ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS

Fredric Miller

Then Darius the king issued an official document and they conducted an investigation into the archives of the treasuries deposited there at Babylon, and a roll was found in the fortress of Ecbatana in the province of Media with the following written on it—Memorandum: In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued an official document. About the house of God at Jerusalem: Let the house where sacrifices are offered be reconstructed and its foundations retained. . . . Ezra 6: 1–3

But fortunate too the man who is friends with the country gods. . . . He spares not a glance for the iron rigour of law, the municipal racket, the public records.

Virgil, Geogrics, ii (493, 500–02)

Both the importance of historical records and their unhappy public image clearly date back thousands of years. Civilization often is identified with writing, and the earliest writing was in fact record keeping. As Virgil noted in his hymn of praise to the rural life, the Tabularia—the archives—were connected intimately to the ordered life of cities and public administration. For him—as for others who have followed—they symbolized some of the routine and regimented aspects of urban society. Yet many of his fellow Romans used archives readily in the writing of history and the administration of government, much as Darius had used his archives to retrieve that memorandum for the grateful Hebrews four centuries before.¹

ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS

Fredric Miller received a B.A. in Social Sciences from the State University of New York-Binghamton in 1967 and both the Ph.D. in History (1972) and M.S. in Library Science (1973) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has been Curator of the Urban Archives Center of Temple University since 1973 and Adjunct Associate Professor of History since 1978. He is the co-author of Still Philadelphia: A Photographic History, 1890–1940 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983) and the author of articles on archival administration, black migration to Philadelphia, and British social policy in the 1930s.

Such ambivalent attitudes toward archives and archivists have dominated the relationship between the historical and archival professions. Since the late nineteenth century, the reliance of historical research on primary sources, the increasing identification of “professional historian” with “history professor,” and the fluctuating job market for historians have combined to produce a variety of patterns in the United States. Archivists are regarded by academic historians sometimes as colleagues, sometimes as assistants, and sometimes as unrelated professionals. Much of the uncertainty is based on incomprehension. To understand the archival profession as part of the larger world of historical work, it is necessary to understand what archives are and what archivists do—subjects which have recently not been part of the training of most historians.

ARCHIVES AND MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

Unfortunately, the use of the word archives in the English language adds to the confusion. To begin with, it can mean an actual building, an agency, or a collection of historical documents. Strictly speaking, archives as historical documents are “the noncurrent records of an organization or institution preserved because of their continuing value” by that organization or institution.² They are in effect those of its files which are of historic interest. In direct contrast to deliberate intellectual creations like books, “archives were not drawn up in the interest or for the information of Posterity.”³ They derive instead from some kind of ongoing activity.

Archivists are responsible for determining which records deserve to be retained permanently, and for ensuring that they are then preserved and made available for use. But of course there are many records—ranging from the old files of a YMCA to the personal papers of a long dead Congressman—which are not maintained by their creators but are instead held by such institutions as university libraries, historical societies, and private research centers, which may each have the papers and records of hundreds of individuals and organizations. Technically such materials held outside of their original custody are called manuscript collections. The professionals who work with them are often called manuscript curators, though to add to the confusion the generic term archivist can also include them, and hundreds of manuscript curators are members of the Society of American Archivists. Some people are both archivist and curator, being responsible for the archives of their own institution while also collecting related records and personal papers.

In terms of modern historical materials, archives and manuscript collections have many similarities. “Most recent private records have the organizational quality of public records and are therefore archival in character.”⁴ Archivists and manuscript curators have the same kinds of duties, and both tend to become experts in the subjects documented by their collections. Since manuscript curators are responsible for records coming from different sources, they are in one sense “a kind of multiple
Adding to the complexity of the field is the development of new types or formats of historical materials. Thus, some archivists specialize in a kind of record, such as photographs, maps, or machine-readable records, just as many others specialize in more traditional historical themes.

The relationship of archives and manuscripts to the writing of history lends itself to a multitude of images, some flattering, others less so. Archives have customarily been described as the primary resources of history. Historians "mine" archives and manuscript collections, which are often stored in conditions which justify the metaphor. For those of a more scientific bent, collections of primary materials are the laboratories of the historical profession, the places where the raw data is kept and the experiments performed. Even those historians who rarely venture outside the secondary literature usually think of archives as in some way the foundation of historical research. As Philip Brooks pointed out, "the scholar is wholly dependent upon the archivist not only for the preservation, the condition and the order of the documents, but also for their identification."

Yet archives and manuscript repositories are far more than the preserve of the lonely scholar. They might instead be thought of as the original public history programs, established to serve the direct needs of institutions, the case of archives, or citizens interested in the past, in the case of manuscript collections and historical societies. It is crucial to recognize that the vast majority of the users of these materials are not professional historians, just as the people who create original records and personal papers are not historians. But it is equally true that in the end archives and historical manuscripts are about history. Individuals come to find out about something in the past, whether as part of their work or for purely personal reasons. In a fundamental sense, "the primary purpose of archives is cultural, and it is the research value of documentation that invests this essentially cultural purpose with substance and significance." The archivist is thus the quintessential public historian, interacting first with a variety of people to identify historical materials, and then making it possible for others to put those materials to different uses.

Such a field is naturally diffuse. And the nature of American social and political institutions reinforces that tendency, for it is institutional settings that define the work of archivists and manuscript curators. Most archivists in the strict definition of the word work in the comparatively straightforward area of public records. Here there is a clear geographic structure of repositories from the National Archives, through the fifty state archives, to those relatively scarce cities and counties fortunate enough to have professional archivists on their staffs. With some variations and exceptions, these archivists work primarily on the records generated by the government which employs them.

The National Archives and Records Administration, established in 1934, dwarfs all other archival repositories in size and importance. Now an independent agency of the government, like the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution, it employs hundreds of professional archivists and has custody over about 1.4 million cubic feet of records. The staff of the National Archives is responsible for determining which files produced by each agency of the federal government are worthy of permanent retention. In addition, the archives runs the nine presidential libraries which contain the papers of the presidents since Herbert Hoover, as well as many of their associates. While the National Archives has pioneered in some aspects of archival administration, its complex bureaucracy and the sheer mountain of paper with which it deals make it very atypical.

In contrast, the state archives range from long-established, highly active institutions to small operations in obscure agencies. Despite the fact that the first state archives was established as early as 1901 in Alabama, a national overview reveals a very uneven pattern of support. Nevertheless, the diversity of state archives and their large but manageable size has ensured that some have always been in the forefront of archival experimentation. Current activities in such states as New York, Illinois, Texas, Kentucky, Alabama, and Wisconsin continue that tradition.

Not all archivists work for governments. Private institutional archives form the other major type of archival repository. All kinds of agencies, societies, and organizations maintain their own archives. Among the most common in the United States are those of colleges and universities, churches and other religious organizations, and corporations. Archives are also maintained by some labor unions, hospitals, social service organizations, and scientific groups. In sharp contrast to the government repositories, private institutional archives are often very small operations, with only one or two full-time professional archivists.

The world of manuscript repositories in many ways parallels this archival system, though there are significant differences. Because they go out into society to acquire from many different sources both personal papers and organizational records—"fugitive archives" in a sense—the lines of division between manuscript repositories are not as neat as they are for archives. Collecting policies overlap considerably. So there is no one institution like the National Archives, though the Library of Congress comes closest. The library's Manuscript Division, which was created in 1897, contains the papers of twenty-three presidents and the records of such national organizations as the NAACP. Of course other institutions have collected on a national scale, such as major universities like Harvard, Texas, and Indiana; libraries like the New York Public and the Newberry in Chicago; and research establishments like the Hoover Institution.

Most manuscript repositories are far more focused than these by geographic area or subject concentration, though in either case they can and do acquire collections of national importance. Manuscript collections with a geographic orientation are commonly found in public libraries, and many have recently been established at universities. But the most prominent are in the state and local historical societies, which
already numbered over 200 in the United States by 1900, and nearly 1,500 in 1944.\textsuperscript{11} They range from such large and professionally run institutions as the Massachusetts Historical Society (founded in 1791), to county repositories and even town or neighborhood societies, which are often open only a few hours a week and staffed by volunteers. Historical societies tend to include libraries, museums, and educational programs, as well as manuscript collections.\textsuperscript{12} Some double as genealogical societies, while others serve as the official public archives, as in Wisconsin.

Very different are subject-oriented manuscript collections, generally found in either academic settings or independent research institutions. Paralleling private institutional archives, in virtually every area of American life, they have collected personal papers and the records of defunct organizations or organizations unable to support their own archivist.\textsuperscript{13} For example, labor records are collected by Cornell, Wayne State, Georgia State, and Pennsylvania State universities and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, among others, while the Baker Library at Harvard and the Hagley Museum in Delaware are prominent collectors of business records.\textsuperscript{14} Many religious denominations and ethnic groups have historical societies or university collections devoted to their development. Larger repositories often specialize in a number of subjects. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, for example, has important groups of collections on contemporary social action and mass communications, as well as on labor. With private libraries like the Morgan in New York, the Clements in Michigan, and the Huntington in California, which specialize in rare and valuable items, added to the mixture, the rich complexity of the manuscripts world is evident.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ARCHIVISTS AND CURATORS

Archivists and manuscripts curators clearly work on a wide variety of subjects, with various types of records and in many different settings, all depending on the specific mission of the repository. Yet whatever that mission, archivists and curators share a broad range of professional responsibilities. The degree to which any individual is involved with one or all of them varies according to the size and organization of different repositories. But there is an essential core common to the work of all those responsible for historical records.

To put it succinctly, that core is the charge to preserve historically valuable materials and make them available for use. Everything else is an expansion of that deceptively simple assignment. It is important to remember this essential goal, because its implementation involves a great deal of detailed and often technical work, whose basic justification must always be kept in mind. Similarly, archivists and curators learn to adapt policies and procedures to both the nature and the content of their holdings. Archival work holds its interest only by avoiding a divorce between content and technique. Thus, the daily work of most professionals usually has a direct relationship to what their collections document.

ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL MANUSCRIPTS

The most fundamental set of tasks involves acquiring materials for the repository. "Adapting the aphorism that 'each generation rewrites history', it may be said that each generation collects records anew, not replacing what is already in hand, but enriching the accretion."\textsuperscript{15} To that end, archivists have to ensure that the "life cycle of records" in their organization culminates in the retention of historically important materials in the archives. Manuscript curators have to decide what areas and/or subjects they are willing and able to document. Archival decisions are often related to records management programs, which regulate the creation and destruction of internal paperwork, usually with a view toward efficiency rather than history.\textsuperscript{16} Manuscript repositories in contrast have to establish collecting policies, not unlike libraries. They look at their institutional mission and decide which of the thousands of potential collections of papers and records in the outside world they should even attempt to acquire. The transfer of organizational records can sometimes involve manuscript repositories in records management, but the operations of most repositories remain comparatively isolated from the creation of materials they hold.

Deciding what should be kept is still a long way from putting record cartons on the shelves. Both archives and manuscript repositories often conduct surveys to locate and identify potential acquisitions. An in-house survey is an obvious prelude to a sensible records management and archives program. For manuscript curators, general surveys of the potential donors in a field may help define a collecting policy. A more detailed survey of a possible acquisition can precede one of their most challenging tasks—obtaining an agreement for the transfer of records or personal papers.\textsuperscript{17} Unlike archivists, manuscript curators must persuade organizations and individuals to physically part with their property—whether by deed, will, deposit, gift, or some other agreement. An elaborate negotiation is often involved, and diplomatic skills are not the least of the requirements for many manuscript positions. A whole range of donor relationships and conditions of access can be discussed, and the discussions can go on for years before the material appears in the repository. While an archivist confronting a bureaucrat reluctant to part with "his" files might disagree, the process of establishing and implementing a collecting policy clearly distinguishes the world of manuscripts from that of archives.

Having been offered a set of records or successfully concluded a negotiation, one crucial task still lies ahead in the area of acquisitions—that of determining precisely which materials should be accepted into the repository. This process is called appraisal. Here the archivist's task is probably the more challenging. They may face tens of thousands of cubic feet of files, while manuscript collections rarely exceed a few hundred feet. As early as 1904, the first guide to federal archives noted that "the mere mass of these records of the government is well-nigh appalling", and the problem has gotten far worse in the ensuing decades.\textsuperscript{18} The National Archives saves less than 5 percent of the paper...
produced by the federal government, and a similar standard applies to many other public and corporate archives.

The decision-making process involves many complex considerations, of which value to historical scholarship is only one. To a large extent, appraisal is informed guesswork. "Recognizing that associating records with future use was a prophetic act, Philip Bauer concluded that 'prophecy is the essence of archival evaluation.'"Inactive records may have permanent value for the continued operation for the organization which created them—as a reference to past policies and procedures; for financial accounting; for legal requirements; for public relations programs; or for some other administrative purpose. Key files, such as minutes, are often saved as the basis of the corporate memory, without any thought of outside users. In the rather unique phraseology of the eminent British archivist Sir Hilary Jenkinson, the "Golden Rule of Archive-Making" is to ensure that records are in "such a state of completeness and order that, supposing (an administrator) and his staff to be by some accident totally obliterated, a successor totally ignorant of the work of the office would be able to take it up and carry it on with the least possible inconvenience and delay simply on the strength of a study of the Office files." In contrast to such considerations of "evidential value," saving records for their research potential involves an informed evaluation of the kind of information they contain, the nature of the activity they document, and how they might be useful to the research community. The archivist or curator must also assess how information is contained in the records—to what extent the collection can be made useable for research.

Whatever the arguments for saving records, whether for internal or external use or both, their value has to then be weighed against the mission and the resources of the repository. All records have some potential use to someone, which is often made clear to the archivist shortly after they are destroyed. But appraisal is the very difficult task of balancing that value against other factors, and often making the irreversible decision not to retain original records. One of the most important principles of appraisal is that not all old records are by definition archival; not all original documents deserve to be saved. As Leonard Rapport noted after many years in this field, "Appraisal is at best an inexact science, perhaps more an art; and a conscientious appraiser, particularly an imaginative one with an awareness of research trends and interests, is apt to know nights of troubled soul searching." Most archival and manuscript work begins when appraisal ends. Records have to be arranged, described, stored, and occasionally restored, before they can be used. These are detailed, labor intensive internal operations, a good deal of which can be done by nonprofessional staff under the general supervision of the archivist or curator. The first manual on such archival operations, published by three Dutch archivists in 1898, opens with the forlorn declaration that "This is a tedious and meticulous book. The reader is warned." The admonition applies most directly to the arranging and describing of materials, known as "processing." This is somewhat analogus to physical classification and book cataloging as done in a library.

There are, however, major differences. Both archivists and manuscript curators keep their holdings together by creator rather than by subject—the principle of "provenance." They arrange the materials by organizational structure or personal activity, and within that structure by type of filing group, such as memoranda, correspondence, diaries, ledgers, and so forth. The filing groups themselves—known to archivists as "series"—are kept in the same order as they were during their active life, where this was not purely idiosyncratic. This is known as the principle of "original order." Both provenance and original order are based upon the concept that, in Theodore Schellenberg's words, "records have a collective rather than a unitary significance. All records arising from a particular activity have a cohesive character and are part of one another. . . . Their subject content is only incidental to accomplishing an action." Finally, the main method of describing collections to others is not the catalog card but the inventory. Inventories can be many pages in length and customarily include an organizational history or personal biography, an essay on the major components of the collection, and a list of the different file units, sometimes down to the folder level. Archivists and curators thus think in terms of a document's place within an organically unified whole, rather than in terms of an individual book or article, as is the case with most library work.

The arrangement of records and the preparation of inventories are the bases for other internal operations. As records are arranged, those in need of repair, restoration, or special storage (such as photographs) can be separated. Preservation is a vital operation in all repositories, whether or not they can afford specialized staff, space, and equipment. Basic descriptive work also generates further activity. Many repositories produce published guides based on their inventories and report their holdings as described in the inventories to national data bases. These external "finding aids" are complemented by internal aids which supplement the inventories, such as special lists, card catalogs, and computerized indexes. Because manuscript repositories have many different collections with no organizational relationship to each other, it is especially important that they have some overall system to help provide users with access to information spread throughout their holdings.

COLLECTION USERS

Use is the ultimate justification for all the work outlined above. Archivists and curators have to be service-oriented rather than research-oriented. For those with traditional historical training, this can be a difficult assignment. The very knowledge and training which enables them to assist researchers can also tempt them to view the collections as
researchers. Many do in fact use their own collections. But their primary goal has to be enabling others to use them. The tension can be aggravated by the depth of knowledge which archivists and curators acquire about their holdings. Inventories, guides, and catalogs never provide the kind of detailed familiarity that comes from working on the materials. Library systems are designed to send people directly to books and articles. In contrast, because of what Richard Lytle has termed a "creator-oriented" approach, archival and manuscript systems lead researchers to the archivist for assistance.26 "The archivist is assumed to be a subject specialist who introduces the user to relevant records through the finding aids, and continues to mediate between the user and the archival system throughout the user's research."27

People come to archives and manuscript repositories for a variety of reasons. In many repositories, especially historical societies and public archives, the majority of users are genealogists. Most users of collections at colleges and universities are students or scholars. Institutional archives may rely on internal use in support of ongoing programs. In all repositories, professional historians are a distinct minority, while use by such people as lawyers and homeowners interested in historic preservation is increasing. Archivists and curators have to establish policies and procedures for access to and use of their materials which take the nature of their users into consideration. In addition, to maintain and increase both use and consequent institutional support, many repositories engage in public programs. These can include in-house or traveling exhibits, instructional sessions, and media presentations.28 Based on a widespread popular interest in history, they bring people into what are usually regarded as dusty, antiquated, and yet exclusive institutions to try to break down the barrier between the interest in history and the aversion to historical collections.

That same barrier exists for many professional historians, though in somewhat different form. While far from reluctant to use collections, they are usually unfamiliar with the application of historical skills in archival work. As users, they naturally have little interest in internal operations, and the most efficient repositories are those which bring researchers and materials together with the minimal amount of intervention from the archivist. So it is not difficult to see a repository in terms of stacks of boxes and an overwhelming amount of clerical detail. Yet the skills and knowledge of the historical profession are central to archival operations. Archivists and curators have to understand how research is conducted and how to evaluate historical evidence. They must be able to analyze large collections of documents, to determine what about them is significant, and to write about them in clear prose. In most cases, they must be knowledgeable about the subjects which their collections document and the trends in research on those subjects. These historical skills are especially important in such key functions as acquisitions, appraisal, description, use, and public programs. It is no accident that graduate historical training has always been considered essential for the administrators of major archival programs. For, in practice, "the archivist's use of history is as obvious as the historical researcher's use of archives."29

This symbiotic relationship is evident in a number of recent projects and publications. Perhaps the most interesting in the basic area of acquisitions was the work of the Joint Committee on the Archives of Science and Technology (JCAST). The committee was created in 1978 as a cooperative venture of the History of Science Society, the Society of American Archivists, the Society for the History of Technology, and the Association of Records Managers and Administrators. Its members spent five years analyzing the documentation of post-World War II American science and technology. Both the nature of research and development and the extremely complex structure of the scientific establishment itself pose unique difficulties for historians and archivists. Experiments produce huge amounts of data, the overwhelming mass of which cannot and should not be saved. Yet somehow the process of discovery—as opposed to merely the published results—has to be preserved. Much of that work of discovery takes place in industrial settings or private research institutes, where security is of far greater concern than history. Even if corporations and institutes saved their records, there would remain the problem of personal notes and papers, where many would argue that the real history of innovation can be found. And for all these records there is a wide variety of potential repositories, from specialized archival centers to the university archives which solicit the papers of prominent graduates. The JCAST group made recommendations for action and research in all these areas and more in their final report.30 Whatever its ultimate impact, by the time it was published in 1983, centers for the history of information processing, electrical engineering, physics, and chemistry were already in existence.

**TYPES OF RECORDS**

While archivists try to acquire the records of technology, they also have to deal with records made possible by technology—computerized or machine-readable records. In public agencies and large corporations, such records are increasingly used to document routine transactions such as cases and interoffice communication. A major effort is required to convince administrators that records are records whether they are on a paper base or a magnetized plastic base. Such an effort was made in Wisconsin between 1979 and 1981, when a survey of state agency files conducted jointly by the State Historical Society and the university's Data Library resulted in a program to apply archival principles to machine-readable records. The final report of the project analyzes the records produced by several key finance and service agencies and emphasizes the urgency of the problem.31 Unless archivists and historians can establish some control over the generation of such records early in their life cycle, there may be little usable social and economic documentation left for the future.

As some archivists struggle to identify records in unfamiliar fields like
science or unfamiliar formats like computer tapes, many others still fight the mountain of paper. The most prominent recent field of battle was at the Federal Bureau of Investigation. After a complicated series of court cases in the 1970s, the National Archives and the FBI were ordered to prepare a retention and disposition plan for the bureau’s case files, which the FBI had wanted to destroy. The resultant FBI Appraisal Project staff found themselves facing 25 million files in fifty-nine field offices as well as Washington. There were 214 different case classifications. Working with historians and FBI personnel, the staff evaluated each classification by examining nearly 18,000 files in detail and preparing a statistical profile for each classification. Historians contributed a list of 4,000 exceptional cases to be saved, while sampling percentages and procedures were developed for each classification. Statistical criteria of research significance were developed, the most reliable of which turned out to be the thickness of the folder. The “fat file” test of historical significance, first revealed in a study of Massachusetts court records, was thus reconfirmed. In the end, the staff recommended the retention of some fifty thousand cubic feet of files, or one-sixth of the original total.32

GUIDES AND INVENTORIES

Archivists and curators use one set of historical skills and knowledge in acquisitions and appraisal. They use other skills in descriptive work. Guides and inventories are the major vehicles for them to write about their collections. In such publications “the archivist has the opportunity and the obligation to analyze in some detail the content and the potential use of the records as well as (their) function and composition.”33 By their nature such writings are not usually best sellers, and their prose is rarely scintillating. But they can and sometimes do rise above the level of bureaucratic recitations. Both the organizational history or personal biography and the analysis of holdings, which precede the box lists in standard inventories, should be viewed as a legitimate form of critical historical writing. Similarly, the indices and appendices which often conclude inventories may involve considerable research and analysis of the collection. The inventories to record groups at the National Archives, though not known for their innovative style, are widely available examples of these customarily in-house documents and illustrate the kind of historical writing involved in archival description.

Institutional guides are intended for wider public distribution. Since they often list almost all of a repository’s holdings in a very summary way, they offer only limited opportunities for creative writing. One partial exception is the Guide to the Swarthmore College Peace Collection. Each collection entry is a capsule history or biography, and many offer evaluations of the collection.34 A different publication from a very different institution is the Guide to the Hoover Institution Archives, which relies on a detailed index, taking up one-third of the 420-page volume, and very short collection entries.35

Perhaps more challenging than the preparation of an institutional guide is the preparation of a guide to collections on a particular subject held by repositories around the country. The recent model in this area is the massive Women’s History Sources: A Guide to Archives and Manuscript Collections in the United States, published in 1979. The product of four years of work by a team of archivists and historians based at the University of Minnesota’s Social Welfare History Archives, the guide describes 18,026 collections in 1,558 institutions. It is arranged geographically and supplemented by a separate index volume. Using both a mail survey of 11,000 repositories and a team of twenty field workers, the survey staff did everything from working out a definition of “women’s collections” to occasionally processing a collection in order to find out what it contained. The success of the survey project resulted in a guide which has lived up to its promise to mark “the beginning of a new era of research into women’s lives.”36

ARCHIVISTS AND THEIR PUBLICS

Historians and archivists collaborate on projects like the Women’s History Sources survey because of their common interest in use. But not all interactions over use are so friendly. The interest of archivists and curators in long-term preservation, their reluctance to open unprocessed collections, and their need to respect the wishes of donors and depositors can conflict directly with the desire of researchers for access to documents. The basic issues were dealt with in 1976 at a conference on access to the papers of recent public figures sponsored by the Organization of American Historians—American Historical Association—Society of American Archivists Committee on Historians and Archivists. This conference at New Harmony, Indiana, did not entirely live up to the promise of the title,37 here historians of earlier periods were asked to work out a classification of the records of the contemporary era.38 Here historians of earlier periods allied with archivists in arguing that extreme demands could lead to the destruction of records rather than their preservation. But there was something of an adversarial climate at New Harmony, with a recognition that “the twin goals of preservation and use of historical sources are not always easily reconciled.”38

Archivists and curators usually interact with the public in the much less controversial area of historical public programming. Historical resources form the basis for a wide variety of programs, many of which go well beyond the traditional in-house exhibit. The Vanishing Georgia project begun in 1975 is an excellent example of a project which both
raised historical consciousness and saved valuable records. Using a mobile laboratory, a team of archivists traveled throughout the state copying photographs in the hands of individuals and institutions. As with so many old photographs, the content could only be explained by the owners. In a sense, the project was not only photographic history, but oral history. The Minnesota Historical Society has also been active in public programming, with a somewhat different approach. Drawing upon its own resources, the society has created multimedia History Research Units for distribution throughout the state. A unit on the Ojibwe people included thirty-five small booklets for classroom use, eight filmstrips, and a variety of charts, diagrams, and posters. The society has also offered mini-classes in such subjects as graphic resources, church records, and genealogical research.

One well-known program which involved many different kinds of public history activities was the New York State Historians-in-Residence Program. Many of its local projects involved either utilizing existing archival and manuscript resources, as in Minnesota, or helping people to uncover hidden resources in their own communities, as in Georgia. The program had a "philosophical commitment to the democratization of scholarship and learning." It thus viewed historical materials in an active sense, as resources which should be brought to people, rather than passively remaining in the proverbial dark stacks.

ARCHIVISTS AS ADMINISTRATORS

Such programs bring the archivists out of those stacks as well. Though their major concern is the core of activities comprising the acquisition, processing, preservation, and use of materials, archivists and curators have a variety of other roles and relationships. The most universal are as both administrators and employees within an organization. Except for the National Archives, archives and manuscript collections are always within some larger operation, whether a department of education supervising a state archives, a historical society which contains a manuscript section, or a university library with a department of special collections. Throughout the United States, "manuscript repositories are parts of a great variety of administrative structure but... none exists as an administrative unit unto itself." Since the numbers of people using their resources are always smaller than those visiting the museums or libraries which generally form the other parts of the organization, archivists and curators have to be able to justify the long-term value of their work to their superiors and contribute to the work of their colleagues in related cultural programs.

At the same time, archivists and curators have their own internal managerial responsibilities. Because most archives and manuscript collections are relatively small, administrative arrangements tend not to be elaborate. However, in contrast to academic historians, archivists and curators generally work a thirty-five to forty-hour week within an organized hierarchy. Few repositories are run collegially. In larger operations, the professional staff may be organized functionally or by type and subject of records, with a few senior archivists responsible for overall policy and administration. But most professional archivists and curators, even in entry-level positions, have some staff of their own, which might consist of paraprofessionals, clerks, student assistants, and/or volunteers. Archivists have to not only plan and organize their work but also supervise it as it proceeds. So in dealing with people on all administrative levels, archivists and curators develop and employ the same kinds of common sense skills in human relations found necessary in all modern organizations.

Other administrative responsibilities are similarly removed from typical academic concerns. Many archivists and curators, especially in smaller operations, also have some responsibilities for physical planning, security, public relations, and budgeting. Perhaps their most important administrative task is fund raising, since repositories are chronically short of money. Internal support can sometimes be increased by participation in such ongoing activities as a commemorative history or a research project. A more regular flow of funds can come from an endowment campaign or the establishment of a "Friends" group, both activities drawing on people with a special interest in the repository's holdings. In addition, there are a variety of external funding sources. Preparing grant proposals for submission to these sources is a challenging task, drawing upon the archivist's skill in conceptualizing needs, developing work plans and budgets, and presenting the proposal in clear but persuasive prose.

National and local private foundations sometimes support archival or manuscript projects, but the archivist has to know the interests and requirements of the foundation being approached. Many are limited both in geography and scope, though local foundations are often responsive to local historical needs. The federal government has been a more reliable source of funding for the profession as a whole. The primary purpose of both the Access Section of the Reference Works Program (formerly the Research Resources Program) of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Records Program of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission is to support archives and manuscript repositories. Together they have funded hundreds of projects. Both agencies insist on sound internal funding before they approve proposals. Looking ahead, one NEH administrator predicted that "increasingly, federal funds will be seen as only one of several sources of support, with additional monies to come from the institution itself and from private sources." Archivists and curators thus have to sustain basic support even as they seek outside grants for special projects.

THE ARCHIVISTS' NETWORK

That sometimes delicate balancing act emphasizes the network of professional relationships within which archivists and curators operate.
Financial and administrative arrangements often link them with records managers and/or librarians. Archives in the narrow sense of in-house repositories are especially close to records management operations. In fact, records management as a separate field grew out of the archival profession in the 1940s as a result of the New Deal–World War II government paper explosion. Records managers were thus naturally oriented toward rapid disposal. The field expanded rapidly since it offered government and business a bottom line saving in space and office efficiency. By 1955 records managers had their own organization and soon developed their own training system. They are now essential to all large public and private bureaucracies and are often found well placed in the organization charts. But in their rise they have generally left behind history as well as archivists. As early as 1951, the Archivist of the United States explained that “management outlook and experience are essential to the records management specialist if he is to develop as a member of the management team.” In some respects, the records manager’s orientation underlines the essential ties between archivists and the historical profession. In relation to the records manager—usually the only other professional in an organization who is primarily concerned with records—the archivist inevitably becomes the advocate for history.

Relations between the archival profession and librarianship are also close and complex. The former is sometimes described as a cross between historical study and librarianship, for “archives and libraries exist as cultural institutions for a common purpose, to collect, maintain, and make available the written and graphic record of man’s intellect and experience.” The comparison is especially apt for manuscript collections, which like libraries develop collecting policies, have elaborate descriptive systems, and are justified on intellectual rather than administrative grounds. But innovative library practices such as automated information retrieval and overall collection management are increasingly useful to archives as well.

However, the administrative placement of archives and manuscript collections within libraries raises serious difficulties, even while providing materials a safe haven. Libraries are oriented toward the acquisition and handling of widely used books and periodicals, and “any library responsive to its clientele will place funding emphasis on the services most in demand.” Archives and manuscripts are often found in special collections departments removed from the central work of the library. Library administrators have in addition become increasingly preoccupied with automation and management, minimizing their involvement with specialized research materials. Similarly, graduate training in librarianship is now oriented toward the “information sciences” rather than specific bibliographic knowledge, a development which has exacerbated the issues both of the placement of archives in libraries and the role of library education in archival training.

VARIETIES OF PUBLIC HISTORY

THE ARCHIVIST’S EDUCATION

The latter issue remains alive because agreement has never been reached on an educational system for archivists and manuscript curators. Traditionally, graduate work in archival history was combined with post-appointment on-the-job training or attendance at the short institute conducted by the National Archives. By the early 1970s, graduate courses in archival management had been developed by individual archivists at a number of universities. The common core of their programs was codified as the guidelines for education adopted by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) in 1977. These mandate an introductory course on theory and operations, an internship of at least 140 hours providing professional preparation, and an independent research project—in practice, three courses completed in a year of study. The courses should be taught at accredited universities by archivists. The society refrained from trying to enforce the guidelines, and while most programs accommodate them, there remains little standardization in archival education.

The SAA guidelines notably failed to state within what larger graduate program the courses were to be offered. Some are in history departments, some in library schools, and others in both. Advocates of historical training argue the need for subject expertise and a knowledge of the research process. The SAA guidelines state clearly that “training in research methods and experience in conducting original research are essential if the archivist is to fully discharge his or her professional responsibilities.” Supporters of librarianship note the archivists’ need for administrative and technical skills, and a service orientation. Further, they claim that the guidelines “fail to integrate archival education into the larger field of information sciences.” The ideal combination may well be history and some elements of information sciences. While the debate continues, changes are taking place. Regardless of department, education according to the SAA Guidelines is becoming the professional norm. From now on, “archival institutions administered by well-trained and experienced archivists will insist that new employees also be well-trained and educated.”

Archival education does not necessarily lead to a standard entry-level position. Most people do begin by doing a good deal of processing and basic reference work, but in small operations they may do much else besides. Many beginning positions are specialized grant projects and can lead to permanent specialized positions in larger repositories. In such repositories, there is a career ladder of increasing administrative and policy responsibility, as in the library or museum fields. Administration of an archival or manuscript program can lead to higher level of overall historical agency administration. But most archivists and manuscript curators seem to find the absence of large-scale organization an attraction of their work, with its consequent closeness to historical materials and their users.

That almost intimate scale of work is reflected in the profession’s
structure. The Society of American Archivists, headquartered in Chicago, has about two thousand members and publishes the journal of record, the American Archivist. In addition, through its publications program, workshops, placement service, lobbying efforts, national convention, and other activities, the SAA offers the full range of professional services. Regional and state archival organizations have flourished since the early 1970s, and these less elaborate groups "have largely supplanted the SAA as the vehicle by which younger archivists gain much needed organizational experience and professional maturity."51 Recently even more informal archival groups have formed in most major metropolitan areas. The fairly complete coverage of the profession geographically and its small size—with only about four thousand members in all organizations in 1982—means that few people are long unaware of major new trends and developments in the field.

NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In the 1980s those trends and developments range from the automation of internal operations to the increase in university trained archivists. Automation is perhaps the most ubiquitous and certainly the most discussed. Archives and manuscript collections were traditionally idiosyncratic, with no common holdings or purchasing procedures to justify standardization on the library model. Each repository had its own forms and system of finding aids. Until some uniformity was achieved, there could be little automated information sharing between institutions, though individual repositories could automate such operations as the internal preparation and updating of inventories. By the early 1980s, basic rules and formats for the cataloging and summary description of archives and manuscript collections had finally been developed through cooperation between the SAA, the Library of Congress, and the Research Libraries Group. This breakthrough is making possible the gradual emergence of a computerized, searchable national data base encompassing descriptions of the holdings of many different repositories. In addition, the automating of descriptions and related information about individual collections will lead many repositories to use computers and data bases for internal housekeeping, assistance to researchers, and better overall archival planning. For the future, "systems that combine records management and information management functions will soon be the sine qua non of modern archives."52

The holdings of archives are changing as well as their internal operations. The rise of social history as a field of study in the past twenty years has had a great impact on the profession. Both the subjects of and the sources for new collections have begun to change. Archivists and, more directly, manuscript curators have become conscious of the need to document the experiences of the majority of the people in our society and the processes which affected their lives. Thus, repositories have collected vigorously in such areas as women's history, black history, labor history, and urban history. They began to approach neighborhood organizations and community activists in addition to the traditional civic leaders and prominent families. Nevertheless, most collections still come from a fairly narrow spectrum, and "the most crucial problem" remains "the lack of representative documentation for the entire range of socioeconomic classes."53 In addition to altering the contents of repositories, social history has also demanded a rethinking of archival practices. The need to study everyday life translates in archival terms into an argument for retaining large numbers of typical records or cases, rather than focusing on the exceptional. Further, social history requires the retrieval of thematic information which cuts across organizational lines, while records are arranged organizationally according to the principle of provenance. Fortunately, the automation of finding aids may well make it "possible to satisfy both the archivist's need to preserve original order and the researcher's desire for subject access."54

Social history and the computer also combine in the troublesome area of machine-readable records, which now contain so much of our socioeconomic documentation. As more "files" are retained in a computerized format, archivists are faced with an increasingly fundamental challenge. Unless the problems of obsolescence and incompatibility affecting both hardware and software are solved, it is hard to see how repositories can deal with these records.55 And yet computerized information storage is a possible solution to two major problems confronting all repositories—the continuing paper explosion and the long-term deterioration of paper. While microfilming and mass deacidification are fairly effective short-term responses, the basic issues remain. In addition to electronic storage, a better technological response may be laser-encoded optical disks. By the late 1980s, these could hold up to 54,000 pages or images on a 12-inch diameter record; be assembled in searchable juke box systems of a thousand or more; and provide a permanent storage medium for such diverse records as paper, photographs, and machine readable data. This technology has the potential for causing a true archival revolution.

Archivists and manuscript curators have responded in several ways to changes in operations, research interests, and record formats. In the words of F. Gerald Ham, "technology and society push us into a more activist role in managing the archival record," inevitably leading archivists into what he has called the "post-custodial era."56 Drawing upon the experience of libraries, they have begun to think in terms of repository-wide collection management, which can include budget and cost analysis of each operation and collection, reappraisal and deaccessioning, and cooperation among repositories in acquisitions, processing, and preservation. As a result of financial restrictions, they have become more active in promoting the values of historical materials and working with allied professions. Closely related is a more systematic approach to discovering who users are, what they need, and why they use materials—an attempt "to think of archives as client-centered, not materials-centered."57

All of these activities have called forth a new type of archivist. Graduate training in the administration of archives and historical manuscripts is
becoming essential. The growth of professional education has been as much a trend of the past two decades as automation. As archivists and curators increasingly find themselves in such environments as corporations and universities, legitimate credentials become both necessary and justifiable—necessary because in practical terms, “Society deserves professional value for its money, and requires from us a recognizable badge”; but justifiable as well, because of the increasing complexity and sophistication of the field. The archival profession is the oldest of the applied historical sciences. Yet it is also the one most closely related to the far newer information sciences. The challenge facing today’s archivists and manuscript curators is to draw upon these two traditions while retaining their unique focus on our society’s documentary heritage.59

NOTES


14. A good overview of one field is the special archives issue of Labor History 23 (Fall 1982).


16. See for example David Hyslop and Irene Place, Records Management (Reston, Va.: Reston Publishing, 1982); Violet Thomas and Dexter Schubert, Records Management: Systems and Administration, (Silver Spring, Md.: Association for Information and Image Management, 1983); and Mina Johnson and Norman Kallaus, Records Management (Cincinnati: Southwestern Publishing, 1982).


18. Quoted in Brooks, Research in Archives, 94.


37. Alonzo L. Hamby and Edward Weldon, eds, Access to the Papers of Public
VARIETIES OF PUBLIC HISTORY


38. Ibid., 8.
39. See Vanishing Georgia: Photographs from the Vanishing Georgia Collection, Georgia Department of Archives and History (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1982).
46. Ibid., 155.
48. Ibid., 2.
59. For a related essay, on business archives, see Philip F. Mooney's "The Practice of History in Corporate America: Business Archives in the United States" elsewhere in this book.

Donald A. Ritchie is Associate Historian in the Senate Historical Office. He graduated from the City College of New York and received his Ph.D. in History from the University of Maryland. Among his publications are James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980) and a high school textbook, Heritage of Freedom: History of the United States (New York: Scribner, 1983). He chaired the American Historical Association's committee on Congressional Fellowships, the Oral History Association's publications committee, and the Society for History in the Federal Government's subcommittee on oral history. A past president of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), in 1984 he received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue award for significant contributions to the field of oral history. In 1985, after completing a term on its council, he was elected vice president/president-elect of the Oral History Association.

THE ORAL HISTORY/PUBLIC HISTORY CONNECTION

Donald A. Ritchie

Public historians, because they are still creating and refining their craft as they practice it, have found the tape-recorded, transcribed interview an infinitely adoptable and usable tool. Whether in government agencies, museums, corporations, labor unions, documentary film-making, or folk festivals, oral history provides a means of collecting information and developing new perspectives about individuals and institutions. It also creates a record in a vernacular form that can be easily transmitted to the popular audience that public historians try to reach.

My own contact with both public history and oral history happened more by chance than by careful career planning. I entered graduate school in history in the 1960s, excited by the prospects of researching, writing, and teaching, and emerged in the 1970s to find precious few academic positions available. But I had the opportunity to develop some skills not traditionally included in a graduate education, which were unexpectedly handy when making the transition to public history. For one, I participated in a historical editing program at the University of Maryland that involved an editing seminar, work on several editorial projects, and editing a graduate student journal. The Maryland Historian. My introduction to oral history was considerably less systematic.

While researching for a doctoral dissertation on the career of James M. Landis, who held posts in the New Deal, Fair Deal, and New Frontier,