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# On the Value of Archival History in the United States

*Richard J. Cox*

Although there is increasing interest in American archival history, there has been no precise definition of its value. This essay is an effort to provide such a definition, arguing that the study of archival history is important for the following reasons: it addresses contemporary concerns of and issues facing the archival profession; it is an important tool to be used in self-evaluation and planning by archival programs; it can be used to develop a body of case studies that could facilitate a better understanding of the life cycle of cultural institutions such as archives; it is an excellent means of introduction for graduate students preparing to be archivists; it is a gateway through which to examine some fundamental questions about the nature of records and information; and the study of archival history provides an outlet for the scholarly interests of individual archivists.

## **Introduction**

Over thirty years ago Jesse Shera wrote a cogent essay entitled “On the Value of Library History.” Libraries, he reasoned in his watershed essay, must be examined as a vital part of society.<sup>1</sup> Prior to his writing, library history consisted mainly of narrow institutional histories and superficial commemorative accounts. Now this field includes a large quantity of excellent studies that employ sophisticated historical methodologies and feature differing schools of thought; individuals other than librarians are increasingly interested in the subject as well.<sup>2</sup> Archival history, closely related to library history, has lagged far behind in research, but now appears to be the object of new interest and activity. Archival history, chronicling humanity’s efforts to preserve its documentary heritage, is a subject deserving as much serious attention as the nature and development of libraries.<sup>3</sup>

When Shera wrote his essay in the early 1950s, most archivists presently at work in the United States had not yet entered grade school. The archival profession is a young discipline.<sup>4</sup> Although the first repositories of historical records in this country date back to the late eighteenth century, the staffs of these institutions for many years remained well-meaning amateurs more

interested in antiquarian, patriotic, and even xenophobic activities than in developing systems or theory to guide the management of their historical collections. Not until the twentieth century, with the appearance of well-trained historians and the establishment of the first publicly supported archives, did a distinct archival profession begin to emerge.<sup>5</sup> The Society of American Archivists (SAA) was not founded until 1936, sixty years after its counterpart, the American Library Association. Partly because of its youth and the press of other concerns and issues, the archival community did not begin to show any interest in its own past and antecedents until recently. Despite a growing number of articles and some monographs on archival history, there remains a distinct lack of any sense—at least any precise definition—of the value of archival history.

It is not exceedingly difficult to determine when and why a profession like that of archivists or librarians might turn to its past. When a profession is first developing, it might attempt to define its origins and antecedents. Rarely, however, does such writing have any lasting usefulness or relevance, other than as a historical source on the profession's origins.<sup>6</sup> Interest in the history of a profession sometimes appears when it encounters serious challenges or crises or undergoes periods of immense change that threaten, or appear to threaten, it and its practitioners.<sup>7</sup> A profession often turns to its own past as it reaches some new level of maturity; at the least, a profession seems interested in its past on certain commemorative dates, evident in the many histories of professional associations and institutions and biographies of individuals.<sup>8</sup> A profession also turns to its own past when its self-identity or self-image improves, especially as educational requirements, the very heart of professionalism, are expanded and strengthened.<sup>9</sup> Finally, a profession can be the subject of research by sociologists, historians, and other outsiders. One examination of the recent interest in professions noted that the "study of the professions derives much of its impetus from the commonplace observation that professionals have become a dominant force in contemporary society, a group whose numbers greatly exceed what anyone could have predicted a century ago and whose influence reaches far beyond what their numbers would indicate."<sup>10</sup> Perspectives from outsiders can greatly enrich a profession's own knowledge of itself.

Motives for examining the history of a profession determine the quality and value of such studies. The strength of a profession's educational standards and prominence that attracts outside attention lead to more important studies than research conducted only to commemorate anniversaries. The most crucial catalyst for serious historical research is a well-developed sense in a profession's practitioners of the value and relevance of their own past and development. Archivists are only now, despite their close alliance with historians, beginning to grasp the importance of their profession's history. Their primary concern within the past decade about the public's

understanding of the archivist's mission has been reinforced more recently by studies about earlier efforts to promote the preservation of historical records.<sup>11</sup> The recent golden anniversaries of the founding of the National Archives and the SAA have brought renewed attention to the archival profession's history.<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, very few archival education programs encourage students to write theses or dissertations on archival topics and few outside the archival profession are interested in its history.<sup>13</sup> Literature on the history of the archival profession, at least in the United States, remains extremely uneven in quality and coverage. Little has been written from a national perspective, and the history of the archival profession continues to consist of episodic views, from widely different angles, that do not constitute a complete portrait.<sup>14</sup> Archivists, let alone outsiders to the profession, still possess an insufficient appreciation of the value of archival history.

### **On the Value of Archival History**

Archival history has two general values. Its first benefit is to the archival community itself. Research into the history of the care of the documentary heritage can assist archivists in understanding themselves and their institutions, provide an outlet for research and writing, and satisfy a normal and healthy interest in their past. Archival history can also be a means to answer a number of fundamental questions about the nature and significance of recorded information, how that information actually relates to decision making and policy formulation, and, finally, how historical records are really perceived by society, past and present. The implications of this, of course, extend far beyond the archival profession. We already know a considerable amount about the history of historical research and writing and about the origins and development of libraries, and that knowledge has helped us to understand much more about ourselves and our culture. Archival history holds the same promise; our quest to collect and preserve recorded remnants of the past extends back hundreds of years and seems imbedded, even if we do not completely understand why, in human nature.

#### *Contemporary Issues*

Archival history is extremely important for addressing the contemporary concerns and issues of the profession. Any profession, at a given moment, is usually beset with a number of important, sometimes crucial, issues and concerns. Archivists have been debating in the 1980s the certification of individual practitioners, graduate education, control over entry into the profession, their public image, and their effectiveness in promoting the importance of preserving the nation's documentary heritage. For most archivists these probably seem like new concerns or, in the case of certification, go

back little further than the early or mid-1970s. Such present-mindedness is the natural consequence of the youthful nature of the archival community, leading sometimes to a distortion of reality. It is wiser to examine present issues and debates from the historical perspective to understand the origins of issues and to be able to distinguish between transient and more important ongoing concerns. Two examples will suffice to demonstrate this.

It has long been recognized that many of the problems of the National Archives came from its placement, in 1949, under the General Services Administration, a situation that archivists and their allies have struggled since then to remedy.<sup>15</sup> Success in the National Archives independence movement in 1984 brought forth a number of self-congratulatory pieces that attempted to show archivists that they had the ability to achieve significant political success if only they organized better and tried harder.<sup>16</sup> As efforts to persuade archivists to become more effective advocates, these essays are quite appropriate, especially considering the more recent brouhaha over the appointment of a new Archivist of the United States. But these essays can also be misleading because they give the impression that such forays into the political arena, especially on the national scene, are new. Their authors have forgotten that the movement to found the National Archives was the result of a long, sustained political campaign largely spearheaded by one individual, J. Franklin Jameson. Jameson's persistence and his ability to take advantage of opportunities and to unify disparate groups, including the members of the fledgling archival community, should be a historical lesson for contemporary archivists.<sup>17</sup> Archivists should also be concerned about why they have had such rare leadership in public advocacy.

The second example is that of archival education. The educational preparation of the archivist has been an increasing concern for this profession for a variety of reasons, primarily because archivists have never completely controlled their own educational standards. Most archivists have been educated in history or library schools with additional archival training in institutes, workshops, and other forms of continuing education or on-the-job experience. Over the past decade, concerns about professional identity, stronger archival standards, and archival theory have brought education to the forefront of discussions and debates. This has especially occurred in the mid-1980s with the question of the certification of individual archivists, an issue that has prompted persuasive arguments from both supporters and detractors. One of the strongest arguments against certification has been that it would not be as effective as graduate education in strengthening the profession. The problem with this view, however, is that most archivists are still not even certain whether archivists should be trained in history or library schools.

Here a knowledge of archival history is instructive. Jacqueline Goggin

has researched and written an interesting essay on the debate about and development of archival education between 1930 and 1960.<sup>18</sup> What should strike anyone familiar with the archival profession today is that the vexation about archival education has changed very little in substance. The basis of archivists' problems with education remains their concern about location rather than substance, although there are a few exceptions to this in the literature.<sup>19</sup> What archivists could learn from a greater knowledge about their history is that the political issue of educational placement is a short-sighted concern in comparison to determining what archivists should know. Because of the increasing interest in archival identity and the uncertain future of the archival profession in the Information Age,<sup>20</sup> archival education will remain a center-stage issue, but (it is hoped) one that has different concerns than *who* provides the education.<sup>21</sup> The history of their education can aid archivists in keeping their present issues in perspective, possibly even assisting their speedier resolution.

### *Self-Evaluation and Planning*

Archival history is an important tool to be used in institutional self-evaluation and planning, activities that have become very important to the archival profession. Self-study and planning have become the hallmark of the archival community in the 1980s; one archivist has suggested that this time may become known as the "Age of Archival Analysis."<sup>22</sup> A historical perspective should be a valuable tool in such work. What was the original mission of the archival institution? What events or decisions most affected achievement of that mission? What have been the most important obstacles to that mission, and how were they resolved or why were they not resolved? What accounts for the archival institution's major successes? These are really historical issues and questions, and the value of such perspective should be obvious in self-study and planning. Unfortunately, this has not been recognized by archivists, although other closely related professions have begun to realize the value of history for self-analysis and planning.<sup>23</sup> We need more examples of the advantages of the historical perspective in the archival profession.

A recent detailed analysis of historical records programs in Alabama is at least one such example. This study was part of a national effort by archivists and their colleagues to assess the condition of historical records and to plan for better management and care of them.<sup>24</sup> Guidance for this work came from the project's funding source, the National Historical Publication and Records Commission, and instructions were uniform for each state. These directions did not ask for any historical evaluation, but Alabama represented a unique case among the forty-two states that eventually undertook such assessment. Alabama was the site of the first state archives, the Alabama Department of Archives and History founded in 1901, which had

been the archival profession's leader for two decades before entering into a long and sustained decline. By the early 1980s the state was marked by lack of archival professionalism, by few historical records programs with any significant resources, and by a distinct unawareness of its own impoverishment. The NHPRC-funded assessment project was a logical time to ask questions about why this had happened and to determine the historical origins of the present crisis.

Examining the history of Alabama's archives revealed a number of important facts that would not have been understood except through historical study. For one, it taught that ideas thought to be new, such as a more prominent profile in the public arena of the value and utility of historical records, had been discussed and acted upon effectively eighty years earlier by individuals like Thomas Owen, the founder of the Alabama state archives. Moreover, although much attention focused upon the need for resources for archival administration, it was soon realized that resources were only one element required for effective archival administration. In Alabama one of the most significant problems had been erosion of leadership in the historical records community after Thomas Owen's death in 1920; Owen's successors were often more interested in matters other than the preservation and management of historical records, and limited resources were diverted among a variety of other activities. Finally, on a more positive note, it was reassuring to discover that an intensive study and issuance of a report could result in something of lasting value. Thomas Owen had evaluated the condition of historical records in 1898-1900, and the Alabama state archives was the result. Perhaps a reinvigorated Alabama historical records community could be the result of similar work in the mid-1980s.<sup>25</sup> What is telling about all of this is that the first review of this report by an archivist indicated that too much time had been spent on the historical study.<sup>26</sup> The archival profession once again demonstrated its lack of appreciation for its own history.

### *Case Studies*

Archival history could be used to develop a body of case studies that would facilitate a better understanding of the life cycle of cultural institutions such as archives. Archivists who have written about the history of specific archival institutions have tended to treat them in virtual isolation, ignoring how they compare to repositories in other states or how they function in their own cultural milieu. There has also been little effort to use sociological or other organizational models to understand how or why these programs come to be, flourish, change, or die. This is all the more amazing given the vast differences that exist between similar archival institutions in the various states and regions in this country. For example, why is it that some state archives have only one or two staff members while others have

over one hundred? Why is it that it took over seventy years for every state to found a state archives? How do we account for the immense differences in the governmental location of these programs when all possess closely related missions?<sup>27</sup> Despite the existence of a sizable number of essays on the development of archival programs, there are none that attempt to compare or understand their differences.

There have been no efforts to review the existing literature on archival programs to determine if there are any patterns or models of development. This is unfortunate. Such a study could tell much about where a particular archival institution is in its development and help it in ascertaining what it needs to maintain or improve its condition. For example, in looking at the institutions that make up the archival profession, it is not difficult to find examples of programs that were established, flourished, moved to a position of professional leadership, and then declined. It is also not especially difficult to find cases of programs that, after a period of decline, were turned around and became stronger than ever before.<sup>28</sup> There is a need to determine patterns of change and why such changes occur, making it possible to detect signs of decline and to take corrective measures. In this, we can turn for inspiration to the archivists' newest colleagues, public historians, especially those consulting in the business world. Using concepts such as "corporate culture," and examining that culture over time, these individuals are trying to understand why companies succeed or fail and what corrective actions can be taken to prevent failure.<sup>29</sup> Archivists could profitably take the same route and enrich their own growing interest in the management of their institutions.

### *Graduate Studies*

Archival history is an excellent means of introduction for graduate students preparing to be archivists. Until recently, students in archival education programs were not encouraged to write theses or dissertations on archival subjects. Whether in history or library science graduate programs, students preparing to be archivists have completed little research on archival topics. The recent strengthening of graduate archival education has, however, brought hope for change. Until recently, the most common academic preparation for archivists was a three-course program consisting of an introductory course, an internship, and an advanced course, although a large portion of archivists are still trained by a combination of courses, practical workshops and institutes, and on-the-job experience. Stronger multicourse (beyond three courses) educational programs are now being established, and these generally include stronger encouragement of research on archival subjects. The description of the Western Washington University's history master's degree with a concentration in archives and records management includes an incentive for students to prepare theses on "topics involving the

history of archives administration and records management, or an emerging problem in these disciplines. . . .'<sup>30</sup> Most promising in this regard are the theses being completed at the youthful Master of Archival Studies Program at the University of British Columbia, some of which have already turned up in the published literature.<sup>31</sup> It is precisely for this reason that the most recent SAA guidelines on graduate education include a strong statement promoting archival research.<sup>32</sup>

There may be no better introduction to the archival profession for students than to have them investigate present archival issues from the historical perspective. Tackling issues in education, appraisal, arrangement and description, and conservation and examining them over time will provide students not only with a better understanding of present concerns and problems but also with an introduction to the origins and past practices of the archival community.

This is extremely helpful for several reasons. First, the archival profession is still young enough that many of the ideas and principles of archival practice written about a quarter- or even a half-century ago are still adhered to in some degree.<sup>33</sup> Second, since the literature on archival history is relatively sparse, graduate students can make unique contributions to the archival writings and enrich the profession's comprehension of its origins and nature. It is not difficult to find neglected areas for students to investigate.<sup>34</sup> Third, students who study historical aspects of the archival profession may be able to determine needs in current archival practice and take up those areas for further work and study. It is not inconceivable that a student might turn—and profitably—from historical analysis of a particular archival principle to examination of the theory underlying that principle. The historical study of archival practice might help to identify weaknesses in that practice by engaging the student's interest in it beyond the historical perspective.

### *The Nature of Records*

Archival history is a gateway through which to examine some fundamental questions about the nature of records and information. The most important essay on an archival topic thus far in the 1980s is Frank G. Burke's brief article on the need for a stronger archival theory. Burke not only lamented that archivists had most often been concerned with "what" and "how" and not "why," but suggested an agenda for studying the nature of records and record-keeping, the value and use of information in decision making, and other such "why" issues.<sup>35</sup> Burke's essay has been answered in two ways. Some respondents have dealt with the broader issue of the nature and role of theory in the archival profession.<sup>36</sup> Others have grappled with specific elements of Burk's research agenda, most notably the matter

of whether records adequately reflect decision making, policy making, and actual activities and events.<sup>37</sup> It is precisely in the latter area that archival history again offers some value. Why can't analyses of archival institutions help archivists gain a better conception of the general role of records and information in documenting actual events and in assisting decision making and policy setting?

The historical study of archival institutions can help archivists understand how decisions have been made, whether correctly or not, and how effectively all of this has been captured in the records. Archival repositories reflect the nature and characteristics of modern institutions. If archivists used their own programs as laboratories, they might learn how to strengthen these programs and gain insights that would help archivists work with other professions and record-creating entities. At the least, archivists would come to grips with the serious problem of their own inadequately documented profession, since many archival institutions care for their own records as a secondary responsibility.<sup>38</sup> Even the archival community's main professional organization, SAA, cares for its historical records a bit too informally, relying on the voluntary efforts of that organization's officers and other leaders.<sup>39</sup> An effort by a staff member to chronicle the development of the most recently created state archives, New York, even caused him to worry that critical events of only ten years before had been lost because of inadequate documentation.<sup>40</sup>

The archival profession should better care for its own records and heritage if it is really committed to preserving the historical documents of other professions and occupations. There is little question about the archival community's interest in such work, with many articles about its importance.<sup>41</sup> But the archival profession will weaken its aim of helping other disciplines if it has not learned how to take care of its own records or failed to set an adequate example. At the least, success in documenting their own profession will help archivists' larger mission to document society. At the worst, archivists appear hypocritical if they do not care for their own records.

### *Scholarly Interests*

Finally, archival history can provide an outlet for the scholarly interests of individual archivists. Many archivists have an interest in historical research and writing. Although the archival code of ethics dissuades archivists from using their own collections for personal research,<sup>42</sup> a considerable number of archivists maintain active scholarly careers in other specializations and do research in other repository holdings. There is no question that such activity can benefit individual archivists and the archival profession. Research skills are kept sharp, scholarly qualifications and credibility

are maintained, and valuable knowledge for administering historical records holdings is gained. The real issue is, however, whether such peripheral scholarly activity is more a reflection of an inadequately developed professional archival self-image or a misuse of already severely limited time for research and writing.<sup>43</sup> Some archivists seem to have discovered the means to do both, but the truth is that too few archivists write about archival administration, and the archival profession has been the poorer for it.<sup>44</sup>

What does archival history really offer for the archivist as scholar? Thirty years ago archival scholarship was largely viewed as the production of finding aids; it was a time when archivists were generally considered as servants or, more charitably, assistants to the academic historian.<sup>45</sup> The times have changed. More archivists see themselves as constituting an independent profession. Alliances or partnerships with historians, librarians, or other colleagues are necessary, but the stress is on the equality of roles.<sup>46</sup> Archival history provides an opportunity for serious research, requiring the standard array of historical sources and the best skills in interpretation and writing. The various values of archival history—illuminating contemporary concerns and issues, assisting institutional self-evaluation and planning, helping understand the development and decline of cultural institutions, introducing graduate students to the nature of archival administration, and clarifying the nature of records and information—can only be achieved if this subject is treated seriously and respectfully by archivists and other scholars such as historians and librarians.

### **Making Archival History Relevant to the Archival Profession and to Others**

If the values of archival history can be agreed upon by the archival profession and others, it is important to determine how to promote the study, discussion, and publication of archival history. The time seems ripe for exploring the archivist's past. The archival profession is maturing, entering the period of its greatest challenge (whether the archival community has any future in the Information Age), and being strengthened by the acceptance of more complex and specific educational standards. Archival history, as a topic of inquiry and the focus of energy, needs to be a part of the archival profession's continued growth. What follows are some recommendations to support archival history as a legitimate professional pursuit.

*There needs to be a mechanism that coordinates and promotes the study of archival history.* Fortunately, the prospects for this already appear to be excellent. In late 1985 SAA's governing body adopted guidelines for the formation of special interest groups or round tables,<sup>47</sup> and nearly a dozen were in motion by late 1986, including one for archival history. At the Archival History

Round Table's inaugural meeting in August 1986, nearly forty individuals launched a newsletter and began to discuss various projects such as a bibliography of studies and a collection of readings.

An unexpected early benefit of the formation of the Archival History Round Table was the opening of communications with allied colleagues. The chair of ALA's Library History Round Table, who is also an active member of SAA, was in attendance and spoke about the similarities between the two professions and the interest in and values of their respective histories. A closer relationship between the two disciplines in the study of their pasts could provide an interesting opportunity for comparison, publication, and dialogue and aid the library profession in its own historical work. Although there is an increasing quantity of literature on library history, little has been written about the identification and management of library records having historical value.<sup>48</sup> At the same meeting of the Archival History Round Table, the executive director of the International Council on Archives was present and discussed the need for Americans better to understand their European heritage and the increasing interest by Europeans in their own archival history. The SAA Archival History Round Table could promote work on the European origins of American archives and comparisons between the development of archives in various countries; much could be learned about how and why historical records are cared for or neglected.<sup>49</sup>

*Graduate archival education must continue to be strengthened and there must be increased opportunities for research.* For most professions, certainly for those in the humanities, strong educational programs are a primary source for research and development. Full-time academics have more time to think, do research, and write than do practicing archivists. Graduate students are obligated to spend significant portions of their time doing original research in their chosen field. For the archival profession, this appears to be the future for its educational programs and standards, and archival history, for all the reasons already mentioned, should be an excellent subject for such study. A basic part of graduate archival education should be a separate course on archival history that focuses on the development of archives in the United States and that is attentive to European origins and the parallel or divergent development of archives in other countries.

A stronger graduate education is not enough, however. The archival profession requires opportunities, outside of the academy, for research and development. At present, the profession has only one such opportunity. The Bentley Historical Library of the University of Michigan has sponsored since 1983—with the aid of funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and other foundations—a summer fellowship program for individuals to examine the area of documenting modern society. This single program has been the source of

some of the most original and provocative archival thinking and writing in the past few years.<sup>50</sup> The archival community needs more individual fellowship opportunities that enable archivists, historians, librarians, and others to study archival history seriously and to test some of the values that this essay has described (and to discover new ones!).

Finally, the SAA needs to strengthen the institutional self-evaluation program that it started in the late 1970s and to expand it to include historical analysis as a self-study tool. Archivists have been extremely concerned, especially in recent years, with the quality of the nation's archival repositories. The SAA established in 1977 an ad hoc committee "to explore the related questions of establishing standards for archives and establishing an accreditation program for archival institutions." That committee became, in 1980, the Task Force on Institutional Evaluation that two years later issued a brief publication entitled *Evaluation of Archival Institutions: Services, Principles, and Guide to Self-Study* and is now doing some excellent work on the census of archival institutions.<sup>51</sup>

Although the original movement toward institutional accreditation seems in limbo, and there is little evidence that more than a few archival repositories ever seriously used the self-evaluation guide or that it has had a very noticeable impact on the archival profession, the *Evaluation of Archival Institutions* is an excellent publication that should be resurrected to play an important role in the profession. One of the major recommendations by the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities a few years after this publication was for a greater effort to "develop and adopt standards for archival programs";<sup>52</sup> the *Evaluation of Archival Institutions*, probably in a revised format,<sup>53</sup> seems to be an excellent base for pursuing that goal.

Unfortunately, one of the main weaknesses of the institutional self-study guide is its distinct lack of historical perspective. Key individuals in historical records repositories and archival institutions, who are the ones likely to use the self-study guide, are directed by it to examine many basic areas of their programs. The guide's self-study questions and its content never direct anyone to examine the repository from a fuller historical perspective. The evaluation, however helpful it may be, is a static snapshot of the archival program's present condition. How can such an institution be understood without a greater understanding of how it reached its current form and what factors have contributed to its successes and failures? A few good questions, placed at several crucial points in the self-study guide, could rectify this problem and, at the same time, help to raise the archival profession's awareness of its own important past. Published reports about the self-study process that utilizes or tests the values of archival history would also be helpful.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

The archival profession will not fail in its mission to identify, preserve,

and encourage the use of records of enduring value if it does not develop a greater sense or knowledge of its own past. However, a better-developed archival history can both enrich and strengthen the archival profession in its quest to accomplish its mission. Archivists are in the business of preserving historical records because these records are valuable to society. The records of their own profession and its precursors, chronicling this important work, are no less significant than the records of other professions or other events and trends. A knowledge of archival history ought to be an essential part of any archivist's training and work. Acceptance of the values of archival history is the sign of a more mature, vital, and healthy archival profession.

## Notes

1. *Library Quarterly* 22 (July 1952): 240–251.

2. For contrasting views, see Michael H. Harris, "Antiquarianism, Professional Piety, and Critical Scholarship in Recent American Library Historiography," *Journal of Library History* 13 (Winter 1978): 37–43; and Phyllis Dain, "A Response to Issues Raised by the ALHRT Program, 'The Nature and Uses of Library History,'" *ibid.*, pp. 44–47.

3. By "archival history," I do not mean just the history of the archival profession that can be dated from the early twentieth century or, as some do, from the founding of the National Archives and the Society of American Archivists in the mid-1930s. Archival history encompasses the history of all efforts to preserve and manage historical records. However, the focus of this essay is primarily on the twentieth-century formation and development of the modern archival profession in the United States.

4. A 1982 analysis of the archival profession in the United States concluded that "archivists are young: more than half are under forty, two-thirds are under fifty." Even this represented substantial aging since a similar study conducted a few years before. See David Bearman, "1982 Survey of the Archival Profession," *American Archivist* 46 (Spring 1983): 233.

5. William F. Birdsall, "The Two Sides of the Desk: The Archivist and the Historian, 1909–1935," *American Archivist* 38 (April 1975): 159–173; and "Archivists, Librarians, and Issues during the Pioneering Era of the American Archival Movement," *Journal of Library History* 14 (Fall 1979): 457–479.

6. Public historians have looked back, for example, to the individuals associated with the pioneering historical societies and archival repositories as their ancestors. This was done to legitimize the newly emerging field, but it has also alienated many practitioners of these "older" disciplines. What has passed thus far for a history of public history, only little more than a decade old, has really been the history of archivists, historical society leaders, historic preservationists, oral historians, and others. There still is no adequate history of the early development of this new field. For an essay that touches upon some of these matters, see Richard J. Cox, "Archivists and Public Historians in the United States," *Public Historian* 8 (Summer 1986): 29–45.

7. The historical profession is a good case in point. It has a tremendously large literature on its history, which often seems to grow during times of stress. There has

been an explosion of such writings over the past decade as the historical profession has weathered declining student enrollment, a lessening of the number of teaching positions, and shrinking readership for its work. See, for example, Joan Hoff Wilson, "Is the Historical Profession an 'Endangered Species'?" *Public Historian* 2 (Winter 1980): 4-21.

8. The centennial of the American Library Association brought with it an outpouring of library history studies in the mid-1970s, as reflected in the annual reviews in the *Journal of Library History* and Michael H. Harris and Donald G. Davis, Jr., *American Library History: A Bibliography* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978).

9. Nathan Glazer, "The Schools of the Minor Professions," *Minerva* 12 (July 1974): 346-364; and, for a historical case study, Stephen J. Kunitz, "Professionalism and Social Control in the Progressive Era: The Case of the Flexner Report," *Social Problems* 22 (October 1974): 16-27.

10. Matthew Ramsey, "History of a Profession, *Annales* Style: The Work of Jacques Lenard," *Journal of Social History* 17 (Winter 1983): 320. See also Burton J. Bledstein, "Discussing Terms: Professions, Professionals, Professionalism," in *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* (ed. Jack Salzman), 10 (1985): 1-15.

11. For recent concerns about the public image of the archival profession's mission, see David B. Gracy II, "Our Future Is Now," *American Archivist* 48 (Winter 1985): 12-21. For a history of an earlier archival public outreach effort, see James Gregory Bradsher, "Taking America's Heritage to the People: The Freedom Train Story," *Prologue* 17 (Winter 1985): 229-245.

12. Such as Timothy Walch (ed.), *Guardian of Heritage: Essays on the History of the National Archives* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1985).

13. A rare exception of a first-rate study in archival history by a nonarchivist is Donald R. McCoy, *The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents 1934-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978). McCoy's effort is virtually alone as an archival history by an academic historian. In most histories of historical research and writing, even those confined to the twentieth century, the advent, development, and importance of the archival profession is ignored.

14. For a survey of the nature of archival historical research, see Richard J. Cox, "American Archival History: Its Development, Needs, and Opportunities," *American Archivist* 46 (Winter 1983): 31-41. The archival study with the closest to a national perspective is Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983). Berner's book has been criticized by some of his colleagues for not being broad enough; see Ann Pederson, "Analysis or Prescription? Richard Berner on Archival Theory and Practice," *Midwestern Archivist* 9/1 (1984): 35-43; and William L. Joyce's review in the *American Archivist* 47 (Summer 1984): 299-301.

15. See Walter Robertson, Jr., "NARS: The Politics of Placement," *American Archivist* 39 (October 1976): 485-492; and H. G. Jones, *The Records of a Nation: Their Management, Preservation, and Use* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), chapters 11 and 12.

16. Page Putnam Miller, "Archival Issues and Problems: The Central Role of Advocacy," *Public Historian* 8 (Summer 1986): 60-73; and Charlene N. Bickford, *The Coalition to Save Our Documentary Heritage: An Important Lesson in Archival Advocacy*, MARAC Occasional Publication, no. 3 (n.p.: Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, 1983).

17. Victor Gondos, Jr., *J. Franklin Jameson and the Birth of the National Archives 1906-1926* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).

18. "That We Shall Truly Deserve the Title of 'Profession': The Training and Education of Archivists, 1930-1960," *American Archivist* 47 (Summer 1984): 243-254.

19. Such as Francis X. Blouin, Jr., "The Relevance of the Case Method to Archival Education and Training," *American Archivist* 41 (January 1978): 37-44; and Lawrence J. McCrank, "Prospects for Integrating Historical and Information Studies in Archival Education," *American Archivist* 42 (October 1979): 443-455.

20. This is one of several issues that will probably dominate the concerns of the archival profession over the next decade or so. For some writings on this, see John A. Vernon, "Technology's Effect on the Role of the Archivist," *Provenance* 3 (Spring 1985): 1-12; Richard Kesner, "Automated Information Management: Is There a Role for the Archivist in the Office of the Future?" *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-1985): 162-172; and F. Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," *American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981): 207-216.

21. The main concerns may become the placement of full-time archival educators in the graduate schools, the development of a number of multicourse programs that satisfy the employment needs of the profession, and the accreditation of archival graduate education programs.

22. Bruce W. Dearstyne, "Archives and Public History: Issues, Problems, and Prospects—An Introduction," *Public Historian* 8 (Summer 1986): 7.

23. Steven K. Hamp, "Subject over Object: Interpreting the Museum as Artifact," *Museum News* 63 (December 1984): 33-37.

24. For various conclusions from these assessments, refer to Lisa B. Weber (ed.), *Documenting America: Assessing the Condition of Historical Records in the States* ([Albany]: National Association of State Archives and Records Administrators in cooperation with the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, [1983]); Virginia Stewart, "Archives in the Midwest: Assessments and Prospects," *Midwestern Archivist* 10/1 (1985): 5-16; and Edie Hedlin, "Archival Programs in the Southeast: A Preliminary Assessment," *Provenance* 2 (Spring 1984): 1-15.

25. *Assessing Alabama's Archives: A Plan for the Preservation of the State's Historical Records* (Montgomery: Alabama Historical Records Advisory Board, 1985); and Richard J. Cox, "Alabama's Archival Heritage, 1850-1985," *Alabama Review* 40 (October 1987): 284-307.

26. Anne R. Kenney's review in *Public Historian* 8 (Summer 1986): 106.

27. Ernst Posner's *American State Archives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) contains the major reference on the nature of these institutions.

28. Edie Hedlin, "Chinatown Revisited: The Status and Prospects of Government Records in America," *Public Historian* 8 (Summer 1986): 56-59.

29. Charles Dellheim, "Business in Time: The Historian and Corporate Culture," *Public Historian* 8 (Spring 1986): 9-22.

30. Quotation from brochure describing the program.

31. Terry Eastwood, "Abstracts of Theses in Archival Studies at the University of British Columbia," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985-1986): 269-274.

32. The new guidelines, approved by SAA's Education and Professional Development Committee in late 1986 and since referred to SAA's Council for final approval, state that "students writing a thesis or dissertation should be encouraged to research archival topics, especially on theoretical areas relating to the nature of information and records, archives in modern society, and basic archival functions."

33. For example, the concept of record group has dominated thinking on archival arrangement and description for nearly forty years, although it is now beginning to be challenged as a result of the increased use of automation in records creation.

Until the mid-1980s a historical review of the origins and development of the record group idea would also have been an introduction to the accepted principles of archival arrangement and description.

34. A glance at *Planning for the Archival Profession: A Report of the SAA Task Force on Goals and Priorities* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1986) reveals a host of subjects and issues that have been barely touched by historical analysis. A more specific example is Ernst Posner's plea, made over twenty years ago, for historical research on state archives: "To write a full history of the development of American state archives would require many and detailed preliminary studies. The record-making and record-keeping practices of colonial America should be investigated, with particular attention to their relationship to the practices of the respective mother countries; so should the practices of the states during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We also need histories of individual archival agencies, their struggles, and their achievements" (*American State Archives*, p. 7). Little has been accomplished, however, in response to Posner's call.

35. "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981): 40-46.

36. Lester J. Cappon, "What, Then, Is There to Theorize About?" *American Archivist* 45 (Winter 1982): 19-25; Gregg D. Kimball, "The Burke-Cappon Debate: Some Further Criticisms and Considerations for Archival Theory," *American Archivist* 48 (Fall 1985): 369-376.

37. Michael A. Lutzker, "Max Weber and the Analysis of Modern Bureaucratic Organizations: Notes toward a Theory of Appraisal," *American Archivist* 45 (Spring 1982): 119-130; JoAnne Yates, "Internal Communication Systems in American Business Structures: A Framework to Aid Appraisal," *American Archivist* 48 (Spring 1985): 141-158.

38. This is an impressionistic conclusion based on experiences in institutions that I have worked in and conversations with other archivists. The scantiness of writing on archival history by outsiders suggests that this might indeed be the case.

39. SAA's executive office files have been formally appraised and scheduled and are regularly transferred to the SAA's official archives at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. However, the papers of individuals or the records of committees are solicited informally, and there is no oral history program for prominent leaders of the profession. Some of these issues are now being discussed by the newly formed Archival History Round Table.

40. Bruce Dearstyne, in reviewing the formation of the New York State Archives in the 1970s, wrote that "there is no history of that program. No one on the State Archives staff has taken an interest in recovering and analyzing that history. Many of the records that would be needed to reconstruct program development, or even key events, are lost or their location is unknown. Moreover, even a study of the files for the period since 1975—the year the first State Archivist was hired—would not reveal the dynamics of program development, the ways in which the program found support, and how it actually developed. If that history is to be recovered at all, it would have to be recovered by interviewing the chief actors. . . . Even then, it would be difficult to construct an accurate picture, or to draw clear lessons about the development of the program that would really be useful in understanding its present-day makeup and its likely course for the future" ("Archives in the Empire State: A Political History," unpublished paper presented at the fall 1983 meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference).

41. The most recent and most important effort has been on behalf of the records of science and technology. See Clark A. Elliot (ed.), *Understanding Progress as Process:*

*Documentation of the History of Post-War Science and Technology in the United States* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1983); Joan K. Haas, Helen Willa Samuels, and Barbara Trippel Simmons, *Appraising the Records of Modern Science and Technology: A Guide* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1985).

42. "Commentary on Code of Ethics," *SAA Newsletter*, July 1979, p. 14.

43. There have been many essays by archivists attesting to the value of such historical research. The most recent and blunt argument about this is David Mycue, "The Archivist as Scholar: A Case for Research by Archivists," *Georgia Archive* 7 (Fall 1979): 10-16. The major weakness with Mycue's essay, and with others of this ilk, is that its main concern seems to be establishing archivists back within the historical profession, not encouraging them to write about archival topics and their own profession. A thorough knowledge of historical methodology and historical research trends is, of course, valuable to the archivist, but more valuable may be an understanding of the archival profession, its theoretical principles, and its practices.

44. Richard J. Cox, "Archival Literature and the American Archival Profession: Expanding Horizons and Continuing Needs, 1901 to 1986 and Beyond," co-published paper presented to the 1986 annual meeting of the SAA.

45. Lester J. Cappon, "Tardy Scholars among the Archivists," *American Archivist* 21 (January 1958): 3-16.

46. Cox, "Archivists and Public Historians," is one example of this kind of thinking. That a truly separate archival profession is emerging is evident in essays that argue for the opposite, such as its subservience to academic history; George Bolotenko, "Archivists and Historians: Keepers of the Well," *Archivaria* 16 (Summer 1983): 5-25.

47. "Roundtables are informal groups of SAA members formed to promote discussion and communication, exchange information or engage in similar activities centered around an archival topic" (*SAA Newsletter*, January 1986, p. 3).

48. Richard J. Cox and Anne S. K. Turkos, "Establishing Public Library Archives," *Journal of Library History* 21 (Summer 1986): 574-584.

49. That is, there has been no connection between the two although there exist excellent separate historical studies of both European and American archives. For the variety of such studies, refer to Frank B. Evans (comp.), *The History of Archives Administration: A Select Bibliography* (Paris: UNESCO, 1979).

50. For a sample of these writings, see the spring 1985 issue of the *American Archivist* on appraisal.

51. (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1982). There has not yet been a published report of the new census, but a session was devoted to examining preliminary results of the data gathering at the 1986 SAA meeting.

52. *Planning for the Archival Profession*, p. 33.

53. A summary of the self-study guide was published in the *SAA Newsletter*, July 1986, pp. 7-10. Since the guide itself is now out of print, a stronger version should be prepared and published. The New York State Archives is, for example, trying to develop a similar self-study manual, borrowing heavily on SAA's work, for use by historical records repositories in that state.

54. As yet not a single evaluation of the process of self-study has appeared in the archival literature. Such studies would do much to assist the archival profession to strengthen its own work and its repositories. Inherent in the nature of self-study is a stronger sense of standards for guiding and regulating the profession in its quest to accomplish its mission.