our present orientation toward division of labour in management of records and data. Implicit in the breadth of training within archival education is the essential tenet that the nature of recorded information must dictate the manner in which records and data are handled, and in turn the character of the professions dedicated to this task. Specifically, the archival profession is concerned with the whole of the documentation created, received, and used by a juridical or physical person in executing functions and activities, which is then retained for reference. The nature of records stems from the circumstances of their creation, and archives are at once a complex of documents and a network of organically determined, cohesive, and therefore necessary relationships between records and their creators, between the documents themselves, and among their principal users. Not surprisingly, then, as the Association of Canadian Archivists’ *Guidelines for a Master of Archival Studies* state, the archivist is (or should be) “intellectually involved in the control of archives from the moment of their creation to the moment of their communication.” The archivist, the *Guidelines* assert, “accomplishes his/her task guided by a single body of internationally developed and accepted theory.”<sup>36</sup>

To summarize the argument thus far, despite considerable soul searching on the part of North American archivists and at a time when a clearer professional definition independent of and separate from the historical profession has become attainable (particularly in Canada), the myth of archivist as handmaiden to the historical discipline, antiquarian, or obscure preservationist lingers on, to the detriment of the archival profession, the record that it serves, and society as a whole. Subjected to closer scrutiny, however, this attempt at professional objectification, and the misconceptions that it engenders, have little basis in fact. Rather, the evidence suggests the relevance of an altogether different professional definition, one that goes further than that of George Bolotenko’s demonized “technicians,” and beyond Atherton’s and Berner’s cooperative archives-records management models. This evidence emanates not from some artificial administrative construct, but from the essential nature of records.<sup>37</sup>

Notwithstanding the negative circumstances previously discussed, archivists in North America are at this time extremely well-positioned to effect sub-

stantial change: the groundwork for finally assuming the profession's more appropriate role has been laid. While to varying degrees still feeling the ill effects of a long struggle with self-definition and assertion, contemporary archivists, in direct consequence of this selfsame struggle, have "rediscovered" the essential principles underlying archival activities. A predominantly, though not exclusively, Canadian phenomenon of the 1980s (that continues to date), this "rediscovery" has centred around individuals who, in the face of unprecedented volumes of records and rapidly changing information technologies, have been compelled to re-examine the theoretical underpinnings of their profession. The outcome is most succinctly described by Terry Cook: "Rather than abandoning archival principles for those of information management or computer science, as some contemporaries were suggesting, or remaining in the Schellenbergian content-centred cocoon, Canadian archivists began discovering the intellectual excitement of contextualized information that was their own profession's legacy."<sup>38</sup> The Canadian rediscovery or re-examination of the principle of provenance was mirrored in certain limited American circles, finding its most profound expression in David Bearman's and Richard Lytle's classic article, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance."<sup>39</sup> The authors' views represented a radical departure from prevailing content and subject-based systems. Bearman and Lytle championed the superiority and integrity of provenance-driven information retrieval systems (i.e., those centred on context of record creation) which, "in addition to more traditional archival descriptive access points," utilize functional terms or designators in conjunction with indicators of record format, all of them presented in the form of authority records, as primary means of accessing records.<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, Bearman and Lytle suggested that archivists could capitalize on the pressing need for more effective information management in modern organizations. The key to seizing this opportunity was "to exploit the power of existing provenance information by better structuring current systems around authority controlled access points."<sup>41</sup>

The rediscovery of provenance can be viewed in a broader context as a manifestation of archivists grappling with complex issues for which the traditional North American approach to archival administration, based primarily on methodology and practice, offered inadequate answers. In essence, North American archival endeavour, too heavily steeped in the methodological and practical, was now prompted to reexamine basic ideas about the nature of archives (that is, archival theory)<sup>42</sup> underlying contemporary methodology and practice. Archives were being required to turn to theory in an effort to develop an appropriate and effective response to the various difficulties attending contemporary records, which were appearing increasingly, and frighteningly, in electronic format.<sup>43</sup> It is hardly surprising that because of its centrality to archival science, provenance emerged as the focal point for this contemplative effort. Indeed, the concept is intimately related to that most fun-

damental of principles underlying archival science, *respect des fonds*. Consisting of two related principles – sanctity of the original order, with its focus upon maintaining the internal integrity of records, and the principle of provenance,<sup>44</sup> with its concern for the preservation and conveyance of evidence relating to the context of records – *respect des fonds* clearly highlighted the archivist's critical need to be involved in all aspects of the records continuum: records creation, active and semi-active use, disposition, and the administration of documentation deemed to possess long-term value.<sup>45</sup> Significantly, the methodology and practice of the records manager are not animated by such theoretical concerns. Concepts such as provenance, original order, and the integrity of the fonds, or reasonable equivalents, are consciously part neither of the vocabulary nor the working reality of the records manager. All one need do is to consult a records management text to witness the paucity of archival concepts. After manuals or forms management, there may at most appear a chapter, no doubt briefer than the foregoing, addressing the topic of "archiving," or the like, if that.<sup>46</sup>

The North American archivist has, evidently, abdicated part of his or her professional responsibility; accordingly, the results of even the most rudimentary examination of the nature of the record that he or she serves are unequivocal in what they say about this neglect. Archives derive their significance or value from the circumstances of their creation only in as much as they are a natural and organic reflection of these formative circumstances. When this is the case, archival records act as impartial and authentic evidence of transactions and by extension, as evidence of the competences, organization, programs, activities, and functions of records creators.<sup>47</sup> Looked at another way, the value of archives, evidential and otherwise, emanates from their probative character, with the latter's integrity being contingent upon the preservation of those originary characteristics with which, Bearman asserts, "records are endowed by the circumstances of creation, accumulation, and use in the conduct of personal or organizational activity[:] ... naturalness, uniqueness, inter-relatedness, authenticity, and impartiality."<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, as Michel Duchein notes, "to appreciate a document, it is essential to know exactly where it was created, in the framework of what process, to what end, for whom, when and how it was received by the addressee, and how it came into our hands."<sup>49</sup> According to Terry Eastwood, it is only when these conditions are satisfied, and when documents are "set aside consciously as memorial of the action or actions giving [them] existence," that archival documents "provide a record of facts which can be attached to events," and it is only under these circumstances that archivists, "as servants of evidence[,] do the job to which society has assigned them."<sup>50</sup> However, it is precisely these and the other noted conditions that have not been and cannot be satisfied as long as archivists continue to subscribe to an outdated recorded information management model which precludes full involvement in the totality of the records continuum.

If all of this seems somewhat abstract, pertinent to few outside of the archival profession, then its practical implications must be considered in light of the challenges to society posed by electronic records. Here an immense window of opportunity for professional redefinition and for the assertion of the archival perspective presents itself. Broadly speaking, this opportunity is rooted in the need to respond to professional dilemmas emerging from the nature of electronic records and relates to the difficulties of preserving organizational accountability and the legality of electronic records as evidence. The challenge is centred, David Bearman observes, around the establishment of record-keeping systems as opposed to information systems. Record-keeping systems are a specific kind of information system or a subset of the latter. They differ from non-record information systems in that they are designed to maintain and support the retrieval of records in order to provide evidence of business transactions, while the former merely store and provide access to information or pieces of discrete data, doing so without regard to documentary context.<sup>51</sup> According to Bearman, “Because conscious intervention is required to shape information systems so that they will create records (rather than non-record information), organizations are faced with a crisis in accountability brought on by the use of electronic information systems.”<sup>52</sup> The crisis came to the fore in the mid-1980s with the proliferation of relational databases and complex, uncontrolled, non-standardized computerized formats that were not adequately linked to the functional processes they supported. It has continued with the rise of end-user-controlled office support systems. Coupled with “a revolution affecting the transmission and interconnectivity of this electronic information,” this situation has, as Terry Cook observes, imperilled “decision-making accountability and the long-term corporate memory of record creators.”<sup>53</sup> The challenge as it emerged, and continues to date, was to introduce control elements and functionalities into computerized information systems to ensure the integrity of the electronic record and of the record-keeping system of which it naturally forms a part.<sup>54</sup> And who better to undertake such a task than the profession whose *raison d’être* has been the preservation of the integrity of the record as authentic, reliable evidence of acts and transactions.

However, as suggested throughout the body of this paper, the assumption of such a role is predicated, in large measure, upon a revision of the traditional professional functions and mind-set of North American archivists regarding records management. Nor can archivists continue to avoid confronting this situation by taking refuge behind the contention that existing archival thinking and practice are incompatible with the issues – technical and otherwise – surrounding electronic records. Terry Cook rightly notes that in order to preserve the profession’s core principles, the nature of electronic records necessitates discarding “many of the traditional interpretations and practical applications” of archival tenets.<sup>55</sup> But most significant is Cook’s reference to the existence of basic archival principles such as provenance which, if not inviolable, are at

least relatively stable and time-tested and which are not affected by record medium or format. David Bearman offers tangible support when he asserts that the archival analysis of the problems engendered by electronic records has, in fact, “enriched the concept of provenance and reinforced its direct link to missions, functions and ultimately the activities and transactions of an organization.”<sup>56</sup> Most theorists concur; Cook observes that “the focus has shifted ... from the actual record to its functional process or context of creation, from the physical artifact to the very act and deed which first caused that artifact to be created.”<sup>57</sup> For purposes of the present discussion, it is sufficient to note that the capture and dissemination of evidence of organizational missions, functions, activities, competences, and the like is part and parcel of traditional provenancial analysis. The difference now is that the analysis focuses directly upon functions and activities, rather than being undertaken indirectly through an examination of recorded information, which then, as relevant evidence, illuminates administrative units’ activities and functions. For, as discussed previously, in order to preserve the organic nature of archives as evidence of transactions, provenance (the external dimension of *respect des fonds*) necessarily concerns itself with the origins of records within the context of functions and activities. Thus the core principle or theoretical basis remains essentially intact, with its impact felt at the levels of methodology and practice; “virtual” or “conceptual provenance” one could readily argue, is at root still provenance. Indeed, much the same may be said of the impact of digital records on the various major archival principles, without exception.<sup>58</sup> The nature of digital records may compel archivists to travel a new path, but the destination, evidently, remains the same.

No doubt the most significant implication of the effort of archivists to ensure the preservation of the integrity of electronic records is the recognition of the need to modify traditional methodologies relating to analysis of *respect des fonds*. Analysis of context of creation and original order of inactive records have, at least theoretically, given way to a belief in the need to adopt an interventionist media-driven approach where archivists ensure the authenticity and reliability of electronic records as evidence of transactions through involvement in the creation and/or auditing of record-keeping systems. It is this very realization that calls into question the relationship of the archivist and records manager as it currently exists. The archivist, whose work must necessarily conform to the requirements of the digital record, encroaches on the domain of the records manager and in effect renders him redundant in this particular function.

Indeed, one could argue that in light of the issues associated with electronic records – as well as the myriad problems that have challenged archivists for the last fifty odd years in dealing with traditional record formats and the evident arbitrariness of the division between archives and records management – the archivist should have always assumed the role of record-keeping systems

designer and/or auditor. Couched in practical terms, why have such crucial activities as records classification system development been beyond the pale of the archival practitioner, even in a traditional predominantly paper-based context? Moreover, turning to the broad records management functions of records creation, records evaluation (and related business process analyses), active records maintenance, and inactive records maintenance,<sup>59</sup> what of non-electronic record-keeping systems design, records inventorying, filing system creation, forms, reports management, directives management, and so on? This is to say nothing of areas where archives and records management activities manifestly overlap, such as retention and disposal scheduling, vital (hence archival) records designation and protection, document imaging, and the like. In addressing these and various related issues, the lessons learned from electronic records help to offer insight by refocusing the archivist's perspective regarding his or her professional role. Even the most cursory examination of classic records management functions and activities strongly suggest the need for wide-ranging archival involvement. As a natural corollary, the demonstrated need for the archivist to assume most, if not all, of the records manager's functions intimates the advent of a new records profession.<sup>60</sup> Thus, the recorded information or documentation management specialist of the twenty-first century may well prove to be an archivist compelled, finally, to conform to the dictates of the record in this, its most recent manifestation.

In conclusion, reconsideration of the relationship between the archivist and records manager, and their respective professional roles, is long overdue. An old issue has been resurrected and a clearer perspective on archival functions offered by the emergence of electronic records as the pre-eminent force affecting record-keeping at the close of the twentieth century. Electronic records and their attendant challenges have demonstrated unequivocally the critical need for archival participation in the management of recorded information from point of creation onward and, arguably, even pre-creation, in the design of record-keeping systems. In so doing, electronic records have conclusively reaffirmed the distinction between the archival and historical professions, and have brought into clearer focus the inevitable functional overlap between archival and records management practice, and the artificiality inherent in the dichotomy presently characterizing the archival and records management professions. The evidence suggests that for archivists to act assertively here is to ensure the professional role and active responsibility of archivists within all stages of the creation, use, management, and preservation of recorded information. Anything less will contribute substantively to a disempowered archival profession in North America and may well consign it, and all that it has to offer, to obscurity and, ultimately, irrelevancy. The cost to society of such a prospect is simply unacceptable. As David Bearman observes, "to claim a social [and professional] role, to demand our share of resources, we [must] point not to ... the nostalgia of the unappreciated past, but to the immediate

requirements of today.” Nowhere are today’s recorded information requirements more immediate than in the area of electronic records.<sup>61</sup> A broader professional definition combining the archivist’s and records manager’s principal functions would seem to be a natural outcome of this paradigm shift.

## Notes

- 1 The notion of the “records continuum” as it appears in this paper refers to an idea articulated by Jay Atherton. Herein, the records “life cycle,” with its rigid adherence for administrative convenience to division of responsibilities for management of recorded information into two separate and distinct phases, records management and archives administration, is supplanted by a more unified approach to recorded information management. The new model reflects a continuum of interrelated stages, rather than a cycle. Atherton advanced it as being more responsive to and appropriate for management of recorded information. Archivists and records managers were to be involved, to various extents, at all stages within the continuum: creation or receipt, classification, scheduling, maintenance, and use. Jay Atherton, “From Life Cycle to Continuum: Some Thoughts on the Records Management-Archives Relationship,” *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985–86), pp. 47–48. It is noteworthy that Atherton’s model – “based on a recognition that the parallels between archives and records management were revealed if you switched from thinking about the physical tasks involved in managing the record and thought about managing the management tasks within a service focus” – was inspired by ideas identified by the Australian archivist, Ian Maclean, in the late 1950s. In particular, Atherton’s notion of focusing on service originated with Maclean’s belief that records are created in order to serve administrative objects, doing so by documenting actions and transactions. Frank Upward, “In Search Of The Continuum: Ian Maclean’s ‘Australian Experience’ Essays On Recordkeeping,” cited in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds., *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and the Australian Archives’ First Fifty Years* (Clayton, 1994), p. 119.
- 2 It must be emphasized that notable exceptions do exist, such as the National Archives of Canada’s proactive approach to records acquisition; but on the whole this state of affairs is extremely pervasive.
- 3 This assertion, and the arguments and conclusions that underlie it, is of course applicable only to archivists and records within a corporate or institutional context. It does not include archivists whose duties are unconnected to records management because they are responsible exclusively for records originating outside of their parent institutions.
- 4 David B. Gracy II, “Is There a Future in the Use of Archives?,” *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), p. 3.
- 5 Gerald Brown, “The Archivist and the Records Manager: A Records Management Viewpoint,” *Records Management Quarterly* 5 (January 1971), p. 21.
- 6 This concept is in effect a contemporary variant of the traditional European approach to archives and records management, wherein the archivist is responsible for the entire records continuum (or records life cycle).
- 7 Perhaps no other feature is more emblematic of the continuing influence of the perception of “archivist as historian” on the American archival scene than the existence of the so-called “manuscript curator” as a *de facto* sub-field of the archival profession in the United States.
- 8 Philip C. Brooks, “Current Aspects of Records Administration: The Archivist’s Concern in Records Administration,” *The American Archivist* 6, no. 3 (July 1943), p. 160.
- 9 Frank B. Evans, “Archivists and Records Managers: Variations on a Theme,” in Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch, eds., *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings in Archival Theory and Practice* (Washington, D.C., 1984), pp. 25–26.

- 10 Wayne C. Grover, "Recent Developments in Federal Archival Activities," *The American Archivist* 14 (January 1951), p. 3.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
- 12 Morris L. Radoff quoted from his article, "What Should Bind Us Together," *American Archivist* 19 (January 1956) in Evans, "Archivists and Records Managers," p. 33.
- 13 Robert A. Shiff, "The Archivist's Role in Record Management," *The American Archivist* 19 (April 1956), p. 111.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 120.
- 15 LeRoy DePuy, "Archivists and Records Managers – a Partnership," *The American Archivist* 23 (January 1960), p. 49.
- 16 While the phenomenon of records management overshadowing or arising in the place of archives has been associated historically more with the private rather than public sector in North America, government response to the issue has been less than ideal. Present national, provincial, and state archives and records management agencies have evolved considerably since the 1950s but exhibit varying levels of program sophistication in reconciling and integrating, or coordinating, records management and archival functions. For a nice summary of the current condition of state archives in the United States see Victoria Irons Walch, "State Archives in 1997: Diverse Conditions, Common Directions," *The American Archivist* 60 (Spring 1997), pp. 132–51. At the level of municipal government (including county and regional) the situation continues to be lamentable, with the current Canadian Council of Archives *Directory of Archival Repositories*, National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators Member Database, and the Society of American Archivists' 1998–99 *Directory of Individual and Institutional Members* being notable for showing the general lack of independent archival or joint archival-records management programs. Records management programs tend to predominate; moreover, many so-called "archives" in the relatively few joint records management/archives programs are merely nominal. In universities, a reverse trend seems to exist, with university archives administering records management programs of varying quality. On the whole, whether records management or archives assume an ascendant position, balanced programs giving appropriate emphasis to both "records management" and "archives" concepts and considerations are few and far between.
- 17 Perhaps the most striking evidence of the decline of archives in recorded information management in North America lies in the fact that in 1975 the Society of American Archivists could boast 195 entries in its *Directory of Business Archives in the United States and Canada*, while in 1990, despite the "Information Age" and the "Digital Revolution" being in full swing, this number had dropped to 158. Philip F. Mooney, "Archival Mythology and Corporate Reality: A Potential Powder Keg," in James M. O'Toole, ed., *The Records of American Business* (Chicago, 1997). Nor can one simply dismiss this reduction in archival programs as an inevitable by-product of corporate re-engineering of the 1990s. One can hardly be unaware of the centrality of information and information technology in its various manifestations in the present world economy and in society in general. In a world supposedly more dependent on information than at any other point in history, it seems the height of irony that a profession whose *raison d'être* is information management finds itself lacking private sector support. In this sense, Philip Mooney's examination of archival myths and realities in the corporate world is most illuminating, especially his reference to "Myth #3," the notion that "corporate archives have experienced healthy growth over the last 20 years reflecting a heightened interest in the maintenance of an internal history department." *Ibid.*, p. 61. Evidently, the problem may, once again, be traced to the archival enterprise being linked exclusively, or at best predominantly, to the notion of historical function, rather than management of recorded information.
- 18 Alliance of Libraries, Archives and Records Management, *Towards a Strategy for Human Resource Development in Libraries, Archives and Records Management* (Ottawa, 1995).
- 19 Atherton, "Life Cycle to Continuum," p. 44.

- 20 Some observers contend that American archival history can be characterized by two traditions whose respective advocates are engaged in ongoing debate. The one is the “historical manuscript” tradition, with its adherents perceiving themselves as historian-interpreters of the records they administer. The other is the “public archives tradition,” whose advocates view themselves as professionals by virtue of mastery of a “body of specialized theory and practice,” assuming the role of the “expert document manager.” Luke J. Gilliland-Swetland, “The Provenance of a Profession: The Permanence of the Public Archives and Historical Manuscripts Traditions in American Archival History,” *The American Archivist* 54, no. 2 (1991), pp. 162–63, 171.
- 21 Richard J. Cox, *American Archival Enterprise: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (Metuchen, New Jersey, 1990), p. 11.
- 22 “Total Archives” in Canada is a concept rooted in the notion of archives acting at one and the same time as bodies serving both the administrative needs of their sponsoring agencies and the cultural needs of society, in the latter case by documenting all aspects of that society. Specifically, total archives is seen as encompassing the following essential tenets: archives must collect material in all media; this material should reflect the experience of society as a whole, public and private, and not merely its elite elements; archives should create networks; and, quite significantly for the present article, archives should control the entire “life cycle” of records. Terry Cook, “The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on Total Archives,” *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979–80), p. 41–72.
- 23 George Bolotenko, “Of Ends and Means: In Defense of the Archival Ideal,” *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), p. 245. Bolotenko’s position finds more detailed expression in “Historians and Archivists: Keepers of the Well,” *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), pp. 5–25, and “Instant Professionalism: To the Shiny New Men of the Future,” *Archivaria* 20 (Summer 1985), pp. 149–57.
- 24 Carl Spadoni, “In Defense of the New Professionalism: A Rejoinder to George Bolotenko,” *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984–85), p. 193.
- 25 Bolotenko, “Historians and Archivists,” p. 21.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 48–50.
- 27 Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Perspective* (Seattle, 1983), p. 178.
- 28 To the credit of Atherton and the proponents of the “records continuum” concept, they have laid to rest the Schellenbergian notion of records and archives being distinct entities exhibiting separate and unique natures. Certainly records in their active and semi-active stage differ from archival records – that is, inactive documentation retained for reference – but this distinction is related to the completion of the activity responsible for the creation of a record, nothing more. During their active and, to a lesser extent, semi-active stages, records are in a formative phase, subject to amendment and expansion, and achieve stability only when the actions to which they relate are completed. Thus, beyond that there appear to be no differences between the nature of “records” and “archives,” prompting certain archival theorists, such as Trevor Livelton, to conclude that “records are best defined – at least for the purpose of archival theory – as archives in the traditional sense: documents made or received in the conduct of affairs and preserved.” Trevor Livelton, *Archival Theory, Records, and the Public* (Lanham, 1996), p. 83. The significance that this reconsideration of Schellenberg’s concept has for the present discussion is that it has prompted archivists, in particular those dealing with electronic records, “to think more seriously about means by which records can be better controlled from the point of their creation.” Luciana Duranti and Heather MacNeil, “The Protection of the Integrity of Electronic Records: An Overview of the UBC-MAS Research Project,” *Archivaria* 42 (Fall 1996), p. 60.
- 29 Michael Pemberton offers an illuminating perspective on records managers’ perceptions of the role of archivists in recorded information management and *vice versa*, observing that “infor-

- mation professionals have a shared – and often self-defeating – tendency to ignore or marginalise those specialists not in their own specific discipline. Archivists, for example, frequently deny a significant relationship between themselves and records managers. Some records managers downplay the role of the archivist.” “This often happens,” he continues, “because persons enter these fields often by ‘falling’ or getting pushed into them.” He goes on to observe that these individuals are likely “to have had little educational foundation in information work as a larger field or to have had enough experience in another related field to be able to see information work as a broader profession, one broader than the particular sub-discipline in which they happen to find themselves.” J. Michael Pemberton, “Canadian Information Professionals Sound the ALARM and ARMA and SAA Reach Out,” *Records Management Quarterly* 31 (October 1997), p. 62.
- 30 Ira Penn, “Wanted: Records Manager – No Experience Necessary,” *Records Management Quarterly* 30 (July 1996), pp. 16–17.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 Social Research Inc., *The Image of Archivists: Resource Allocators’ Perceptions* (n.p., 1984), pp. ii–iii.
- 34 The body of knowledge required of the professional archivist was defined by the Association of Canadian Archivists in 1989 in the Association of Canadian Archivists’ *Guidelines for the Development of a Two-Year Curriculum for a Master of Archival Studies* (Ottawa, 1989).
- 35 It would therefore appear as if Mr. Penn’s indignation and concerns are somewhat less than justified. Indeed, they illustrate prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions, and consequently beg a closer examination of the records manager’s and archivist’s professional qualifications and roles, and the consequences for the archival profession and the record of perpetuating existing misconceptions. In the United States and Canada, university level education in “records management” is practically non-existent other than, as we have seen, as an element in graduate archival programs, or, very rarely, as stand-alone university-level certificate programs. In Canada, the formal education of the non-archivally educated records manager is gained at the community college level, and usually takes the form of a certificate program, as more expansive diploma programs are rare. By contrast, the more recently established Archival Technician Diploma Program at Algonquin College in Nepean, Ontario – which trains archival technicians rather than archival professionals – requires its students to take a comprehensive and demanding thirty-six courses over two years (including introductory and advanced courses in records management). Thus, the evidence would suggest that any concerns or reservations about the qualifications of archivists entertained by the records management community are unfounded. For more information about the Canadian MAS and Archival Technicians programmes, see Bureau of Canadian Archivists, *Directory of Archival Education in Canada, 1996–1997* (Ottawa, 1996).
- 36 ACA, *Guidelines for a Master of Archival Studies*, p. 7.
- 37 It must be stressed that the writer is in no manner attempting to diminish the importance of the archivist’s cultural roles and responsibilities, both within parent organizations and society at large. Indeed, to focus the archivist’s efforts upon the entirety of the records continuum is to raise the archivist’s cultural role to new heights, by giving the archivist greater responsibility for ensuring the integrity and reliability of the record as evidence of the actions and transactions of individuals and organizations.
- 38 Terry Cook, “What’s Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), p. 36.
- 39 David A. Bearman and Richard H. Lytle, “The Power of the Principle of Provenance,” *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985–86), pp. 14–27.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24, 26.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

- 42 Archival theory, or the analysis of ideas about the nature of archives, in turn forms the basis of archival methodology, that is, the analysis of how theory should be applied. This in turn manifests itself in archival practice, with its emphasis on the deployment of methodology to deal with specific situations. Livelton, *Archival Theory*, pp. 32–33.
- 43 For an excellent discussion of the nature of archival theory, methodology and practice, and their interrelationships, see Terry Eastwood, “Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies,” *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 232–52.
- 44 Sanctity of the original order, or *respect pour l'ordre primitif*, with its focus on the physical record, represents *respect des fonds'* internal dimension; contextually oriented provenance is its external dimension.
- 45 For a uniquely western European consideration of the theoretical evolution and practical application of the principle of provenance, see Kerstin Abukhanusa and Jan Sydbeck, eds., *The Principle of Provenance: First Stockholm Conference on the Archival Theory and the Principle of Provenance, 2–3 Sept 1993* (Stockholm, 1994).
- 46 Even some of the more recent general records management texts that do in fact touch upon some aspects of archival theory, do so in an extremely cursory fashion, and are thus hardly conducive to imparting the archival perspective adequately to their readers. See for example, Ira A. Penn, Gail Pennix, Anne Morddel, Kelvin Smith, *Records Management Handbook* (Brookfield, 1989). The pattern extends beyond texts. Records management literature dealing with more specialized subjects is equally unconcerned with archival issues and, indeed, basic theoretical concepts pertaining to the nature and character of recorded information. Steeped in methodology and practice, records management literature seems, for the most part, fundamentally devoid of any substantial theoretical basis.
- 47 Charles M. Dollar, “Archival Theory and Information Technologies: The Impact of Information Technologies on Archival Principles and Methods,” cited in Oddo Bucci, ed., *Informatics and Documentation 1* (Macerata, 1992), pp. 45–46.
- 48 Heather MacNeil, “The Context is All: Describing a Fonds and its Part in Accordance with the Rules For Archival Description,” in Terry Eastwood, ed., *The Archival Fonds: From Theory To Practice* (Ottawa, 1992), p. 205.
- 49 Michel Duchéin, “Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems of Respect des Fonds in Archival Science,” *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983), p. 67.
- 50 Terry Eastwood, “Toward a Social Theory of Appraisal,” in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), p. 74.
- 51 David Bearman, *Electronic Evidence: Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations* (Pittsburgh, 1994), pp. 34–35.
- 52 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 53 Terry Cook, “What is Past is Prologue,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), p. 41.
- 54 Recent developments in the efforts of archivists to introduce procedural controls and functionality to recorded information systems in order to enable these systems to protect the integrity of electronic records are well covered in Margaret Hedstrom, “Building Record-Keeping Systems: Archivists Are Not Alone on the Wild Frontier,” *Archivaria* 44 (Fall 1997), pp. 44–71.
- 55 Cook, “What is Past is Prologue,” p. 42.
- 56 Bearman quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 57 Cook, “What is Past is Prologue,” p. 45.
- 58 Using appraisal as an example, David Bearman illustrates the commonalities between electronic records management and traditional archival methodologies and practices. Recognizing certain areas of discontinuity (principal among which is the fact that electronic record systems, unlike their traditional counterparts, do not as a matter of course provide evidence of acts unless specifically designed to do so), Bearman provides support for the notion that the changes required in shifting to new record-keeping systems are more a matter of changes in nuance than in fundamental precepts. Electronic records, like their traditional counterparts,

are appraised as series, with analysis centring on evidence of business transactions rather than on physical records, with appraisal ideally occurring before or during system design, as opposed to point of accessioning. Furthermore, owing to the albeit variable risk of loss of records integrity and reliability associated with each system migration, appraisal of electronic records focuses on the notion of continuing, rather than on the increasingly obsolete notion of permanent value. Bearman's case is compelling even when factoring in what some archivists view as a radical departure from the past in an area such as preservation management – where electronic records are managed by their originators for as long as feasible and where preservation of “usable information” largely supplants the concept of media preservation. Bearman, *Electronic Evidence*, pp. 28–30.

- 59 The records management profession's broad functions are identified in Mary F. Robek, Gerald F. Brown, Wilmer O. Maedke, *Information and Records Management* (Mission Hill, California, 1987), a standard North American records management text.
- 60 Records management is formally defined as “a field of management responsible for the systematic control of the creation, maintenance, use, and disposition of records.” Lewis J. Bellardo and Lynne Lady Bellardo, *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers* (Chicago, 1992), p. 29. In light of the apparent need for extensive archival involvement in the whole of the records continuum, such an all-encompassing professional definition makes impractical the notion of revitalizing the concept of separate and distinct records professions by enhancing co-operation between archivist and records manager.
- 61 The quotation is taken from David Bearman's paper, “Recorded Memory and Cultural Continuity,” paper presented to the Texas Library Association Annual Meeting at Fort Worth on 10 April 1986, quoted in David B. Gracy II, “Is There a Future in the Use of Archives?” *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), p. 8.