

---

# American Archival History: Its Development, Needs, and Opportunities

RICHARD J. COX

ARCHIVISTS, IN THEIR SELECTION, DESCRIPTION, and interpretation of historical records, must employ all the best qualities of the historian. It is, then, with irony that we view the poor condition of the study of American archival history. Only over the past decade and a half have archivists begun to seriously consider the history of their own vocation. I do not mean to imply that little has been written and published on this subject. The literature is voluminous and dates back to the primeval period of American archives, the late 19th century. A careful scrutiny, however, reveals an uneven coverage in both quality and subject, a truly lamentable situation. It is vital that we know as much as possible about the development of the profession to aid our continued self-study, reevaluation, and progress, especially in time of unusual stress and change. We need to direct the historian's perspective not only to the records under our care but to our profession as well.

This essay is intended to examine the trends of research on the history of

American archives, to assess its strengths and weaknesses, and to suggest some areas for future research. One additional preliminary note needs to be stated. My definition of the archival profession, as will be seen below, is broad. I consider its originators—even if this necessitates an overly long gestation period—to be the pioneer manuscript collectors and first historical societies of more than two centuries past. Those professional historians and historically-trained archivists who preemptively write of the American archival movement as solely the manifestation of a professionalization of history ignore a main line of its ancestry, one still in evidence and vitally important today.

The pioneer essays in American archival history appeared between the last years of the 19th century and the 1920s. By then private collectors and historical societies had been active in the United States for a century. The formation of an historical profession, emphasizing the critical use of sources via intensive seminar training, in these same years

focused a new attention on the early institutional and individual manuscript collectors. The historians' interest primarily emanated from the need to know of the locations of records, but, being historians, it is not surprising to see this interest expanded to the history of repositories and biographies of collectors and documentary editors. Justin Winsor's 1887 essay on the "conspicuous collections extant," based upon his monumental eight-volume *Narrative and Critical History of America*, devotes equal space to the careers of Jared Sparks, Peter Force, and George Bancroft.<sup>1</sup> Herbert Baxter Adams, the leading advocate of scientific history while at the Johns Hopkins University from 1876 to 1901, also thought highly enough of Sparks to compose a two-volume biography, a work still valuable today for its liberal publication of his letters and journals.<sup>2</sup> These efforts by Winsor and Adams were among the best of a literature that was large even in these early years.

The historical profession was a strong impetus for studying the formation of early manuscript collections and record

keeping practices. The American Historical Association's sponsorship of a Historical Manuscripts Commission and Public Archives Commission, in 1895 and 1899, respectively, also encouraged the gathering of data on these subjects. An essay on the "dispersion" of George Washington's papers, a scathing attack on the lack of care of the state records of New York, and a review of the initial two decades of the Public Archives Commission all were written to encourage historians to fight for the better preservation of American historical records, but each also provided information on the history of American archives.<sup>3</sup> This was especially evident by the 1920s. The Public Archives Commission was a catalyst in the formation of state archives among Southern states, and two decades later, in the *North Carolina Historical Review* issued between 1926 and 1929, summary essays on these programs were published.<sup>4</sup> Although they were generally only catalogues of earlier legislation and often included saccharine predictions of the future, these essays constituted the first serious regional survey of the

<sup>1</sup>"The Manuscript Sources of American History: The Conspicuous Collections Extant," *Magazine of American History* 18 (July 1887): 21-34; reprinted in the *Papers of the American Historical Association* (New York: American Historical Association, 1889) 3: 9-27.

<sup>2</sup>*The Life and Writings of Jared Sparks: Comprising Selections from His Journals and Correspondence*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1893). It is surprising, and regrettable, that Sparks still has not been the subject of a modern biography.

<sup>3</sup>J. M. Toner, "Some Account of George Washington's Library and Manuscript Records and Their Dispersion from Mount Vernon, With an Excerpt of Three Months From His Diary in 1774 While Attending the First Continental Congress, With Notes," *American Historical Association Annual Report 1892* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), 73-169; Victor Hugo Paltsits, "Tragedies in New York's Public Records," *American Historical Association Annual Report 1909* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 369-78 (this article also was published in the *Magazine of History* 12 [July 1910]: 36-42); Paltsits, "An Historical Résumé of the Public Archives Commission from 1899 to 1921," *American Historical Association Annual Report 1922*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1926), 1: 152-60.

<sup>4</sup>Mitchell B. Garrett, "The Preservation of Alabama History," *North Carolina Historical Review* 5 (January 1928): 3-19; Philip M. Hamer, "The Preservation of Tennessee History," *Ibid.* 6 (April 1929): 127-39; J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton, "The Preservation of North Carolina History," *Ibid.* 4 (January 1927): 3-21; Theodore H. Jack, "The Preservation of Georgia History," *Ibid.*, 4 (July 1927): 239-51; Grace King, "The Preservation of Louisiana History," *Ibid.* 5 (October 1928): 363-71; Charles W. Ramsdell, "The Preservation of Texas History," *Ibid.* 6 (January 1929): 1-16; James A. Robertson, "The Preservation of Florida History," *Ibid.* 4 (October 1927): 351-65; A. S. Salley, Jr., "Preservation of South Carolina History," *Ibid.* 4 (April 1927): 145-57; David Y. Thomas, "The Preservation of Arkansas History," *Ibid.* 5 (July 1928): 263-74; Lyon G. Tyler, "Preservation of Virginia History," *Ibid.* 3 (October 1926): 529-38; and William H. Weathersby, "The Preservation of Mississippi History," *Ibid.* 5 (April 1928): 141-50.

history of the archival profession and were the primary sources for two later excellent composites of archival development in the South.<sup>5</sup>

Without the leadership of a national archival body and professional society or the convenient forum of a specialized journal, however, research and writing on American archival history, or on any other archival subject, was severely limited. This problem was rectified quickly in the mid-1930s with the opening of the National Archives (1934), the establishment of the Society of American Archivists (1936), and the start of the quarterly *American Archivist* (1938). The National Archives provided a national perspective to hitherto scattered records programs and the SAA concentrated on professional issues and concerns; the existence of a journal enabled a consistent dissemination of information on such matters. From the late 1930s through the 1950s the *American Archivist* featured numerous essays on the histories of state and federal programs, as fledgling national and state programs, the onslaught

of the Second World War, and the unprecedented proliferation of government records forced archivists to grapple with issues ranging from disposition of records to dissemination of vital information. A common methodology for resolving records problems was historical research on records legislation and earlier procedures.<sup>6</sup>

The archival literature of the 1940s and early 1950s brought forth few new or definitive studies. Leslie Dunlap's 1944 analysis of the early development of American historical societies, concentrating on their role as institutions "organized primarily to collect, preserve, and make available the materials for the history of the United States or a section of it," was by far the best of this period.<sup>7</sup> By the end of the 1940s, however, the literature was improving rapidly. Roscoe P. Hill's 1951 history of searches for American records in foreign archives, as well as William B. Hesseltine's biography of collector and historical society administrator Lyman Copeland Draper a few years later, provided, along with Dunlap's study, a

<sup>5</sup>Philip M. Hamer, "The Records of Southern History," *Journal of Southern History* 5 (February 1939): 3-17 and J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton, "Three Centuries of Southern Records, 1607-1907," *Ibid.* 10 (February 1944): 3-36.

<sup>6</sup>Christopher B. Coleman, "Indiana Archives," *American Archivist* 1 (October 1938): 201-14; R. H. Woody, "The Public Records of South Carolina," *Ibid.* 2 (October 1939): 244-63; Edwin Adams Davis, "Archival Development in the Lower Mississippi Valley," *Ibid.* 3 (January 1940): 39-46; Harriet Smither, "The Archives of Texas," *Ibid.* 3 (July 1940): 187-200; Siert F. Riepma, "A Soldier-Archivist and His Records: Major General Fred C. Ainsworth," *Ibid.* 4 (July 1941): 178-87; Edward F. Rowse, "The Archives of New York," *Ibid.* 4 (October 1941): 267-74; Waldo Gifford Leland, "Historians and Archivists in the First World War," *Ibid.* 5 (January 1942): 1-17; William D. Overman, "Ohio Archives," *Ibid.* 5 (January 1942): 36-39; Henry P. Beers, "Historical Development of the Records Disposal Policy of the Federal Government Prior to 1934," *Ibid.* 7 (July 1944): 181-201; Carl L. Lokke, "The Captured Confederate Records Under Francis Lieber," *Ibid.* 9 (October 1946): 277-319; Henry Howard Eddy, "The Archival Program of Pennsylvania," *Ibid.* 12 (July 1949): 255-66; William D. McCain, "History and Program of the Mississippi State Department of Archives and History," *Ibid.* 13 (January 1950): 27-34; J. H. Easterby, "The Archives of South Carolina," *Ibid.* 15 (July 1952): 241-47; and Robert M. Brown, "The Development of an Archival Program in Minnesota," *Ibid.* 16 (January 1953): 39-44.

The *American Archivist* has never had a monopoly on the archival literature. In these early years a number of other noteworthy studies appeared in other journals including, for example, Dallas Irvine, "The Genesis of the *Official Records*," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 24 (1937): 221-29; "The Fate of Confederate Archives," *American Historical Review* 44 (July 1939): 823-41; and "The Archives Office of the War Department, Repository of Captured Confederate Archives, 1865-1881," *Military Affairs* 10 (Spring 1946): 93-111. I would strongly contend, however, that the vast quantity of such studies has appeared in this single journal and that such articles are far more widely read in it because of easier and wider access to the archival profession.

<sup>7</sup>*American Historical Societies, 1790-1860* (Madison, Wisconsin: privately printed, 1944).

good introduction to the 19th-century origins of the modern archives movement.<sup>8</sup> The 20th anniversary of the National Archives, its controversial placement under the General Services Administration, the unfortunate schism between archivists and records managers, the memoirs of a few elder archival statesmen, and the diversification of the profession stimulated the preparation of a small group of other useful archival histories.<sup>9</sup>

The increasing attention to the history of American archives in these years was, perhaps, a minor part of the search for the common and unifying elements of a profession that had become far more complex than its originators had ever imagined. All through the 1950s and early 1960s the presidents of the Society of American Archivists harped upon this

theme until, in 1965, W. Kaye Lamb officially "resigned" the profession to the fact that it was "so broad and varied that no one person can any longer claim to have a detailed knowledge of all its aspects."<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, some of the profession's chroniclers strived to connect the disparate elements of the archival movement in this country. Companion essays by Lyman H. Butterfield and Francis L. Berkeley in the 1954 *Proceedings* of the American Antiquarian Society traced the American concern for records preservation from the outburst of nationalism in the early 19th century to the work of professional archivists, editors, and historians a century later; Berkeley's essay was an admirable summary of the efforts to establish intellectual control over historical manuscripts with national surveys and the publica-

<sup>8</sup>Hill, *American Missions in European Archives* (Mexico: Instituto Pan Americano De Geografia e Historia, 1951) and Hesseltine, *Pioneer's Mission: The Story of Lyman Copeland Draper* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1954). Little additional work has been completed on these subjects except, for example, Nicholas Falco, "The Empire State's Search in European Archives," *American Archivist* 32 (April 1969): 109-23 and John Francis Bannon, "Herbert Eugene Bolton: His *Guide* in the Making," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 73 (July 1969): 35-55.

<sup>9</sup>Robert H. Bahmer, "The National Archives After 20 Years," *American Archivist* 18 (July 1955): 195-205; Herbert E. Angel, "Federal Records Management Since the Hoover Commission Report," *Ibid.* 16 (January 1953): 13-26; Victor Gondos, Jr., "The Era of the Woodruff File," *Ibid.* 19 (October 1956): 303-20; Bess Glenn, "The Taft Commission and the Government's Record Practices," *Ibid.* 21 (July 1958): 277-303; Robert W. Krauskopf, "The Hoover Commissions and Federal Recordkeeping," *Ibid.* 21 (October 1958): 371-99; Harold T. Pinkett, "Investigations of Federal Record-keeping, 1887-1906," *Ibid.* 21 (April 1958): 163-92 and "The Forest Service, Trail Blazer in Recordkeeping Methods," *Ibid.* 22 (October 1959): 419-26; Fred Shelley, "The Interest of J. Franklin Jameson in the National Archives: 1908-1934," *Ibid.* 12 (April 1949): 99-130 and "Manuscripts in the Library of Congress: 1800-1900," *Ibid.* 11 (January 1948): 3-19; Elizabeth Donnan and Leo F. Stock, eds., *An Historian's World: Selections from the Correspondence of John Franklin Jameson*, *Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 42 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956); R. D. W. Connor, "FDR Visits the National Archives," *American Archivist* 12 (October 1949): 323-32; Waldo G. Leland, "The First Conference of Archivists, December 1909: The Beginnings of a Profession," *Ibid.* 13 (April 1950): 109-20, "Some Early Recollections of an Itinerant Historian," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 61 (October 1951): 267-96; "The Story of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library," *Archivi* 1 (1951): 47-52, "R. D. W. Connor, First Archivist of the United States," *American Archivist* 16 (January 1953): 45-54; "The Creation of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library: A Personal Narrative," *Ibid.* 18 (January 1955): 11-29; "John Franklin Jameson," *Ibid.* 19 (July 1956): 195-201; and "The Prehistory and Origins of the National Historical Publications Commission," *Ibid.* 27 (April 1964): 187-94; Henry J. Browne, "The American Catholic Archival Tradition," *Ibid.* 14 (April 1951): 127-39; William Warren Sweet, "Church Archives in the United States," *Ibid.* 14 (October 1951): 323-31; Lester J. Cappon, "Archival Good Works for Theologians," *Ibid.* 22 (July 1959): 297-307; and Oliver W. Holmes, "Some Reflections on Business Archives in the United States," *Ibid.* 17 (October 1954): 291-304.

<sup>10</sup>Philip C. Brooks, "Archivists and Their Colleagues: Common Denominators," *American Archivist* 14 (January 1951): 33-45; Wayne C. Grover, "Archives: Society and Profession," *Ibid.* 18 (January 1955): 3-10; Morris Radoff, "What Should Bind Us Together," *Ibid.* 19 (January 1956): 3-9; Mary Givens Bryan, "Changing Times," *Ibid.* 24 (January 1961): 3-10; and W. Kaye Lamb, "The Changing Role of the Archivist," *Ibid.* 29 (January 1966): 7.

tion of repository guides and archives administration manuals.<sup>11</sup> A few years later, the first single-volume history of the archival profession in all of its variety appeared in the guise of a festschrift for Herbert A. Kellar. With essays on public archives, pioneer organizations and collectors, historical editing, microphotography, and the first analysis of the Historical Records Survey, this tome was primarily a reflection of Kellar's career that, due to the multiplicity of his interests, also accurately portrayed the diverse parameters of the profession.<sup>12</sup>

The Kellar volume also was representative of another transitional stage in the profession, the passing of a generation of leadership. In some cases, as with Herbert A. Kellar, there was pause and honor. More broadly, however, there was a serious reevaluation of accepted methods and the presentation of and experimentation with new techniques. The result was a triumvirate of massive, official studies of the predominant archival establishments in this country—historical societies, state archives, and the National Archives—that called for specific actions of all kinds, including more serious study of their history.

These three books—Walter Muir Whitehill's *Independent Historical Societies*, Ernst Posner's *American State*

*Archives*, and H. G. Jones's *The Records of a Nation*—are, with little debate, among the most significant publications concerning this profession.<sup>13</sup> Few who brand themselves archivists have not perused these writings. Whitehill, Posner, and Jones each were sponsored by professional organizations<sup>14</sup> to examine specific problems and summarize the current conditions of the respective institutions. Whitehill explored the “financial crisis” and mandate of American historical societies, Posner the reasons for the dramatically uneven quality of state archives, and Jones the controversial placement of the National Archives under the General Services Administration. The success of these books was mixed not because the authors missed their assigned mark but, especially in the case of Posner's work, because the profession ignored their findings.<sup>15</sup>

Examining the work of Whitehill, Posner, and Jones from a different perspective, as studies of American archival history, makes all three unqualified successes. Before and since Whitehill, with the one single exception of Dunlap's earlier book, the studies of American historical societies have tended to be largely commemorative ventures, celebrating donors and patrons,

<sup>11</sup>Francis L. Berkeley, Jr., “History and Problems of the Control of Manuscripts in the United States,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 98 (June 15, 1954): 171–78 and Lyman H. Butterfield, “Archival and Editorial Enterprise in 1850 and in 1950: Some Comparisons and Contrasts,” *Ibid.*, 159–70.

<sup>12</sup>William B. Hesseltine and Donald R. McNeil, eds., *In Support of Clio: Essays in Memory of Herbert A. Kellar* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1958). Contributors included George L. Anderson, G. Philip Bauer, Lester J. Cappon, Lucile M. Kane, David L. Smiley, David D. Van Tassel, James A. Tinsley, and Richard D. Younger.

<sup>13</sup>Whitehill, *Independent Historical Societies: An Enquiry Into Their Research and Publication Functions and Their Financial Future* (Boston: Boston Athenaeum, 1962); Posner, *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); and Jones, *The Records of a Nation: Their Management, Preservation, and Use* (New York: Atheneum, 1969).

<sup>14</sup>Whitehill was sponsored by the Council on Library Resources, Posner by the CLR and the Society of American Archivists, and Jones by the American Historical Association, Organization of American Historians, and the SAA.

<sup>15</sup>See, especially, H. G. Jones's comments on the neglect of Posner's book in his “The Pink Elephant Revisited,” *American Archivist* 43 (Fall 1980): 473–81.

and isolated to purely institutional concerns often in needless minutiae.<sup>16</sup> Much of Whitehill's book consists of brief institutional sketches, but the author, with a lively style and great affection, also carefully relates institutional and regional variations and subtleties to the reader. It remains the one single volume that must be read on this subject. Posner did the same for state archives. Until Posner the profession had been fed a steady diet of brief, administrative histories that had changed little in three decades or more.<sup>17</sup> *American State Archives*, however, provided a lengthy chapter on their "genesis and evolution," a state-by-state evaluation, and a careful summary of findings. Not only did this book become a standard source on this subject, it pleaded throughout for further study. Jones's book on the National Archives was very similar to Posner's work, providing not only an excellent history of the federal program but also an evaluation of its status within the federal bureaucracy; the individual interested in either subject can read with equal profit.

Whitehill, Posner, and Jones made the 1960s the time that the possibilities of American archival history were realized, as they interwove archival history and current professional topics to an extent not seen previously. Jones himself wrote in the middle of that decade a model history of the origins of a state archival program, praised by Posner as the first scholarly evaluation of an individual state's records; its greatest flaw was only what it did not do: it failed to consider the development of the program from its creation.<sup>18</sup> American archival history was now a subject important enough to attract the attention even of writers of archival manuals and broader historiographical works. T. R. Schellenberg's 1965 manual, despite its controversial recommendations regarding archival training, is still remarkable for its considerable attention to the history of methodology, a subject its author devoted little more than a few pages to in his pioneering manual of a decade before.<sup>19</sup> More importantly, the professional historians David D. Van Tassel, George H. Callcott, O.

<sup>16</sup>Representative histories include the following: Mrs. John Trotwood Moore, "The Tennessee Historical Society, 1849-1918," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 3 (September 1944): 195-225; Floyd C. Shoemaker, *The State Historical Society of Missouri: A Semicentennial History* (Columbia: State Historical Society of Missouri, 1948); Mary W. Bethel and Harold D. Cater, "The Minnesota Historical Society: Highlights of a Century," *Minnesota History* 30 (December 1949): 293-330; Robert W. G. Vail, *Knickerbocker Birthday: A Sesqui-Centennial History of the New-York Historical Society, 1804-1954* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1954); Stephen T. Riley, *The Massachusetts Historical Society, 1791-1959* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1959); Richard C. Simmons, "The Historical Society of Delaware 1864-1964," *Delaware History* 11 (April 1964): 3-34; George R. Brooks, "The First Century of the Missouri Historical Society," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 22 (April 1966): 273-301; and Christopher P. Bickford, *The Connecticut Historical Society 1825-1975: A Brief Illustrated History* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1975).

<sup>17</sup>See, for example, William J. Petersen, "Iowa—The Challenge of the Archives," *American Archivist* 26 (July 1963): 327-31; Frank G. Evans, "The Many Faces of the Pennsylvania Archives," *Ibid.* 27 (April 1964): 269-83; and Linwood F. Ross, "The Adoption of an Archival Program for Maine," *Ibid.* 29 (July 1966): 395-402. Compare these to the earlier state essays mentioned in notes 4 and 6.

<sup>18</sup>*For History's Sake: The Preservation and Publication of North Carolina History 1663-1903* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966). For Posner's review see the *American Archivist* 30 (January 1967): 167. A number of other histories of this program have updated Jones's history; see Henry S. Stroupe, "The North Carolina Department of Archives and History—The First Half Century," *North Carolina Historical Review* 31 (April 1954): 184-200; Fannie Memory Blackwelder, "The North Carolina Records Management Program," *Ibid.* 36 (July 1959): 340-57; and, especially, Jeffrey J. Crow, ed., *Public History in North Carolina 1903-1978: The Proceedings of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary Celebration March 7, 1978* (Raleigh, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1979).

<sup>19</sup>*The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965). Compare this to his earlier *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

Lawrence Burnette, and Walter Rundell liberally included archives in histories of American historical writing and research,<sup>20</sup> a relationship that our historical colleagues had rarely appreciated prior to this time.

After the works of Whitehill, Posner, and Jones, the literature on the history of the profession expanded in both quantity and variety, keeping pace for a time with the growing and widening archival world. On one hand historians of archives returned to traditional topics and studied them anew and in greater depth. The 1970s was a time of thorough analysis of Southern state archives<sup>21</sup> and

the National Archives,<sup>22</sup> persistent subjects of such writing for two generations. Historical editing, written about by its pioneer modern practitioners since the early 1950s,<sup>23</sup> also was treated afresh, primarily because of this field's dramatic growth, spurred by the revitalization of the National Historical Publications Commission (now the National Historical Publications and Records Commission) since the mid-1960s. Lester Cappon's three essays, published from 1966 to 1978, provide the most complete and authoritative description of this subject.<sup>24</sup> The rediscovery of the

<sup>20</sup>Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America 1607-1884* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Callcott, *History in the United States 1800-1860: Its Practice and Purpose* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970); Burnette, *Beneath the Footnote: A Guide to the Use and Preservation of American Historical Societies* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1969); and Rundell, *In Pursuit of American History: Research and Training in the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970).

<sup>21</sup>Josephine Hart Brandon, "A History of the Official Records of the Colony and State of Georgia," Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1974; Richard J. Cox, "The Origins of Archival Development in Maryland, 1634-1934," Master's thesis, University of Maryland, 1978; Lilla Mills Hawes and Albert S. Britt, Jr., eds., *The Search for Georgia's Colonial Records*, Georgia Historical Society Collections, vol. 18 (Savannah: Georgia Historical Society, 1976); Robert R. Simpson, "Leland to Connor: An Early Survey of American State Archives," *American Archivist* 36 (October 1973): 513-22; Simpson, "The Origin of the Arkansas History Commission," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 32 (Autumn 1973): 241-54; Simpson, "The Origin of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History," *Journal of Mississippi History* 35 (February 1973): 1-13; and Simpson, "The Origin of State Departments of Archives and History in the South," Ph.D. diss., University of Mississippi, 1971.

<sup>22</sup>Alan H. Ginsberg, "The Historian as Lobbyist: J. Franklin Jameson and the Historical Archives of the Federal Government," Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1973; Victor Gondos, Jr., *J. Franklin Jameson and the Birth of the National Archives, 1906-1926* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Milton O. Gustafson, "The Empty Shrine: The Transfer of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to the National Archives," *American Archivist* 39 (July 1976): 271-85; Arnold Hirschon, "The Scope, Accessibility and History of Presidential Papers," *Government Publications Review* 1 (Fall 1974): 363-90; Louise Lovely, "The Evolution of Presidential Libraries," *Ibid.* 6 (1979): 27-36; Donald R. McCoy, "The Beginnings of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library," *Prologue* 7 (Fall 1975): 137-50; McCoy, "The Crucial Choice: The Appointment of R. D. W. Connor as Archivist of the United States," *American Archivist* 37 (July 1974): 399-413; and McCoy, *The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents 1934-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

<sup>23</sup>See, for example, Julian P. Boyd, "God's Altar Needs Not Our Pollishings," *New York History* 39 (January 1958): 3-21; Philip M. Hamer, "'... authentic Documents tending to elucidate our History,'" *American Archivist* 25 (January 1962): 3-13; Lyman H. Butterfield and Julian P. Boyd, "Historical Editing in the United States," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 72 (1963): 283-327; and Lyman H. Butterfield, "Editing American Historical Documents," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 78 (1966): 81-104.

<sup>24</sup>Lester J. Cappon, "A Rationale for Historical Editing Past and Present," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 23 (January 1966): 56-75; "American Historical Editors Before Jared Sparks: 'They Will Plant a Forest . . .,'" *Ibid.*, 3rd series, 30 (July 1973): 375-400; and "Jared Sparks: The Preparation of an Editor," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 90 (1978): 3-21. See also the following: Lyman H. Butterfield, "Worthington Chauncey Ford, Editor," *Ibid.* 83 (1971): 46-82 and Fredrika J. Teute, "A Historiographical Perspective in Historical Editing," *American Archivist* 43 (Winter 1980): 43-56.

Historical Records Survey in the mid-1970s was but another example. Archivists interested in the reference value of the massive, unpublished, and underutilized records inventories of this 1930s project soon studied its history as well.<sup>25</sup> And, finally, a few explored the profession's formative period under the wings of the academic historians.<sup>26</sup> By the end of the 1970s archivists, historians, and graduate history students all seemed to be flocking to a newly discovered virgin territory of research.

Progress on researching the history of American archives has been substantial, especially since the mid-1960s. Much, however, remains to be done. The vast proportion of excellent histories concerns only historical societies, federal records, and Southern state archives,

leaving gaps in our knowledge impossible to disregard. Despite a number of studies on colonial record keeping, no one has endeavored to trace the European precedents and influences; this is especially unfortunate since there is sufficient literature on European practices to draw upon.<sup>27</sup> Autograph collecting, a popular avocation since the early 19th century and extremely important for the preservation of historical records before the advent of professional archives, has been treated only in a few studies of early collectors and dealers.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps a greater understanding of the avocation could have helped us to avoid the unfortunate hoopla about replevin in very recent years. Even the vast literature on American state archives has short-changed local government records,

<sup>25</sup>Leonard Rapport, "Dumped from a Wharf into Casco Bay: The Historical Records Survey Revisited," *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 201-10; Edward C. Papenfuse, "A Modicum of Commitment: The Present and Future Importance of the Historical Records Survey," *Ibid.* 37 (April 1974): 211-21; Loretta Hefner, comp., *The WPA Historical Records Survey: A Guide to the Unpublished Inventories, Indexes, and Transcripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1980); Edward Francis Barrese, "The Historical Records Survey: A Nation Acts to Save Its Memory," Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1980; Chester W. Bowie, "The Wisconsin Historical Records Survey, Then and Now," *American Archivist* 37 (April 1974): 247-61; Trudy Huskamp Peterson, "The Iowa Historical Records Survey, 1936-1942," *Ibid.* 37 (April 1974): 223-45; Don Farran, "The Historical Records Survey in Iowa, 1936-1942," *Annals of Iowa*, 3rd series, 42 (Spring 1975): 597-608; and James A. Hanson, "The Historical Records Survey in Wyoming: 1936-1942," *Annals of Wyoming* 45 (Spring 1973): 69-91.

<sup>26</sup>William F. Birdsall, "The American Archivists' Search for Professional Identity, 1909-1936," Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1973; "The Two Sides of the Desk: The Archivist and the Historian, 1909-1935," *American Archivist* 38 (April 1975): 159-73; and "Archivists, Librarians, and Issues During the Pioneering Era of the American Archival Movement," *Journal of Library History* 14 (Fall 1979): 457-79.

<sup>27</sup>See, for example, Frank B. Evans, comp., *The History of Archives Administration: A Select Bibliography* (Vendôme: Imprimerie des Presses Universitaires de France for UNESCO, 1979). Two very recent examples that draw some parallels and demonstrate some promise for future work are Maygene Daniels, "The Ingenious Pen: American Writing Implements from the Eighteenth Century to the Twentieth," *American Archivist* 43 (Summer 1980): 312-24 and Laetitia Yeandle, "The Evolution of Handwriting in the English-Speaking Colonies of America," *Ibid.* 43 (Summer 1980): 294-311.

<sup>28</sup>Not including, of course, men like Draper, Force, Hazard, and Sparks, mentioned in other contexts above. Lester J. Cappon, "Walter R. Benjamin and the Autograph Trade at the Turn of the Century," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 78 (1966): 20-37; Joseph Edward Fields, "Israel K. Tefft—Pioneer Collector," *Manuscripts* 6 (Spring 1954): 130-35; Francis C. Haber, "Robert Gilmor, Jr.—Pioneer American Autograph Collector," *Ibid.* 7 (Fall 1954): 13-17; and W. R. Quynn, "Jacob Engelbrecht: Collector of Autograph Letters (1797-1878)," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 56 (December 1961): 399-408. See, also, Charles Hamilton, *Great Forgers and Famous Fakes: The Manuscript Forgers of America and How They Duped the Experts* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1980), a popular history with numerous illustrations that shows the potential of more scholarly work in this subject.

especially those of the municipalities.<sup>29</sup> And, finally, college and university archives, one of the fastest growing components of the profession during the past two decades, have been the subject of less than a handful of historical studies.<sup>30</sup> Add to this list other neglected subjects of archival theory and practice—arrangement and description, training, conservation, reprographics, archival architecture, and records management (other than federal), to name only a few<sup>31</sup>—and the weakness of the literature on American archival history becomes all too readily apparent. Perhaps its holes are too large and numerous even to allow at present the

preparation of a full history of the profession.

A brief comparison of this research with that on the history of the American historical profession is a telling indictment of our neglect. Not only have there been numerous general reviews of the historical profession's development, extending far back to the 1890s,<sup>32</sup> but nearly every decade a major reevaluation of the current state of their craft appears.<sup>33</sup> This phenomenon may be a product of their training, emphasizing the understanding of past work and searching for new interpretations of previously interpreted events. This can, and often does, produce sterile displays of erudi-

<sup>29</sup>A recent general overview is Richard J. Cox, "A Reappraisal of Municipal Records in the United States," *Public Historian* 3 (Winter 1981): 49–63. Other articles of miscellaneous value include Cox, "The Plight of American Municipal Archives: Baltimore, 1729–1979," *American Archivist* 42 (July 1979): 281–92; Jean T. Kadooka-Mardfin, "The Municipal Archives of the City and County of Honolulu—Its Creation and Collection," *Records Management Quarterly* 11 (April 1977): 38–40; and A. J. Wall, "The Printing of the Records of the City of New York in the Days of William M. Tweed by the 'Ring,'" *New-York Historical Society Bulletin* 7 (October 1923): 88–97.

<sup>30</sup>Maynard Brichford, "Academic Archives: Überlieferungsbildung," *American Archivist* 43 (Fall 1980): 449–60; Clifford Shipton, "The Harvard University Archives in 1938 and in 1969," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 18 (April 1970): 205–11; and Annabel Straus, "College and University Archives: Three Decades of Development," *College & Research Libraries* 40 (September 1979): 432–39.

<sup>31</sup>The following represent nearly the entire literature in these subjects: Richard C. Berner, "Arrangement and Description: Some Historical Observations," *American Archivist* 41 (April 1978): 169–81; Frank B. Evans, "Modern Methods of Arrangement of Archives in the United States," *Ibid.* 29 (April 1966): 241–63; Mario D. Fenyo, "The Record Group Concept: A Critique," *Ibid.* 29 (April 1966): 229–39; Evans, "Post-appointment Archival Training: A Proposed Solution for a Basic Problem," *Ibid.* 40 (January 1977): 57–74; H. G. Jones, "Archival Training in American Universities, 1938–68," *Ibid.* 31 (April 1968): 135–54; Ernst Posner, "Archival Training in the United States," *Archivum* 4 (1954): 35–47; James L. Gear, "Lamination After 30 Years: Record and Prospect," *American Archivist* 28 (April 1965): 293–97 and "The Repair of Documents—American Beginnings," *Ibid.* 26 (October 1963): 469–75; "History of the Barrow Lab, or, The Thirty Years that Revolutionized Paper," *Publishers Weekly* 189 (April 4, 1966): 72–73, 76, 78, 80; Leon DeValinger, Jr., "Lamination of Manuscripts at the Delaware State Archives, 1938–64," *American Archivist* 28 (April 1965): 290–93; Rolland E. Stevens, "The Microfilm Revolution," *Library Trends* 19 (January 1971): 379–95; Allen B. Veaner, ed., *Studies in Micropublishing 1853–1976: Documentary Sources*, Microform Review Series in Library Micrographic Management (Westport, Conn.: Microform Review, Inc., 1977); Gene Waddell, "Robert Mills's Fireproof Building," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 80 (1979): 105–35; and Evans, "Archivists and Records Managers: Variations on a Theme," *American Archivist* 30 (January 1967): 35–58.

<sup>32</sup>Just a few of the comprehensive reviews of American historical writing include the following: J. Franklin Jameson, *The History of Historical Writing in America* (New York: Antiquarian Press, Ltd., 1961; reprint of 1891 edition); Michael Kraus, *A History of American History* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, Inc., 1937); H. H. Bellot, *American History and American Historians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952); Harvey Wish, *The American Historian: A Social-Intellectual History of the Writing of the American Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); and Bert James Loewenberg, *American History in American Thought: Christopher Columbus to Henry Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).

<sup>33</sup>If one does not believe this, one may examine the most recent of these reevaluations, especially the editor's introductory essay; Michael Kammen, ed., *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

tion devoid of original ideas and written for a coterie of colleagues.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, such consistent self-appraisal is healthy. Its practitioners are fully aware of their profession's history and such knowledge is often effectively utilized in current controversies and debates and experimentation with new techniques and methodologies. Considering that the vast majority of archivists are still trained as historians, however, it is surprising that we have not followed this precedent.

What, then, is the problem with archivists and the still scanty histories of this profession? Is such a historical perspective of so little value? The answer is, obviously, no to the latter question. Not only are most archivists trained as historians and all vitally concerned with the past in the preservation of its records, but nearly every archival study of any merit commences with some form of historical introduction. Many of the studies mentioned above were written and published primarily to come to terms with some professional issue. The problem of the unevenness of this literature, therefore, lies elsewhere.

The problem exhibited by a review of the historical literature is a reflection of some fundamental weaknesses of our profession, *not* including a disregard for its own history—although that is the ultimate result. Very few archivists publish *anything*, partly a reflection of and contributing factor to a poor professional self-image.<sup>35</sup> The struggle by ar-

chivists for acceptance by their peers, the professional historians in academe, also has contributed to an emphasis on the uniqueness of archival work, an avoidance of other historical scholarship (even on their own profession), and isolation to preparing finding aids and assisting researchers; even much of what has been written is cast in the form of the administrative history normally expected as part of archival guides.<sup>36</sup> Even the new "public history" movement, an event of unlimited potential for our profession, has been greeted with suspicion and blatant animosity by some archivists.<sup>37</sup> Public history training in graduate schools and other new archival education programs also may provide what has been a missing stimulant to the intensive historical analysis of the archival profession: systematic classroom examination of the profession's development and characteristics. Despite the seriousness of such professional flaws, all seem in the process of being resolved.

What, then, needs to be accomplished in the field of American archival history? First, there is a need for extensive state histories, like that by H. G. Jones, that explain the efforts and relationships of historical societies, private collectors and antiquarians, professional historians, public programs, and college and university archives. The local scene provides the best mechanism for carefully and exhaustively examining our origins, progress, and successes and failures. Institutional analyses will only

<sup>34</sup>For such complaints by both professional and amateur historians, see Oscar Handlin, *Truth in History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979) and C. L. Sonnichsen, *The Ambidextrous Historian: Historical Writers and Writing in the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981).

<sup>35</sup>Lester J. Cappon, "Tardy Scholars Among the Archivists," *American Archivist* 21 (January 1958): 3-16 and David Mycue, "The Archivist as Scholar: A Case for Research by Archivists," *Georgia Archive* 7 (Fall 1979): 10-16.

<sup>36</sup>Karl L. Trever, "Administrative History in Federal Archives," *American Archivist* 4 (July 1941): 159-69, a classic essay which has seemingly set the tone for succeeding generations of archivists.

<sup>37</sup>David A. Clary, "Trouble Is My Business: A Private View of 'Public' History," *American Archivist* 44 (Spring 1981): 105-12, is an especially and, I might add, unnecessarily caustic view of this subject.

be of value if their institution's development is consistently tied to a broader perspective of professional, cultural, and local developments. Second, using local histories, studies of the regional variations of archival repositories could be attempted. Why have the Southern states been so much more successful than most other regions? Why have local government programs been so neglected across the various regions? Third, it would be of tremendous value to have one single-volume synthesis of the history of American archives, whether composed by an individual or a team of researchers. Such a volume could endeavor to trace this history from the pioneer antiquarians, collectors, and editors through the professionalization of history and the birth of the modern archives movement to the present problems of the field. A work of this magnitude would be a substantial contribution to the knowledge of historical

studies in the United States and an excellent reference for the continuing efforts to resolve contemporary problems and issues. The late Victor Gondos's book on Jameson's long lobbying effort for the establishment of a national archives, for example, has become highly relevant in light of recent federal financial policies seriously hampering our profession.<sup>38</sup>

The history of the American archival profession is, without question, an extremely important subject that requires our best and fullest attention. To those who contend that there are other priorities, I remind them of the much repeated, but perhaps little understood, dictum: the "past is prologue." The study of our professional past will enable a clear focus on the proper professional priorities; it is, in fact, a necessity for the future progress of the American archival profession.

---

<sup>38</sup>Gondos, *Jameson*. See note 22 for a full citation. Another example is a recent analysis of the Historical Records Survey primarily as a public welfare program of the Depression years, measuring its success in that light as well as its value to the historical community; Burl Noggle, *Working With History: The Historical Records Survey in Louisiana and the Nation, 1936-1942* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).