

Telling Stories around the “Electronic Campfire”: The Use of Archives in Television Productions*

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RÉSUMÉ Cet article développe une perspective archivistique relativement à l’usage de documents d’archives dans les productions télévisuelles et explore l’importante opportunité de programmation publique qu’offre l’industrie de l’histoire à la télévision. Comme la télévision enseigne maintenant l’histoire, il est essentiel que les archivistes acquièrent les rudiments du langage de la télévision. Il ont besoin d’aborder de façon critique les programmes et les productions de télévision. Alors que des débats sur les mérites de la télévision et du cinéma historiques ont vu le jour dans les écrits des historiens professionnels, il y en a bien peu en archivistique. L’approche contextuelle des archives, basée sur l’idée que le point focal de l’administration archivistique est la connaissance de l’histoire des documents ou de leur contexte de création, offre une loupe théorique par laquelle l’utilisation des archives pour la télévision sera analysée. L’article incorpore les réponses à deux sondages effectués auprès d’archivistes, de producteurs de documentaires et de chercheurs. Il conclue avec des suggestions adressées aux archivistes pour des programmes publics destinés à faciliter et à améliorer les utilisations des archives pour fins de télédiffusion. L’article montre que les archivistes peuvent apporter une contribution essentielle à la compréhension historique et à l’intérêt public en tirant profit des opportunités qu’offre la télévision.

ABSTRACT This article develops an archival perspective on the use of archival documents in television productions and explores the significant public programming opportunities presented to archivists by the growing history-on-television industry. Television has become a significant teacher of history, and it is essential that archivists acquire a basic level of visual literacy. Archivists need to be able to view television programmes and the television production process critically. Although some debate over the merits of historical television programmes and films has developed in the literature of professional historians, such archival literature is limited. The contextual approach to archives, grounded in the idea that the intellectual focus of archival administration is knowledge of the history of the records or the context of their creation, provides the theoretical lens through which the use of archives on television will be analysed. The article incorporates responses to two surveys, of archivists and of documentary producers and researchers. It concludes with several suggestions to archivists for public programming designed to facilitate and improve the uses of archives in television broadcasting. The article shows that archivists can make a vital contribution to historical understanding and the public interest by taking advantage of opportunities provided by television.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, history is being discussed and discovered through a wider variety of media formats than ever before, and history-based audiovisual productions in particular appear to be capturing the minds and imaginations of an ever-growing audience. Feature films exploring a wide range of historical topics, such as *Titanic*, *Schindler's List*, *Braveheart*, and *Elizabeth*, continue to achieve both popularity and acclaim. They seem to ignite an interest in history in the viewing public, whether or not the films are deemed historically accurate. Moreover, audiovisual presentations of history are not limited to the big screen. History has also garnered a presence on the small screen, as the television industry has increasingly discovered the entertainment value and the audience growth potential of historical programming. Eminent documentary producer Ken Burns has defined television as the "electronic campfire" around which people gather to learn, to debate, and to be entertained by the past.¹ Historical content on television, whether in the form of drama, documentary, or within a newscast, is probably making a significant impact on the historical consciousness of society. Through this programming, more people than ever before are viewing or hearing archival documents. To the archival profession, which has often lamented the relatively small proportion of society which actually enters an archives and directly uses archival holdings, wide-ranging "access" to archival documents through television presents an important opportunity to increase and improve the visibility and role of archives and archivists in society. Both the makers and the viewers of television programmes which use archival documents represent a significant audience for archival public programming. This opportunity challenges archivists to increase their own visual literacy and to participate actively in the very public, and often very animated, processes of remembering history.

The purpose of this article is to develop an archival perspective on the use of television in "writing" history and the use of archival documents therein. Television has become a significant "teacher" of history. While some debate over the merits and deficiencies of historical television programmes and films has appeared in the literature of professional historians, such archival literature is limited. This article will attempt to stimulate more discussion among archivists of the uses of archives on television. It also aims to make a contribution to the archival literature on public programming. It will discuss an increasingly important but so far largely overlooked use and user of archival records. With the development of a greater degree of visual literacy or the ability to read critically the televised use of archival records, archivists will be better able to provide knowledgeable assistance to television clientele and the general viewing public.

The contextual approach to archives provides the theoretical lens through which the presentation of archives on television is analysed and assessed. Contextual knowledge provides the key to the interpretation of archival documents and is the essential information through which both archivists and the

users of archives can find meaning in the words and images contained within the documents. By assisting both the direct and the indirect users of archives to understand the nature of archival records and to examine critically their use in historical productions, archivists will position themselves in new ways, not only as experts on the uses of the archival record, but as active contributors to the societal process of remembering and interpreting the past.

Archival Public Programming

On 21 March 1996, archivists were launched into prime time situation comedy television. On this night, the pilot show of NBC's *Boston Common* was aired and viewers were introduced to a secondary character named Leonard Prince, a reclusive, awkward, and largely irrelevant archivist whose arcane specialty was eighteenth-century New England footwear. Even before the show had been launched, there was lament once again on the Archives and Archivists listserv of the proliferation of baneful stereotypes of archivists.² The characterization of the archivist in *Boston Common* and the reaction of the archival community strike at the core of the issues and challenges in archival public programming as well as the power of television.

In the last decades, public programming has become a crucial issue as archivists endeavour to justify their existence and to define their services and responsibilities to the public. Archivists have addressed the lack of knowledge about users, the importance of user studies, the problem of image in society, and issues of public relations and outreach. Those proposing a client-centred approach have argued that archival administration needs to be reoriented to the user and that knowledge of user groups and user needs must inform and guide all archival functions. Contrary to this, materials-centred theorists have argued that the record must remain the focus of archival work and that to perform archival functions with the user as the focus is fundamentally shortsighted and will greatly endanger the archival record.³ At the heart of both theories, however, is a realization that archivists do relate to people from many different fields and backgrounds, and that some form of public relations activity is necessary for wide-ranging, effective use of the archival record and, indeed, for the survival of archival institutions.

An examination of the public programming debate may lead one to view the issue as either client-centred or materials-centred. Perhaps, however, archivists would do well to take the best of both sides. Concern about the records does not equal disregard for the user, just as concern about users does not equal disregard for records. The challenge for archivists comes in finding the appropriate areas for action in improving public service and relations. Improved user-friendly finding aids, exhibitions, and more aggressive marketing tactics have been suggested as means to increase visibility and access. Also, more recently, archivists have begun to deal with the impact of informa-

tion technology and the opportunities and challenges which are presented to archives by world-wide computer networking.⁴ Archivists are busy developing Web sites through which the Internet navigator can have access to information about the institution, the records held within it, and possibly also research actual archival documents.

In discussions aimed at increasing the visibility and accessibility of archives in society, however, archival theorists have almost completely neglected the seemingly obvious medium of television, and the public programming opportunities which it presents. Two essays in Elsie Finch's *Advocating Archives* only briefly touched on the interaction between archives and the media. Megan Sniffin-Marinoff offered a practical guide for archivists who want to understand how to use the media to increase awareness of and support for their institutions. For example, she encouraged archivists to offer themselves as "local experts" by writing a regular newspaper column or planning exhibits to coincide with television "events" such as Ken Burns's *The Civil War* series.⁵ In the same book, Philip Mooney contended that archivists must capitalize on the willingness of Americans to watch history on television "if it is presented in an enticing package": "Archivists should not only advocate more programming time for their materials, but they should also stand ready to actively participate in developing these programs."⁶

Both Sniffin-Marinoff and Mooney recognized the power of television. However, they did not address in detail how archives might become more involved with television. If public programming and Mooney's encouragement to "actively participate" are geared only to increasing the direct users of archives and to providing these users with fast, hassle-free service, the only concern regarding archives on television would be quick and easy access to the film footage or photographs which are desired by a particular producer. However, if public programming includes increased knowledge of the users and uses of archives, a better appreciation of the indirect users of archives, and a concern for the historical consciousness of a society, then television and its use of archives to present and interpret the past are of great significance.

Through television, thousands and even millions of viewers become beneficiaries of historical information and, thus, indirect users of archives even though many may not realize the presence of the archival record or the archival institution behind it. By gaining an appreciation of the production process and of how archives are used in a production, and by incorporating their knowledge of documents and the contextual information necessary to appreciate the meaning of an archival document, archivists will be better equipped to comment on how the use of archives might be improved and, by extension, how a production might be strengthened in its presentation of history.

The opportunities for public programming, however, do not end with the broadcaster. On the other side of the television production is its audience, an excellent target group for archival outreach. As archivists learn to become crit-

ical television viewers, they can not only better assist the television broadcaster, but they can also help the viewer, the indirect user of archives, to appreciate and analyze the use of the archival record in the production. By offering themselves as experts on the archival record, archivists can enter the debate which may surround a television production and, thereby, both sensitize the public to the use of records and articulate how the record could be used in the realm of television.

Paul Conway challenged archivists to expand their definition of archival users to include those who never enter their institutions and to study the use and reception of archival records once they have “left” the institution. Conway maintained that this knowledge is essential in order to defend archives “from the users’ point of view” and, in so doing, improve services and ensure continued funding.⁷ Knowledge of the users and uses of archives, however, could be employed also to defend, uphold, and promote the integrity of the archival record itself. Public programming provides an opportunity for archivists to use their expertise in the characteristics of the archival record and to involve themselves in the debate and process of the continuous creation of public memory.

Battles and Biographies: A Survey of the Uses of Archives on Television

The television industry is making significant use of archives for television production. On any given day, archival documents might be seen, heard, or otherwise incorporated into such programmes as the evening news, retrospective programmes, talk shows, sports coverage, documentaries, and docudramas. Because of the nature of the medium, television has been able to incorporate archival materials in various media, including textual, photographic, moving image and sound, documentary art, and cartographic records. Although it is virtually impossible to compile a comprehensive list of television productions which have used archival documents or have been history-based, it is useful to examine recent developments in historical programming including specific television networks, significant productions, ongoing series, and programme genres which make use of archival documents.

Historical programming which uses archival materials has always been a part of the television landscape. The “serious” documentary is a standard genre in which historical topics from politics to religion, and from war and disaster to sports and popular culture, have been explored at length. Documentaries, however, do not usually achieve the highest ratings and are not the most popular programmes on television. Television networks and production companies have tended, as a result, to devote much of their resources and prime-time schedule to more popular tastes in programmes. Robert Brent Toplin writes that, in the mid-1980s, historians despaired at the dearth of historical programming on the major American networks.⁸ In the last decade, however, the world of television has undergone considerable change. During the 1990s,

cable television has expanded quickly and successfully, introducing specialty channels to the list of options, with networks devoted solely to such subjects as news, food, golf, cartoons, and, notably, history. History-oriented productions have, as a result, enjoyed increased air time, production dollars, creative energy, and viewer popularity.

Some historians and television critics argue that Ken Burns's nine-part, eleven-hour documentary *The Civil War*, which aired in 1990 on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), was a turning point for history on television in the United States and elsewhere.⁹ Instead of using dramatizations, Burns relied heavily on original documents to retell history and bring to life diaries, letters, artwork, and photographs. His careful use of original sources seemed to encourage a widespread emotional connection to the people and events of the American Civil War. The series broke PBS audience records for an educational series by attracting 13.9 million American viewers for the first episode and forty million viewers for one or more episodes over the course of the series.¹⁰ Since then, Ken Burns has produced other PBS documentary series including *Baseball* and *The West*. His style and success have heightened expectations for historical programmes in the minds of both programme producers and the television audience. Burns has provided a high standard to which others strive and by which new programmes are judged.

Because of the resources poured into ambitious historical documentary series, they have the potential to become major television "events." The research for and production of *The Civil War* took five years and involved several prominent historians as consultants.¹¹ In 1997, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) aired the five-part series *Dawn of the Eye*, which it co-produced with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The series presented a "history of visual news for the past hundred years."¹² The production team spent two years researching in one hundred different archives for moving images, photographs, and other sources. The team also conducted interviews with and collected records from private individuals. The CBC has also produced a major thirty-hour documentary series on the history of Canada for the 2000–2001 television season.¹³ This series makes wide use of Canadian archives and exploits the expertise of Canadian historians.

Not every historical programme reaches a vast audience and few are in production for several years. In today's expanding multi-channel television universe, however, a niche has been created for historical programming. Although the production dollars and audience ratings of historical programmes may not rank with prime-time situation comedies or television dramas, many viewers are turning to television for information about history. Currently, there are historical programme series on both American and Canadian networks. *American Experience* is a weekly hour-long PBS show which debuted in 1988. This show explores various topics in American history, using original documents, some dramatizations, and, often, the advice of professional historians.¹⁴ The CBC's

Witness showcases documentaries which examine both contemporary and historical topics. *Biography* is an hour-long programme which has aired on weeknights on the Arts & Entertainment Network (A & E) since 1987. Each show presents the life story of one person. The subjects run the gamut from politicians to movie stars, saints to criminals, Jesus Christ to Madonna. The *Biography* format has been copied and adapted by other productions, including CBC's *Life and Times*, which debuted in 1996, and *Herstory* on the Women's Television Network (WTN). The former features weekly, hour-long biographical sketches of contemporary and historical Canadian personalities, and the latter highlights the lives of individual women. These series use film clips, photographs, documentary art, journals, and correspondence and interviews with the subject and related individuals or "experts" to document the lives of the individuals being profiled.

The proliferation of specialty channels and the popularity of historical programmes on A & E spurred the launch of The History Channel by A & E on 1 January 1995. This channel provides twenty-four hours of historical programming each day and has a mandate, according to vice-president of programming Charles Maday, to bring "flesh-and-blood stories alive for a popular audience."¹⁵ The History Channel features series such as *Year by Year*, in which each programme highlights a specific year, *In Search of History*, a prime-time show featuring documentaries on the "hidden stories" in history, and *History Undercover*, which "looks at recent revelations, new information and investigations of past events with an eye toward setting the record straight."¹⁶ In addition, the network's programming includes historical movies and special documentary series.

A major development in the broadcasting and production of Canadian historical programming occurred on 17 October 1997 when the Canadian-owned specialty channel, History Television, was launched. The network's mandate is to "give special emphasis to documentary and dramatic programming relating to Canada's rich and colourful history."¹⁷ History Television will devote a minimum of thirty per cent of its schedule to Canadian programming. This will increase to as much as fifty per cent as subscribers increase. The network will air a "minimum of 180 hours of independently produced Canadian programmes in the history genre each year, rising to 215 hours at the end of the licenses [sic] term in 2003."¹⁸ Like its American counterpart, History Television features special documentaries, historical films, and several ongoing series including: *History Presents*, which features documentaries and series; *It Seems Like Yesterday*, in which each programme examines one week in history; and a history quiz show, *Time Chase*. Undoubtedly, the networks devoted solely to history programming will increase the demand for documentary specials and ongoing series to deal with a wide range of historical topics.

The uses of archives in television are in no way restricted to traditional historical programming. Television newscasts, for example, make significant use

of archives. Unlike the intensive research time which is put into some documentaries, archives used in a newscast need to be located and filmed very quickly. On any given evening a viewer might see photographs, moving images, and other records used to illustrate a news story and, at times, the use of archives will move beyond illustration to assist in more in-depth analysis of the historical context to current events. Natural disasters, deaths, and important anniversaries often warrant historical reflection at local, national, and international levels. The 1997 flooding of the Red River in southern Manitoba and North Dakota, for example, prompted journalists to search for records containing information and images of flooding in years past. The death of such famous people as Princess Diana and Mother Theresa resulted in significant use of photographs, film footage, and other records to commemorate their lives. Similarly, the transfer of Hong Kong to China in 1997 led news networks to examine the history of British colonialism and of Chinese communism. Once again, archival film, photographs, and textual records gave context to the contemporary event.

Often the archival documents used in television programming will be the moving image records generated by television itself. As television grows older, it has cause to reflect on its own past. From this comes a popular “historical” genre of retrospective programming. Just as towns and families might create history books to record their past, so also are programmes created to look back fondly, and largely uncritically, at a successful television series. One example is the CBC comedy series, *Wayne and Shuster in Black and White*, a series aired during the 1996–97 television season. These programmes were hosted by Frank Shuster, who relayed personal anecdotes about the famous Canadian duo and introduced the archival segments which formed the bulk of the shows. During the 1997–98 broadcast season, CTV’s *Canada AM*, a week-day morning news and information programme, celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. In order to commemorate this anniversary, the programme included regular montages of film clips of significant newscasts and interviews from the programme’s history.

The archives of television, and possibly other records as well, are also used in advertising. Advertisements for Shake ‘n’ Bake Chicken have incorporated historical clips from earlier advertisements of the product. In the fall of 1996, CBC launched an advertising campaign, “T.V. to call our own,” which featured the current national evening news anchors, Peter Mansbridge and Hana Gartner, against a backdrop of footage of former newscasts and current affairs programmes. Sports programming also makes considerable use of archives. The coverage of the 1996 Olympic Games on the CBC and American networks, for instance, included many historical vignettes in the coverage of the games, profiling athletes, moments, and events from other years. In 1997, CBC’s coverage of the Stanley Cup playoffs included a short segment entitled “From the Files,” which used film footage to illustrate significant events in hockey history.

Undoubtedly, there are many uses for archives on television as the presentation of history on television takes on a variety of forms and topics. One of the perceived dangers of film and television becoming a primary teacher of history to mainstream society is that historical discussion and inquiry will be discouraged and the moving image production will be taken as historical truth. Theorists such as Neil Postman have argued that television is by its nature an anti-intellectual medium, more simplistic in its content than discourse in print, and with entertainment, not education, as its “supra-ideology.”¹⁹ There are several examples, however, in which television, and historical programmes specifically, are demonstrating an ability to stimulate further interest and inquiry. Following the broadcast of the nine episodes of *The Civil War*, for instance, book sales on Civil War topics and attendance at related historic sites and museums rose dramatically.²⁰ The A & E Network has recognized television’s ability to stimulate reading and is encouraging viewers to read more widely about the subjects of its broadcasts. *Biography*, for example, now provides a bibliography of recommended books related to the person featured in each programme. A & E has also negotiated arrangements with the Barnes and Noble bookstore chain for the sale of videos and Random House publishers from whom the network will commission history books related to its documentaries.²¹

Stoking the “Electronic Campfire”: Analysing the Impact of Television on History and Archives

Networks, documentary series, and programmes devoted to history have become a mainstay on television, while historical movies continue to be popular in theatres and on television. The entertainment industry has been able to (re)capture the historical interest and imagination of millions of people as academic history has become seemingly more isolated and less accessible.²² Indeed, the presentation of history on television has several strengths. While studies in academic history often focus on very specialized levels of inquiry, television has helped to resurrect storytelling as part of historical learning. Television programmes are designed to capture the attention of viewers and to prevent them from moving on to the next channel. They rely, therefore, on “a good story,” with an unfolding plot, climax, and resolution.²³ Producer Ken Burns, who refers to himself as “an historian of emotion,” criticizes academic historians for neglecting the art of storytelling and for failing to educate Americans about their history. In contrast, Burns compares television to an “electronic campfire,” a new Homeric form around which the stories of history will be communicated and discussed.²⁴ Burns and his colleagues invite viewers to enter and experience the stories of history and, thereby, to make emotional connections with the events and the personalities of the past.

In addition to its storytelling approach, the appeal and accessibility of his-

tory on television is enhanced by the medium's ability to bring history to life. An audiovisual production takes words off the printed page and permits the viewer to enter into a multi-sensory presentation of the past, creating the illusion that the viewer can leave the present and enter directly into the atmosphere of history, including its sights, sounds, and "feel."²⁵ Documentaries breathe new life into archival records, allowing viewers to see and hear actual people, places, and events in ways that the written word cannot. History on television, as such, encourages the viewer to consider facial expressions, vocal inflections, body language, landscapes, and artifacts as all part of the historical picture. Because visuals are an effective component of learning, images of the past as shown uniquely on television through dramatization or through documents are often able to make an indelible mark on viewers.

The ability of television to bring history into our living rooms is not, however, without problems. The demands of the television industry and of the audiovisual medium change the discourse on history. Television is accused frequently of simplifying history, requiring a linear story with a satisfactory conclusion, often focusing on the life and struggle of one individual (usually male) or presenting a complex episode in history as a classic battle between good and evil. As a result, most productions are not able to deal with complexities of motive or character nor the multiple contextual factors which might have contributed to the historical period in question.²⁶ A television programme will not usually debate multiple interpretations of history, nor will it include an exhaustive discussion of all of the related and existing evidence. In reality, television cannot be expected to adhere to the rigours of academia in its productions. The television industry's need to make history entertaining and to provide an engaging story with captivating visuals in order to grab a corner of the viewing market, however, presents an obvious limitation to the topics which will be addressed. Subjects and events which represent highly dramatic points in human history and for which good visuals are readily available will be favoured by television, as is evidenced by the proliferation of documentaries on the Second World War. Topics and issues that are not easily dealt with on the screen, for which no footage or photographs exist or which have minimal popular appeal, will likely be neglected by television.²⁷ Likewise, television documentaries will often incorporate archival photographs or moving images based on their visual appeal rather than their value as evidence.²⁸

The tendency for television productions to present relatively simplistic, formulaic histories is not only a result of the limitations of the medium. Television history productions are often conservative, in simply reflecting the values of the filmmaker, the network, the advertisers, or the targeted audience.²⁹ Film historian Eric Breitbart argued that the subjects dealt with by television are limited by sponsors who are reluctant or unwilling to advertise during a production which is depressing or without a happy ending. He notes that CBS had

difficulty finding advertisers for a docudrama about the Holocaust because the account ended consistently on “low points.”³⁰ Historians William Cohn and Mark Carnes have argued that most viewers want history productions which are uplifting and reinforce their view of the world and contemporary values and politics.³¹ Historian Eric Foner argued that *The Civil War* series allowed all Americans (whether from north or south or whether black or white) to feel good about their past. The series perpetuates a vision of the war as “a tragic conflict within the American family, whose great bloodshed was in many ways meaningless, but which accomplished the essential task of solidifying a united nation.”³² Similarly, Daniel P. Murphy contends that the lives of former U.S. presidents Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter as presented on A & E’s *Biography* are diluted into “morally reassuring narratives” which serve primarily to support the American dream.³³ Historical presentations on film and in television may thus be more likely to reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate cultural and historical myths than to challenge them. Productions which present interpretations which run counter to accepted official memory, such as the controversial interpretation of Canada’s involvement in the Second World War in *The Valour and the Horror* or Oliver Stone’s movies *JFK* and *Nixon* which interpret American history through a conspiracy theory framework, are discredited by some as dangerous influences on impressionable youth and other uninformed viewers.³⁴

Both historians and archivists have expressed concerns which relate specifically to their interactions with filmmakers. Several historians have commented on the challenge of working as consultants on history film projects. There is tension when they try to encourage historical “accuracy” and filmmakers play with details and manipulate images in order to strengthen the visual impact or entertainment value of their production.³⁵ Similarly, archivists have experienced frustration with the way archives have been used in documentary productions. Several archivists, including some surveyed in March 1995 for the purpose of this study, responded almost unanimously that for the most part filmmakers are extremely demanding because of their time constraints. They usually require extensive assistance from archivists to find appropriate documentation, make copies of it, and, especially in the case of moving and still image records, to obtain copyright clearance.³⁶ Beyond these practical concerns, not surprisingly the surveyed archivists also stated that most filmmakers have little knowledge of or patience with the intricacies of archival description. For most, the need for a good picture usually outweighs the desire for historical accuracy. Documents are often used as generic representations of a particular period, or are misrepresented in order to achieve the desired visual or dramatic effect.³⁷ Filmmakers might expect from archives the same detailed shot lists and quick access to generic images as provided by stock shot libraries, but archival institutions do not necessarily have the ability nor willingness to provide such detailed description for all of their visual holdings. In the end,

although several archivists have recognized benefits in having documents included in television productions, their relationship with filmmakers seems to be one of damage control and appeasement rather than a constructive partnership.

Many historians have recognized that their profession cannot ignore television and film interpretations of history. They believe that historians should become more involved in helping film and television histories to achieve “greater historical integrity.”³⁸ They have argued that, while historians may be able to lend their expertise in the production process, a more important task may be that of educating people to become critical viewers of television and film. Just as students are taught to read and analyse written historical texts, they must also be taught critical techniques for viewing history on television. In this effort, Robert Rosenstone argued that historians must hold filmmakers and film productions accountable for their presentations and interpretations of history. Historians, likewise, must learn about the tools of filmmaking and develop critical standards for historical presentations on film and television based on the capabilities and limitations of these media. They ought not to expect filmmakers to follow exactly the criteria of written history.³⁹

In order to provide a forum for the discussion of television and film, numerous historical journals now include a film review section. Both *American Historical Review* and *Journal of American History*, for instance, include regular film reviews. In its December 1996 issue, the latter journal introduced a series which offers television reviews as well as an opportunity for contributors to examine history-oriented programming, its relation to historical scholarship, and its contributions to historical learning.⁴⁰ Historians such as Robert Brent Toplin, John E. O'Connor, and Robert Rosenstone have written numerous essays and edited collections on the representation of history on television and film. In addition, some collections of essays deal specifically with one documentary series. *Ken Burns's The Civil War*, edited by Toplin, includes essays by eight historians and one by Burns. They debate the merits and weaknesses of Burns's presentation and historical interpretations. Similarly, *The Valour and the Horror Revisited*, edited by David Bercuson and S.F. Wise, includes essays by the authors and three other historians. They comment on the historical interpretation presented in the series and on the ensuing controversy.

While historians have begun to address the “history explosion” on television, archivists, unfortunately, are conspicuously absent from the debate. Archivists Ernest Dick, Elisabeth Kaplan, and Jeffrey Mifflin have argued that archivists must become more visually literate so that they can better appraise, describe, and preserve records in all media, provide improved assistance to the television production clientele, and make more thoughtful and informed critiques of the use of archives in these productions.⁴¹ The collections edited by Bercuson and Wise and by Toplin could have benefitted from the inclusion of an essay by an archivist, because while historians critique productions for

their interpretation of history, they give little attention to the use of records. Ernest Dick's two essays on *The Valour and the Horror* stand alone as a critique of a historical documentary from an archival point of view. In these essays, Dick issued a strong challenge to archivists. Like historians, he said, archivists must understand the audiovisual medium and develop critical standards with which to evaluate the presentation of archival documents in television and film productions.⁴²

Dick's articles serve as a valuable example of the informed comment an archivist can provide on a historical documentary. The essays discuss some of the key issues involved in presenting history on television, especially in light of the controversy over the series' interpretation of history; Dick takes a close look at the use of sources. It is necessary, however, to take a step back and ponder the nature of an archival critique. Although archivists and historians are concerned similarly with the ways in which history is being presented and interpreted on television, the critique of a production by an archivist will be significantly different from that offered by a historian. The historian's purpose in analyzing a production is to assess the particular interpretation of history, commenting, thereby, on the perceived historical accuracy, on the particular interpretation being given, and, perhaps, the correlation to contemporary historiography. Archivists, meanwhile, will take a step back from the historical interpretation and look at the ways in which the archival sources are incorporated and represented. The challenge, then, lies in determining how the archivist's knowledge of records can be incorporated into useful critique of the presentation of history on television.

The basis for an archival critique is found in the contextual approach which maintains that the archivist's first concern is the preservation of the integrity of records. At the intellectual foundation of the archival profession and of the contextual approach is the principle of provenance which, in essence, emphasizes that a record must be understood in terms of its context of creation, its creator, and its relation to other records. Archival records are arranged and described according to these principles and common descriptive practice requires archivists to include information regarding the creator and the original functions and form of the records. The defence of the integrity of records, however, must move beyond the level of arrangement and description and into the public programming arena. Archivists should be ready to communicate their knowledge of the origins of the records and raise questions about the records which should be dealt with in order to best interpret them. A critique of the use of archives in television production will incorporate a contextual understanding of the archival record and ask, for example, whether any acknowledgement is given to the creator, the creating process, the type of record, and the circumstances under which the record was maintained and archived. While archivists should not expect every historical documentary to be an exploration of the records themselves, they might point out where addi-

tional information about the records could make an argument or a production stronger and, perhaps, more interesting.

An archival review of a documentary will involve, first, a look at the production as a document with its own creator, context of creation, and form. As such, the archivist might ask questions regarding the producers of the documentary, sources of funding and support for the production, the motivation behind the production, and the relation of the production to other works by the same creator. The archivist might also look at the documentary's audience: to whom the production was directed and how it was received both by critics and the general public. Finally, the reviewer will want to determine the production's form or genre. Undoubtedly, a different critical eye will be required for the use of archives in a historical documentary, a game show, a docudrama, historical drama, or a television retrospective. Historical documentaries, the genre to which the proposed criteria will be applied, deserve a different, more analytical level of critique as it is in the body of these productions themselves that grand claims of truthfulness, importance, and seriousness are often made. In fact, Neil Postman has argued that "television is at its most trivial and, therefore, most dangerous when its aspirations are high, when it presents itself as a carrier of important cultural conversations."⁴³ Therefore, when historical programmes and documentaries promise to "set the record straight" (*History Undercover*), provide a "definitive family portrait" of Canada (CBC's *Life and Times*), or tell "the true story" for the first time (*The Valour and the Horror*), they need to be held accountable for their presentations of the past.

Once the background of the television production has been explored, the critical viewer must enter into an examination of the language of the television medium. Perhaps the greatest challenge in attempting to examine critically the use of archival sources in a production is the need to dissect the variety of sources, both visual and oral, with which the viewer is being confronted. Video recording machines have given viewers the ability to stop, start, and review the bombardment of images and sounds. Web sites have provided a forum through which a visitor can examine documents more closely and, in essence, talk back to a production and debate with other visitors on-line. However, these are not the suppositions on which the production of a television programme is based. The pace of a television programme is an essential element of how the production "works" and, although the use of archival sources at particular points in the production might be questioned, the production must also be analysed as a package.⁴⁴

In order to analyse a production, archivists must become familiar with various production techniques such as editing, lighting, the speed of film, camera angles, focus, sound effects, music, and the colour of the film. They give important clues as to the perspective of the production and its treatment of historical sources.⁴⁵ The critical viewer might look at editing and ask questions about the pace of the production, the juxtaposition of images, and what mate-

rial has been omitted. The viewer might also question the effects of close-up shots, a soft or sharp focus, or the use of slow motion.

Some “conventions of truth,” which are used to enhance the credibility and authoritative status of a production, can influence the editorial and compositional decisions of many documentaries. Filmmakers might decide, for example, to use black and white film instead of colour, because it appears to be more honest and more realistic. They might include the customary, authoritative “voice-of-God” narration which keeps a tight rein on the interpretation of evidence. In addition, they might choose original or original-looking footage (filmed with a shaky camera, or containing scratches and dirt), expert and eyewitness testimony and authentic music, all used to convince viewers that what they are seeing and hearing is true.⁴⁶ Historian Elazar Barkan contends, for instance, that, by deciding to film all of *Schindler’s List* in black and white, Steven Spielberg allied his film with documentaries instead of fiction film and challenged viewers to see the film as a true story.⁴⁷ Paul Cowan, in *The Kid Who Couldn’t Miss*, a Canadian docudrama about Billy Bishop, recreated the “look” of original footage by filming with a shaky camera at eighteen frames-per-second (to be projected at twenty-four frames-per-second) using scratched and dirty black and white film stock.⁴⁸ No indication was given that the footage was fabricated and most viewers might assume the footage was authentic. The critical viewer has to become familiar with some of the techniques of television in order to appreciate the ways in which “truth-enhancing” techniques and decisions regarding composition can affect the nature of the evidence being used or, as in the case of the previous examples, how these techniques can be used to represent replication as authenticity.

After educating themselves in some of the compositional and editing techniques of television, archival viewers will be able to apply their knowledge of archival documents to the analysis of their use. The archival principle of provenance points to several questions for consideration in the use of all types of archival records in a historical documentary. First, is the creator of the document identified? Is any information given about the creating process? For instance, was the photograph staged; for what audience was a newsreel created; to whom was the letter being written? One might also ask questions about the type or form of record which is used, and whether or not the distinction of type is acknowledged. A moving image, for instance, is not taken simply at face value. Government propaganda films, newsreels, and amateur home movies will each have been created under distinct circumstances and with unique motivations. Likewise, the type of information found in a personal diary will be different from a formal letter addressed to a colleague. Are archival documents distinguished from fabricated or fictionalized elements? Are letters or newspaper articles ever shown or are they merely referred to? Are archival radio recordings distinguished from an actor’s reading? Respect for original documents will also require archivists

to analyse to what degree records are allowed to speak for themselves or to what extent the use of a narrator or of quick editing silences and manipulates the records to serve the filmmaker's intent. For example, how much of a journal entry or letter is read? Is film footage shown in short bites or are longer excerpts used? Is the original soundtrack included? Are photographs, maps, or works of art shown quickly or is the viewer allowed to "look" more closely at the details? Finally, insofar as the viewer can determine, are archival documents being used in context or are they being used to represent something different from their content?

The misrepresentation of documents is likely most problematic in the use of still and moving images. In their use of visual sources, documentaries reinforce the maxim that "a picture is worth a thousand words." An image can be given multiple meanings, depending on the accompanying text. Archival images are often used to convince viewers that they are seeing more than they really are. Close-ups on a person's face and especially on the eyes convince viewers that they are seeing through the subject's eyes to their soul and motivation. Another common technique is for the camera never to show a photograph's edge, creating the illusion that the image goes on in all directions.⁴⁹ This denies the creator's act of framing and "editing" in composition and denies, in a sense, the form of the record.

While visual evidence is being used increasingly by historians for the information it contains, still and moving images are often used as an afterthought in a production. Several archivists have complained that images are frequently chosen after the script has been written and that filmmakers are usually more interested in an image's aesthetic or dramatic appeal than its value as evidence.⁵⁰ Archivist Mark Ritchie cites an example of a filmmaker who was creating a documentary on the Spanish Civil War and chose footage of soldiers based on the direction they were moving (left to right or right to left) instead of for which side they were fighting simply in order to maintain the action and continuity of the film.⁵¹ The reviewing archivist might then ask whether the photographs and moving images appear as mere illustration or are incorporated more fully as part of the historical inquiry.

Ken Burns's series, *The Civil War*, was applauded for incorporating still images effectively. His "still-in-motion" cinematography brought photographs to life, as the film camera panned landscapes and focused on specific details.⁵² He was criticized, however, for not acknowledging the context in which the photographs were created and the role of the photographer in interpreting and framing the historical record.⁵³ While the photographs used were not necessarily related directly to the text being read, they are offered as proof of the text's assertions and as generic illustration of an era. On the other hand, *Dawn of the Eye*, a CBC/BBC documentary series on the history of television news, used examples of "staged" footage, including the Second World War footage shot in New Jersey, to show how news was "created."⁵⁴ In effect, this docu-

mentary demystified the footage for the viewer by providing its context. Other documentaries, however, might use the same footage, represented as reality, and continue the myths which were created when the film was shot. The archivist as reviewer must assess to what degree artistic license is acceptable and at what point the misrepresentation of documents represents a distortion of historical evidence and a serious flaw in the presentation of history. Without any contextual information or direct reference to images given, the viewer is left to assume the correlation between image and story.

The visual components of a documentary, including the original stills and moving images being used, are given meaning through the “invisible” yet equally powerful counterpart, sound. A documentary production may use a variety of sound elements including synchronous sound, wild sound, sound effects, voice-overs, narration, music, and silence.⁵⁵ Archival sound recordings which might be used in a documentary include radio recordings, oral history interviews, and the original soundtrack accompanying a moving image. Ernest Dick has suggested, however, that original recordings are often disappointing to viewers and that original sound is often replaced or enhanced in contemporary production.⁵⁶ Considering the dramatic, persuasive, and invisible power of sound, archivists must keep themselves attuned to its usage and manipulation in a production. The sound component of a film might be considered as part of the film’s “original order.” Is the film, then, allowed to “speak” or is its original sound replaced by a narrator’s interpretation of events or recreated sound? If no original sound existed or if that sound has been replaced or enhanced, what is the impact on the interpretation of the image? How does, for example, the addition of gun shots or crowd noise manipulate the interpretation of an archival photograph or moving image? Furthermore, how does the use of music affect the interpretation of images and text? Music and other sound effects have a powerful capability to create a mood, cuing viewers to feel a range of emotions, from nostalgia and romance to disgust and horror, about the history which is being presented. Because images are vulnerable to multiple readings, the deconstruction of the use of sound, including narration, music, sound effects, and voice-overs, is essential to the analysis of the representation of visual documents.

In order to tell the story and to bring continuity to the evidence being presented, documentaries often use a narrator, eyewitness, or expert testimony or any combination of these. Each needs to be considered in terms of the weight and authority they are given. The use of an authoritative male narrator, in particular, is one of the conventions of truth used commonly to enhance the credibility of a documentary production. The viewer must measure, however, the degree to which the narrator dominates and leads a production and, in consequence, the degree to which the records are allowed to speak. Clayton R. Koppes, Robert Brent Toplin, and David Wiener have cited filmmakers who have chosen to dispense with the authorial narrator and have allowed the

actual archival sources to tell the story, confident that the audience will be able to draw the appropriate conclusions.⁵⁷

Wiener referred specifically to the documentary *Survivors of the Holocaust* in which eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust provide the foundation for the story instead of a narrator. Wiener contended that a narrator “could not find [the] depth” that is provided in a first person account and that the combination of testimony with archival stills and footage makes for a more powerful and compelling production.⁵⁸ To the contrary, John O’Connor argues that documentaries which do not use a narrator are more dangerous. They raise the viewer’s expectation of truth and “seriously limit the voice of the historian.” He adds that they rely too much on eyewitness testimony which can result in privileging memory and emotion over historical evidence.⁵⁹ The sampling of eyewitnesses must be questioned and the viewer must consider whether a person is speaking as an individual or being used by the filmmakers to represent the experience of a larger group. The challenge for the filmmaker is to determine the appropriate balance between narration, testimony, and archival records. In the end, the critical viewer must try to discern whether the incorporation of these voices, narrator, expert, or eyewitness, provides a helpful guide and complement to other evidence and to the interpretation as a whole, or if they serve to limit the “voice” of the original documents and to stifle the historical enquiry.

Another frequently used component of historical documentaries is dramatization. The challenge for the critical viewer is to be aware of the possible use of dramatized, staged portions and to be able to understand the role of re-enactments in the context of the whole production. Re-enactments might include dramatizations by actors or recreated footage which may or may not be identified as a fabrication. One of the most controversial aspects of *The Valour and the Horror* was, indeed, its use of dramatization. Actors were used to represent men and women involved in the war with the scripts taken directly from textual documents and oral history interviews. The connection between the actors’ words and the original sources from which they were obtained was not made clear, however, and the portrayal of some military leaders was seen to be inflammatory and unjustified.⁶⁰ The use of unseen actors in *The Civil War* to read excerpts from journals, letters, and other documents, on the other hand, was both artistic and respectful of documents, especially with the incorporation of the author’s name at the end of each statement.

Another example of the use of re-enactment can be seen in an episode of *American Experience* entitled “The Wright Stuff.” The documentary outlines the history of the Wright brothers. Along with some compelling interviews and well-used archival sources, including the first moving images shot from an airplane, the programme includes a re-enactment of the Wrights’ first flight in a replica of their airplane. The only indication that the scene is re-enacted is

given in the credits at the end of the show, which identify the replica's builder and flyer. The footage is filmed in black and white and gives the impression that the film might be authentic, although shot from multiple angles and not scratched nor dirty.⁶¹ Regarding the use of dramatization and re-enactment, archivists might encourage filmmakers to indicate the fictional status of recreated footage while making clear, when applicable, the connection between a dramatization and original sources.

The presentation of archival documents in audiovisual format is radically different from their incorporation into written works. Television is a different medium from the written word and cannot be judged solely by the standards applied to print culture. Written studies allow for a complex analysis of sources and theories, while film and television tend toward a linear, comparatively simplistic, narrative approach to history.⁶² Textual studies allow the reader to reflect and review the evidence, piece by piece, at her or his own pace. Audiovisual presentations, however, are much more complex and, despite the rewind and freeze-frame innovations on a video machine, the viewer is bombarded with a multiplicity of images and sounds, in which a number of archival records might be presented simultaneously along with the fictionalized or creative elements of a production. Because of this multi-media barrage, the viewer finds it more difficult to dissect and analyse the various bits of evidence as each "must be 'read' differently within the context of the whole if their full meaning is to be understood."⁶³ The presentation of history can make a significant impact on the viewer without encouraging or allowing the viewer to analyse or question the evidence which is being submitted as proof of the particular interpretation of historical events. David Herlihy argues that historical productions, and movies in particular, grant the viewers the illusion of being eyewitnesses to history, engaging them in the historical event rather than encouraging a critical distance. Herlihy explains that "doubt is not visual," and that television viewers are more inclined to link a historical film with reality than to question what they see.⁶⁴ As such, some viewers may be seduced easily into the presentation of history as seen on television or in the movies without being aware of production techniques or the point of view from which the programme has been created. Active critical viewing, from an archival point of view, involves an examination of the archival sources which are used and the production techniques, both sound and visual, which affect the presentation of the documents and their reception by the viewing public. By asking questions regarding the origins of archival records, viewers become more aware of how sources are used and manipulated by television to convince them of the historical interpretation being made. In order to defend the record in this very public arena, archivists must become intelligent, critical viewers, promoting visual literacy to the wider society and challenging documentary makers to a greater level of respect for the richness of the archival record.

The Role of Archivists in the Television Age

In 1998, historian J.L. Granatstein asked the question “Who killed Canadian history?” in a book of the same name. In the book, Granatstein despaired of the lack of historical knowledge of Canada and of a national historical memory which has fallen prey to the specialization of academic historians, the lack of a national history curriculum, and the political correctness of multi-cultural policies.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, at the 1999 “Giving the Past a Future” conference at the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada in Montreal, CBC documentary producer Mark Starowicz declared that “Canadian society has had a stroke which has virtually eliminated long-term memory....”⁶⁶ A survey conducted in conjunction with the conference, however, showed that not only are Canadians very interested in learning more about their history, sixty-seven per cent said that they would go to television to find out about history, followed by museums and historic sites (forty-four per cent), books (forty-three per cent), and archives and libraries (twenty-four per cent).⁶⁷ Both the perceived crisis in national memory and the expectation that television is a good source of information about history should be of interest and concern to archivists. Archivists might ask whether they have a responsibility to become involved in the promotion of historical consciousness beyond the preservation of recorded memory. Beyond teaching about history, television has become a significant user of archives and a lens through which viewers see and hear archival documents. These “invisible” users of archives are a user group which is difficult to define. They represent, however, an important audience which archivists may or may not choose to address.

Beyond the (necessary) goal of self-promotion, however, archival institutions and archivists exist to preserve the public memory and, as such, archivists need to become “students of their society” in order to understand how a society “views its past,”⁶⁸ according to Richard Cox. Thus, if society is receiving much of its historical knowledge from television and film, archivists must learn more about the audiovisual production process and the implications of having archival documents presented and interpreted in this manner. Reviews of documentaries need to become a part of archival literature in order to develop a dialogue on the subject within the archival community. Archivists are accustomed to writing and reading book reviews related to archival theory or issues and, more broadly, to history and the use of sources within historical writing. *Archivaria* includes regular sections for both book reviews and exhibition reviews. The *Archivaria* editorial board, as well as those associated with other professional archival journals, should be encouraged to consider expanding their reviews section to include audiovisual productions which make significant use of archival records. In addition, archivists might consider submitting reviews for publication in journals of related disciplines, such as history or film studies, thus opening avenues for participation in a wider

multi-disciplinary dialogue. The presentation of reviews or demonstrations on visual literacy at professional conferences might also generate discussion and raise awareness of the issues related to the use of archives in television. Informal archival reviews of documentaries and other productions likely occur regularly in archives coffee rooms throughout the country as archivists view with interest and curiosity the programmes which have used their sources. It is time, however, for the reviews and the discussions of archives in television to move into a more formal, professional sphere in order to foster visual literacy.

In addition to the publication of reviews in professional and academic journals, archivists also need to turn their attention to the broader public. In this respect, public programming is not solely a matter of trying to get more researchers into archival institutions but becomes an opportunity to defend the archival record and to educate the people whom Paul Conway termed the “invisible” users of archives. As such, reviews and letters to the editor written for a more popular audience could be submitted to newspapers and magazines. Reviews in this wider domain, however, are not always conducted in print. Archivists need to make sure that they are available and able to participate in interviews or panel discussions which may take place on television or on radio. In the aftermath of the airing of documentaries on television, historians often volunteer or are called upon to offer comment on the quality and historical accuracy of a particular production. Historians, for instance, were very vocal in the public debate over the controversial presentation of the history of the Second World War in *The Valour and the Horror* and some were called upon to advise the CBC Ombudsman in the ensuing report.⁶⁹ This would have been an excellent opportunity for archivists to contribute their point of view, beyond Ernest Dick’s excellent reviews in *Archivaria*, by commenting not on historical interpretation per se but on the origins, history, characteristics, and use of evidence. In addition, as the History Television network expands, more on-air commentary may be provided during which “experts” discuss the merits or drawbacks, or both, of a particular documentary before or after it is aired, as has been done to accompany broadcasts of *The Valour and the Horror*. Archivists will have to increase their public profile before they become as obvious a choice as historians for these discussions. They will also need to prove that they have an important perspective and some valuable insight to contribute. Although documentaries are not always popular or contentious, when they do “make waves,” archivists should be on the ready to offer their comments and to contribute their insight to the public discussion.

The media is an effective tool through which archival institutions can reach their invisible users. In a posting to the Archives and Archivists listserv, American records manager Peter Kurilecz argued that archivists should “cultivate the news media” by providing ideas for stories, feeding information or images for upcoming anniversaries, and writing letters to the editor. He stated further that archivists should “complain when the information provided is mis-

interpreted, [but] applaud when they get it correct.”⁷⁰ Archivists may need to be creative and assertive in order to take full advantage of the possibilities of using the media. The debut of a documentary which makes significant use of an institution’s holdings, for instance, might be a good opportunity for a press release issued by the institution, highlighting the incorporation of their materials into the project and drawing attention to sources available for further exploration. Also, television columnists of daily newspapers could be targeted and provided with specific information about the institution’s connection to the documentary before it is reviewed by the columnist. While the columnist may not have thought to contact an archival institution before writing an article, she or he might use the information provided as a hook to a story or as a way to provide a local or tangible connection to the history being presented. By developing relationships with the media and by finding ways to insert an archival agenda into reporting about television, archivists may indirectly influence public awareness of the presence of actual documents in a production and, perhaps, encourage more active, informed television viewing.

The broadcast of significant documentaries may provide archival institutions with excellent public programming opportunities directed at potential television viewers. Documentaries such as *The Valour and the Horror* or the CBC Canadian History Project could provide an opportunity for archival institutions to “show off” their contributions to these important television events. Tours, lecture series, or exhibitions developed by archivists and targeted to such groups as schools, seniors, or the general public could include an exhibition of records used in a production and presentations by both archivists and producers on the challenges of creating a documentary using original sources. These programmes could also include input from historians, museum professionals, or others involved in the production process such as script writers, researchers, editors, or camera operators. The development and delivery of such programmes could, ideally, encourage people to think beyond the television set and to establish in the minds of the audience a tangible, real connection between television productions and historical documents and the archival institutions in which these documents are preserved.

Taking a step back from public programming directed at television viewers, perhaps the most obvious avenue for public programming is to go directly to the users, the documentary makers. For the most part, as was indicated in responses from archivists, interaction with people involved with the production of documentaries is most often defined by the need for quick service, a lack of understanding regarding archival institutions, and a quest for perfect images as opposed to historically accurate ones. Archivists are accustomed to the exchange of ideas which might occur, both casually and professionally, with members of other significant user groups such as academics or genealogists. Perhaps, however, that dialogue needs to be extended more intentionally to the documentary-making user group. Increased communication between

archivists and documentary makers would promote an awareness of and appreciation for the work of both groups.

In a survey conducted for the purposes of this study, documentary producers and researchers stated unanimously that archivists are very important in “demystifying archives,” pointing to relevant sources, and assisting in securing rights for the use of materials, to name just a few areas of importance.⁷¹ When asked what archivists and archival institutions could do to improve service to these users, the responses were varied. Some, including Patti Poskitt and Monica MacDonald, expressed a desire for increased on-line or Internet access to archival documents.⁷² Script writer Janine Dubé stated that “it would be good to know [which archival institution] has what.”⁷³ Others, including Marque Landells and Michael MacDonald, wished for more efficient service and a quicker turnaround time for locating as well as reproducing images.⁷⁴ Several respondents expressed difficulty in finding “precise” information when looking for images or other records showing specific people, dates, locations, or other details.⁷⁵ Beyond these very practical details, however, almost all of the respondents indicated that historical accuracy was very important and some expressed a further understanding that archival documents are a “critical element” in attaining credibility, giving “life” to productions, and making them valuable as educational tools.⁷⁶ Finally, a response which confirms some of the assertions of this article was provided by Douglas Davidson, president of The Peer Group, who stated that it would be helpful to the work of documentary makers if archivists were more attuned to the “creative uses of material” and that “ideally archivists should have a strong understanding of [the] production process and how materials are used. Most don’t.”⁷⁷ In this statement, Davidson points to the possibility of a closer relationship between archivists and documentary makers, one in which archivists could make insightful suggestions and comments on how archival documents might be used to further enhance their impact as evidence in a production.

Although this survey was only a beginning point in discovering some of the opinions and experiences of documentary makers, the clear respect for archivists and archival institutions demonstrated in the surveys points to some good possibilities for more in-depth consultation and discussion in the future. In order to extend the dialogue with documentary makers into more practical applications, archivists may want to seek out additional areas of cooperation. Archivists, professional archival associations, and archival institutions might consider increasing their visibility by lobbying for the involvement of archivists as consultants in the production of documentaries. In their efforts to attain some level of historical credibility and accuracy, many documentary producers have invited historians to work both as consultants and as on-camera expert commentators. Ken Burns, for example, called on the advice of a panel of historians in the production of *The Civil War* series and included a few of them to comment on-screen throughout the documentary.⁷⁸ Likewise,

historian Terry Copp served as both consultant and on-screen expert for *No Price Too High*, and the CBC Canadian History Project includes several historians on its advisory board. Archivists have not been included in this advisory process, other than through the provision of standard research assistance to those who enter or contact their institutions. Because these documentary productions made and will make extensive use of archival sources, it seems logical to call not only on historians for comment on the historical interpretation but also on archivists to offer more insight on the evidence being used. In order to be effective in this capacity, however, archivists would need to be aware of some of the techniques and capabilities of documentary productions and would need to have some appreciation for the creative film-making process. Most likely, an archivist who acts as the “documents police” expecting and demanding rigidly contextual usage of archival records would be unwelcome in the documentary production process. If, however, archivists can work cooperatively in the creative process and advise on ways which contextual information behind a photograph, film clip, or diary entry might strengthen and add interest to a presentation, archivists may become a valuable asset.

Another area in which increased cooperation and consultation could occur is in the development of Web sites which are created in conjunction with documentaries. More and more television productions and networks have begun to use Web sites to complement their programming. Several of Ken Burns’s recent documentaries, for example, are represented on the PBS Web site and each includes an “archives” or “sources” component wherein photographs, moving images, texts, maps, and other original documents are shown.⁷⁹ These Web sites provide an excellent avenue through which archival documents as well as the full text of interviews with “experts” or “eyewitnesses” can be examined closely at a pace decided not by television but by the navigator. This is a forum in which contextual details can be presented, full texts can be included and photographers and image contents can be identified more fully. A Web site, as such, provides an easy first access point for the television viewer who wants to know more about the history which has been presented on television. Many Web sites include lists of books for further reading or links to other Web sites, as well as providing opportunities for discussions among visitors. Besides ensuring that good usable information is available for the Web sites being produced and encouraging the accurate citation of records, archivists should encourage the producers of the Web site to include links to the Web sites of the archival institutions where specific records are found. Archival Web sites might, in turn, incorporate links back to those Web sites which incorporate their own sources. Similar to the exhibits and tours suggested above, archival Web sites, with or without the cooperation of the television producers, could take advantage of the airing of documentaries and create a virtual exhibition highlighting the institution’s contributions to the documentary as well as additional holdings related to the same historical topic.

Public programming is a crucial function for archival institutions that want to increase their profile, draw attention to the importance of keeping and preserving records, and contribute to the overall collective memory of society. Beyond public programming, increased interaction with the users of archives associated with television production might provoke archivists to discuss whether the other core archival functions, including appraisal, arrangement, description, and preservation, might or should be affected by the needs of this user group. Should more attention be paid to the acquisition of the records of television and film?⁸⁰ When appraising or describing records, should archivists learn to be more sensitive to records which are “televisable?” Do the needs and demands of documentary makers require archives to digitize more of their holdings? Do archivists need to ensure that archival texts, photographs, or moving images are searchable in minute detail? These questions move somewhat beyond the scope of this study and will need further debate and discussion elsewhere. Client-centred and materials-centred theories on public programming divide on the degree to which the needs of researchers should affect the core archival functions. Archivists need to remain grounded and focused on their first priority, the defense of the integrity of archival records, and initiatives stemming out of user studies or other public programmes must remain grounded in the contextual approach to archives.

Obviously, the television age does not bring with it increased staff, time, or resources for archival institutions. The reality of archival work and stretched resources is that the primary concern of archivists when dealing with television-related clientele is to answer their questions, to direct them to the images or other records that they want, to assist them in making copies or in filming documents. Because the use of archives by documentary makers is increasing and because their needs are significant, perhaps larger archival institutions need to consider appointing or hiring an archivist to work as a liaison with the production clientele, regardless of which record media they are needing for their productions. As a central point of contact, a liaison archivist could establish more significant relationships with the production community, orient them more fully to the archival institution and the archival research process, and offer informed comment on the use of evidence in their productions. Many documentary makers may not see the need for any further assistance or advice than they are already receiving. Not every project will include an advisory board of history professionals, nor will every project have the luxury of time in which to carry out extensive research and consultation. However, when more extensive service and expertise is called for, archivists should be ready and able to provide more in-depth assistance. In the end, the more informed archivists are about the needs and characteristics of this specific user group, the better able they will be to provide any level of service to documentary makers and other television production clientele who utilize the resources of their institutions.

In his address to the McGill Institute conference on the teaching of Canadian history, Mark Starowicz challenged history professionals to become involved with the history-on-television phenomenon. After stating the number of hours that the average Canadian spends in front of the television in a week (twenty-one), Starowicz argued that the power of television should not be dismissed. Rather, “anyone who holds precious any idea, cause or sensibility has the moral obligation to bring those ideas to where people are.”⁸¹ As a producer, Starowicz was speaking primarily about the need for more quality in Canadian historical programming. Archivists can apply his challenge to their own work and look for ways to become more integrally involved in the development, viewing, and critique of television productions which incorporate archival sources. The growing interest in and industry of historical programming on television is undeniable and the opportunities for archival education and outreach are not to be missed. While increasing their own visual literacy and learning to apply the contextual approach, grounded in the archival principle of provenance, to critical analysis of audiovisual productions, archivists need to be more deliberate about increasing dialogue with the users associated with television production, including documentary producers, researchers, and script writers. More knowledge of the needs and expectations of these users and of the production process should help archivists provide better service and offer informed comment on creative and effective uses of evidence in documentaries. Obviously, the invisible users of archives, the television viewers, are more difficult to target. Archivists need to be creative in searching for or creating forums through which they might begin to educate viewers about the characteristics of original records and to encourage them to move from passive viewing to a level of visual literacy which allows them to ask questions of both the historical interpretation and the strength of evidence being presented in a historical production. Perhaps interest in Canadian history, and in history in general, will be strengthened not by focusing solely on what facts society or students need to learn, but by encouraging an appreciation for the process of doing history built on a foundation of visual literacy and an understanding of how and why documents come into existence. If a large and increasing number of people are turning to television to learn about the past, then history professionals, including archivists, need to become involved as advisors, commentators, and proponents of active, critical viewing.

The “electronic campfire” will, no doubt, continue to bring to life the sounds, sights, and texts of the past while also stirring passionate debate about the meaning of historic events and the need to remember. As servants of their society, of records, and of history, archivists must seize the opportunity to “pull up a log,” take their place around the fire, and become active, vocal participants defending the integrity of archives, increasing awareness of the importance of the documentary record, and contributing to the ongoing processes of keeping alive the collective memory.

Notes

- * This article was drafted from the author's thesis as part of the Master of Arts degree in Archival Studies at the University of Manitoba. The author is grateful for the guidance, support, and editorial assistance of Dr. Tom Nesmith in its creation.
- 1 Robert Brent Toplin, "Introduction," in Robert Brent Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's The Civil War: Historians Respond* (New York, 1996), p. xxii; Thomas Cripps, "Historical Truth: An Interview with Ken Burns," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 3 (June 1995), pp. 741, 749, 760; and *The West Web* site <<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/>>.
 - 2 For example, Barbara Floyd, "Archivist in TV Sitcom," Archives and Archivists Listserv <ARCHIVES@MIAMIU.ACS.MUOHIOEDU> (21 March 1996). Responses to this post were generated on 21 and 22 March 1996 by Elizabeth Cassidy, Paul Gray, Jim Whittington, Glenn T. Smith, Weston Thompson, and Daniel German. This phenomenon recurred in October 1996, on the same listserv, when the discussion of archivists on television and in the movies started again and postings poured in, listing the various productions on which archivists have been featured, usually in the same stereotypical manner. See the archives of the Archives and Archivists Listserv <<http://listserv.muohio.edu/archives/archives.html/>>.
 - 3 See, for example, discussions of archival public programming in Gabrielle Blais and David Enns, "From Paper Archives to People Archives: Public Programming in the Management of Archives," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 101–113; Paul Conway, "Facts and Frameworks: An Approach to Studying the Users of Archives," *American Archivist* 49 (Fall 1986), pp. 393–407; Terry Cook, "Viewing the World Upside Down: Reflections on the Theoretical Underpinnings of Archival Public Programming," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 123–34; Richard Cox, "The Concept of Public Memory and Its Impact on Archival Public Programming," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 122–35; Barbara L. Craig, "What are the Clients? Who are the Products? The Future of Archival Public Services in Perspective," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 135–41; Timothy L. Ericson, "'Preoccupied with our own Gardens': Outreach and Archivists," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990–91), pp. 114–22; Elsie T. Freeman, "Buying Quarter Inch Holes: Public Support Through Results," *The Midwestern Archivist* 10 (1985), pp. 89–97 and "In the Eye of the Beholder: Archives Administration From the User's Point of View," *American Archivist* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1984), pp. 111–23.
 - 4 Avra Michelson and Jeff Rothenberg, "Scholarly Communication and Information Technology: Exploring the Impact of Changes in the Research Process on Archives," *American Archivist* 55, no. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 236–15. In this essay, the authors explore the implications for archives of evolving information technologies and encourage archives to provide access to archives on the ever-expanding global computer networks.
 - 5 Megan Sniffin-Marinoff, "In Print, On Air: Working with the Media," in Elsie Finch, ed., *Advocating Archives: An Introduction to Public Relations for Archivists* (Metuchen, N.J., 1994), p. 51.
 - 6 Philip F. Mooney, "Modest Proposals: Marketing Ideas for the Expansionist Archives," in *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.
 - 7 Conway, "Facts and Frameworks," pp. 395–96, 405.
 - 8 Robert Brent Toplin, "History on Television: A Growing Industry," *Journal of American History* 83, no. 3 (December 1996), p. 1109.
 - 9 Toplin, "History on Television," p. 1110; Gary Edgerton, "Ken Burn's [sic] American Dream: Histories-for-TV from Walpole, New Hampshire," *Television Quarterly* XXVII, no. 1 (1994), p. 59.
 - 10 Robert Brent Toplin, "Introduction," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's The Civil War*, p. xv.
 - 11 Edgerton, "Ken Burn's [sic] American Dream," p. 59.
 - 12 Jeannette Kopak, "TV series on the history of reporting news through moving images,"

- E-Mail to Association of Moving Image Archivists Listserv <AMIA-L@LSV.UKY.EDU>, 16 January 1997.
- 13 "CBC Plans Epic Series on History of the Nation," *Winnipeg Free Press* (22 March 1996), p. D7.
 - 14 See the *American Experience* Web site page <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/amex/about.html>>.
 - 15 Libby Haight O'Connell, "Viewing History: The Pros and Cons of Presenting History on Television," *History News* 49, no. 5 (September/October 1994), p. 17.
 - 16 See The History Channel Web site <<http://www.historychannel.com/>>.
 - 17 Richard Rotman, Director of Communications, Alliance Broadcasting (Showcase Television and History Television), e-mail to the author, "Re: The History and Entertainment Network," (18 March 1997).
 - 18 Ibid.
 - 19 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York, 1985), pp. 46–51, 87. See in particular Chapter 4, "The Typographic Mind," and Chapter 6, "The Age of Show Business."
 - 20 Thomas Cripps, "Historical Truth," p. 747; and Toplin, "Introduction," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's The Civil War*, p. xvi.
 - 21 Toplin, "History on Television," p. 1111.
 - 22 Robert A. Rosenstone, "History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film," *American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (December 1988), p. 1175.
 - 23 O'Connell, "Viewing History," p. 16.
 - 24 Toplin, "Introduction," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's The Civil War*, p. xxii; Thomas Cripps, "Historical Truth," pp. 741, 749, 760; and *The West* Web site <<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/>>.
 - 25 Rosenstone, "History in Images," p. 1179; and Dan Sipe, "Media and Public History: The Future of Oral History and Moving Images," *Oral History Review* 19, nos. 1–2 (Spring-Fall 1991), pp. 79–80.
 - 26 Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History* (Cambridge and London, 1995), pp. 55–60.
 - 27 Jill Godmilow & Brooke Jacobson, "Far from Finished: Deconstructing the Documentary," in Mark O'Brien and Craig Little, eds., *Reimagining America: The Arts of Social Change* (Philadelphia, 1990), p. 178; and Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, pp. 116–17.
 - 28 Clifford M. Kuhn, "A Historian's Perspective on Archives and the Documentary Process," *American Archivist* 59, no. 3 (Summer 1996), p. 314; Jerry Kuehl, "Television History: The Next Step," *Sight and Sound* 51, no. 3 (Summer 1982), pp. 190–91.
 - 29 William H. Cohn, "History for the Masses: Television Portrays the Past," *Journal of Popular Culture* X, no. 2 (Fall 1976), p. 281.
 - 30 Eric Breitbart, "From the Panorama to the Docudrama: Notes on the Visualization of History," *Radical History Review* 25 (1981), p. 119.
 - 31 Mark C. Carnes, "Hollywood History," *American Heritage* 46, no. 5 (September 1995), pp. 79–82; Cohn, "History for the Masses," pp. 281–87.
 - 32 Eric Foner, "Ken Burns and the Romance of Reunion," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's The Civil War*, p. 114.
 - 33 Daniel P. Murphy, television review of "Jimmy Carter: To the White House and Beyond and Ronald Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime," *A & E Biography, American Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (December 1996), p. 1140.
 - 34 See Dick, "History on Television," pp. 199–216; and "'The Valour and the Horror' Continued," pp. 253–69; David Taras, "The Struggle over *The Valour and the Horror*: Media Power and the Portrayal of War," *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de sci-*

- ence politique* XXVIII, no. 4 (December 1995), pp. 725–48; Art Simon, “The Making of Alert Viewers: The Mixing of Fact and Fiction in *JFK*,” *Cineaste* XIX, no. 1 (1992), pp. 14–15. Taras gives an interesting analysis of *The Valour and the Horror* controversy as a struggle over historical memory between the guardians of official history (such as the Canadian Senate and veterans’ groups) and journalists and the CBC. The article points to the potential danger in challenging conventional historical wisdom on television and, particularly, on publicly funded television.
- 35 Geoffrey C. Ward, “Refighting the Civil War,” in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns’s The Civil War*, pp. 150–51; and Natalie Zemon Davis, “‘Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead’: Film and the Challenge of Authenticity,” *Yale Review* 76 (Summer 1987), p. 460.
- 36 E-Mail Survey responses received in March 1995 from Evelyn Barker, Rosemary Bergeron, J. Robert Davison, Herbert J. Hartsook, Jeannette Kopak, W. Mark Ritchie, and Rob Spindler; see also Dick, “History on Television,” p. 201.
- 37 E-Mail Survey responses received in March 1995 from W. Mark Ritchie, Allen Specht, and Rob Spindler.
- 38 John E. O’Connor, *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television* (Malabar, 1990), p. 3.
- 39 Robert Rosenstone, “Film Reviews,” *American Historical Review* 94, no. 4 (October 1989), p. 1031; and “History in Images/History in Words,” p. 1181.
- 40 Toplin, “History on Television,” pp. 1111–12. *The American Historical Review* includes film reviews in the fourth issue every year. Canadian journals lag behind their American counterparts. Since 1996, *The Canadian Historical Review* has included only a few film reviews.
- 41 Interview with Ernest J. Dick, 10 February 1995; Dick, “History on Television,” pp. 213–14; and “‘The Valour and the Horror’ Continued,” p. 263; and Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Miffilin, “‘Mind and Sight’: Visual Literacy and the Archivist,” *Archival Issues* 21, no. 2 (1996), pp. 107–108.
- 42 Dick, “History on Television,” pp. 199–216; and “‘The Valour and the Horror’ Continued,” pp. 253–69.
- 43 Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, p. 16.
- 44 Dan Georgakas, “Malpractice in the Radical American Documentary,” *Cineaste* 16 (1987–88), p. 49.
- 45 O’Connor, *Image as Artifact*, pp. 30–31; Kaplan and Miffilin, “‘Mind and Sight,’” pp. 112–13. The National Film Board of Canada’s series *Constructing Reality* is an excellent guide to the methods of documentary construction. Included in the series are six videos and a resource guide. See Arlene Moscovitch and David Adkin, directors, *Constructing Reality: Exploring Media Issues in Documentary* (Montreal, National Film Board of Canada, 1993) and Arlene Moscovitch, *Constructing Reality: Exploring Media Issues in Documentary, Resource Guide* (Montreal, National Film Board of Canada, 1993).
- 46 Arlene Moscovitch, *Constructing Reality, Resource Guide*, pp. 118–27.
- 47 Elazar Barkan, Film Review of *Tango of Slaves*, *Korczak*, and *Schindler’s List*, *American Historical Review* 99, no. 4 (October 1994), p. 1247.
- 48 Moscovitch, *Constructing Reality, Resource Guide*, pp. 124, 127.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- 50 E-Mail Survey Responses from Stewart Renfrew, W. Mark Ritchie, and Rob Spindler; Jerome Kuehl, “Too Good to be True, Too Hard to Get Right,” in *Documents that Move and Speak: Audiovisual Archives in the New Information Age* (München, 1992), pp. 275–77.
- 51 E-Mail Survey response from W. Mark Ritchie.
- 52 Edgerton, “Ken Burn’s [sic] American Dream,” pp. 58–60; and Toplin, “Introduction,” in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns’s The Civil War*, p. xx.
- 53 Joseph P. Reidy, Film Review of *The Civil War*, *The Public Historian* 96, no. 4 (Fall 1991), p. 89.

- 54 Mark Starowicz, executive producer, *Dawn of the Eye* (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/British Broadcasting Corporation, 1997).
- 55 Moscovitch, *Constructing Reality, Resource Guide*, p. 3.
- 56 Dick, "History on Television," p. 207.
- 57 Clayton R. Koppes, "Radio Bikini: Making and Unmaking Nuclear Mythology," in Rosenstone, ed., *Revisioning History*, p. 134; Robert Brent Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," *American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (December 1988), p. 1214; and David Wiener, "A Testament to Tragedy," *American Cinematographer* 77, no. 1 (January 1996), p. 70.
- 58 Wiener, "A Testament to Tragedy," pp. 70–72.
- 59 John O'Connor, *Image as Artifact*, p. 32.
- 60 Dick, "History on Television," p. 205; and S.F. Wise, "The Valour and the Horror: A Report for the CBC Ombudsman," in Bercuson and Wise, eds., *The Valour and the Horror Revisited*, p. 18.
- 61 Interestingly, the show's Web page included considerable detail about the plane's replication which was obviously not deemed appropriate for the television show <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/amex/aeabout.html/>>.
- 62 Rosenstone, "History in Images," pp. 1176–77.
- 63 Hugh A. Taylor, "'The Valour and the Horror': Hypertext as History?" *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), p. 191.
- 64 David Herlihy, "Am I a Camera? Other Reflections on Film and History," *American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (December 1988), pp. 1187–89.
- 65 J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto, 1998).
- 66 Mark Starowicz, "Erasing History: The Fate of Memory in the Digital Age," address at "Giving the Past a Future: A Conference on Innovation in Teaching and Learning History" (Montreal, 30 January 1999). Available on "Giving the Past a Future" Web site <<http://www.historymatters.com/sp10.html/>>.
- 67 "Environics History Survey Results," "Giving the Past a Future" Web site, January 1999 <<http://www.historymatters.com/form~res.html/>>; and "Interest in Canadian History: Highlights of a New National Poll," "Giving the Past a Future" Web site, January 1999 <<http://www.historymatters.com/PR-sondage.html/>>. The poll was conducted in December 1998 and January 1999 in conjunction with the "Giving the Past a Future" conference held at the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, Montreal, 29–31 January 1999. Among numerous workshops, the conference included workshops on "Teaching Canadian History on Film," "Uneasy Partners: The Producer and the Historian," and "History on Television: The Challenge of Representation in the Documentary."
- 68 Cox, "The Concept of Public Memory," pp. 131–32.
- 69 One archivist, Carl Vincent, was included among several historians in the CBC Ombudsman's consultation process. Vincent, however, seems to have been solicited for comment on the basis of his historical writings on the Second World War as opposed to commenting on the use of archival evidence. See William Morgan, "Report of the CBC Ombudsman," in Bercuson and Wise, eds., *The Valour and the Horror Revisited*, pp. 61–72.
- 70 Peter Kurilecz, "Re: We don't exist – My Take," Archives and Archivists Listserv, <ARCHIVES@LISTSERV.MUOHIO.EDU> (21 March 1999).
- 71 Survey conducted March and April 1999. Of approximately twenty-five surveys sent to documentary producers and researchers (mostly Canadian, one American) via both mail and electronic mail, ten were completed and returned. Unfortunately, neither Mark Starowicz nor Ken Burns replied.
- 72 Monica MacDonald, e-mail to author, 14 April 1999; Patti Poskitt, Response to Survey, April 1999.
- 73 Janine Dubé, Response to Survey, April 1999.

- 74 Marque Landells, Response to Survey, April 1999; Michael MacDonald, Response to Survey, April 1999.
- 75 Doug Hutton, Janine Dubé, William O'Farrell, David Paperny.
- 76 David Paperny, Patti Poskitt, Janine Dubé.
- 77 Douglas Davidson, Response to Survey of Documentary Makers, April 1999.
- 78 See C. Vann Woodward, "Help from Historians," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's The Civil War*, pp. 5–15.
- 79 See for example, *Lewis and Clark* <<http://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/>>; *Jefferson* <<http://www.pbs.org/jefferson/>>; and *The West* <<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/>>.
- 80 This challenge was addressed by the Task Force on the Preservation and Enhanced Use of Canada's Audio-Visual Heritage. See their report in *Fading Away: Strategic Options to Ensure the Protection of and Access to our Audio-Visual Memory* (Ottawa, 1995).
- 81 Starowicz, "Erasing History."