Archival Training in a Changing World

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Abstract

Archives are the memories of a nation or a people. Archival theory accepts the distinction between past and present and even creates it through archival functions. Archival work consists of the management of access and closure, of preservation of materials in unchanged shape as the basis for constantly changing memories. The archival training at the Marburg Archives School approaches education as a holistic enterprise. It consists of pre-employment training, post-graduate continuing education, and research in archival sciences. Training in archival science is complemented by instruction in preservation management and in the legal implications of archival and administrative law. The Marburg Archives School also maintains an active publications program. Based on a well-grounded professional practice, continuing education training adapts itself to practical needs as it enlarges the professional knowledge.

More than ten years after Terry Eastwood’s cries for a standardized means of guaranteeing that every archivist possess the requisite professional knowledge and a standardized means of dissemination of that knowledge, and Richard Cox’s statement about the archival profession still being an occupation in the process of professionalization, a vast step forward has been achieved. The traditional training institutes in Europe, such as the Marburg Archivschule, which was founded in 1949, have been confronted with similar challenges. Should they continue to train historians in some practical archival craft, together with more thorough introduction to or instruction in diplomacy, regional history, and editing techniques; or should they develop an educational program for a new, independent, yet interdisciplinary discipline, based on specific knowledge and theory? The internationalization

1 Terry Eastwood, “Nurturing Archival Education in the University,” American Archivist 51 (Summer 1988): 236.

2 Richard Cox, “Professionalism and Archivists in the United States,” American Archivist 49 (Summer 1986): 244.
of professional debates on appraisal theory and practice and on the new experiences and perspectives of electronic records have led to a situation where the international relations among archivists across national borders sometimes seem even stronger than their traditional bonds to the different disciplines, (whether these are library science, history, or the auxiliary sciences like diplomatics or law), from which archival sciences once emerged. The war of independence of archivists, as Elio Lodolini in Italy once called it, seems to be definitely won, not with violent fights against the former comprehensive disciplines, but simply by practicing archives’ own and self-confident theory. Theory always prospers through training, and a profession achieves solid ground with pre-employment education as the basis of its qualification. This essay explores the interplay between the societal balance of memory and oblivion and the development of the archival education program at the Marburg Archives School.

New Demands for Archival Qualifications

Because of the increasing professionalization of archivists, the expanding knowledge about archives, and new trust in archival skills, societies want more from the archival profession. Professional archivists are confronted with new demands in ever more complicated situations, such as electronic media development, and are employed in more and different environments than ever before. With the knowledge that digital records may unexpectedly vanish and are at risk with the implementation of new software or hardware systems, memory becomes a subject of concern. The opposite is also true: “Man must have, and, from time to time, also use the power to destroy and dissolve the past in order to live.” Friedrich Nietzsche’s harsh request recalls what is often overlooked when speaking about archives. Archives are perceived as the memories of a nation or a people. But memory and forgetting are twins and memory would not be longed for if oblivion were not the norm. Memory even needs oblivion; only things which have ceased to exist in reality and remain in one’s consciousness can be remembered. Memory only exists by distinguishing the past from the present. That which is remembered is the past. The present cannot be remembered as long as it is occurring. Memory develops when societies recall residues of their past. And so the emphasis put on memory calls attention to the need to forget. This thinking is reinforced by the new technical possibilities to store or erase digital recordings, as well as by the conscious effort

4 Friedrich Nietzsche, Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen (Frankfurt, 1981), 118. Translation by the author.
5 That is shown for example by such initiatives as the “Memory of the World” program of UNESCO.
that must be made in the present to establish history or “leave tracks.” The debates surrounding electronic records enhance the feeling of lacking strategies on how to use both sides, memory and oblivion, in a rational way.

In his research on memory and oblivion at the end of the first millennium, Patrick J. Geary shows how archives during that time were reshaped to form a new past, which was the basis of a new identity and self-understanding in the following centuries. At that time, the Church became interested in organizing its past. Acknowledging the actual ruptures in thinking and self-identification with which they were faced, the Church used its collections as the raw material for a creation of the past. “But in neither case were the creators of the eleventh century bound by what they found in their archives. They used this raw material with great freedom, destroying, revising, recopying, and especially reorganizing.” Doing so, they followed an approach formulated by a monk from a Bavarian monastery: “Not only is it proper for the new to change the old, but even, if the old is disordered (or at variance with the divinely willed order), it should be entirely thrown away, or if it conforms to the proper order of the things but is of less use, it should be buried with reverence.”

So, Geary concludes, one can characterize the decades around the beginning of the second millennium as an age of forgetting, a mental clearing of the forest, which made possible the great process of creation of the later eleventh and twelfth centuries. The reshaping of the past was meant to be irrevocable. An essential part of the process of shaping a useful past was the actual destruction of archives, thus closing routes to creating alternative pasts. This process affected later historical research and created assumptions that very little writing was used during earlier centuries, even though some residues had survived and suggested otherwise.

The new approach of Geary’s publication, like that of some others in recent years, especially in the field of medieval history, asks what things are good for remembrance. The instruments, rather than the contents, are investigated. The questions surrounding the techniques used to remember are more interesting than those concerning the contents of memory. Those questions make the approaches to remembering interesting and extremely relevant for archives. They also challenge archival skills. The image of the past is part of our view of the world. It provides explications and legitimization for present actions and makes the conceptions of future, chosen as aims for collaborative efforts, reliable. Monolithic systems such as the Church in the Middle Ages or dictatorial regimes, tend to affirm their view of the past as a logical premise for their reign by destroy-

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8 Geary, Phantoms of Remembrance, 166.
9 Geary, Phantoms of Remembrance, 21.
10 For example see Michael T. Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307, 2nd Ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).
ing residues that could lead to other interpretations. Modern democratic societies allow freer historical research and give people the chance to find their own identity based on the roots they choose for themselves. These societies need the ability to construct different memories, permitting the creation of many individual histories by different segments of the populace. All those memories are interpretations and thus neither true nor false, they are only useful, useless, or misleading. Memories compete with each other and can be changed if necessary. They all have one basis—that is, the past. “The past is, by definition, a datum which nothing in the future will change. But the knowledge of the past is something progressive which is constantly transforming and perfecting itself.”

Memory is a selective process that shapes the image of the past as needed for a present situation. Enduring tracks of the past allow society to reconstruct it, thus making memory relative. It can be disputed and assured simultaneously; elements of memory can exist in multiple contexts at the same time. Archives permit cultures to construct and verify memory, but also permit societies to forget it again and select different contents more relevant for each new generation of society or different groups within that society. With the methods and techniques the archival profession has developed and offers to society, the possibility exists to simultaneously choose between forgetting and remembering and to construct a memory without the total destruction of the past. The existence of public archives as separate institutions whose activities are controlled by laws also ensures oblivion if a need is expressed by laws that protect individual rights, as well as opens up the chance to recover knowledge of past events by protecting the rights of access. Laws guarantee privacy by closing records after their initial reason for creation has been accomplished, which means after fulfilling the purposes for which the information on persons or other observations were collected. Yet, these laws also weigh individual rights against the freedom of access and research. Institutional separation of the records from their creators assures silence and oblivion. If separated archives are not available, only destruction can serve this end. Functional and organizational separation works as an equivalent to destruction, giving the supplementary chance to change the contents of oblivion and memory at other times.

Destruction for oblivion is different from the destruction for access, practiced in the consequence of appraisal decisions. The factual destruction of records during the transfer to the archives according to appraisal decisions serves to improve access for the purposes of enhancing memory. Together with the availability of documentation about appraisal decisions and destruction,

11 Angelika Menne-Haritz, “Appraisal and Documentation. Can We Appraise Archives by Selecting Content?” American Archivist 57 (Summer 1994): 528–42


this allows subsequent construction of memory through reconstruction of the past.\textsuperscript{14} Appraisal destroys physical material to open the intellectual perspective, like streets open the access to wild lands. Appraisal is a tool for memory, while its rejection hides access and facilitates definite oblivion. Thus, archives control the forgetting and protect individuals against governmental and public intrusion into their lives and guarantee access as soon and as broadly as possible without violating any rights of citizens.

\textbf{Archival Research and the Uses of Observation}

Archives are providers for memory-potentials, and as such, they are tools that allow societies to observe themselves and to learn from their own experiences. Observation means collecting insights from an external point of view that cannot be attained by anyone involved in the actions. Observation means to step aside, to take a breath and think. It enables societies to define goals and priorities, which can lead to practical involvement.

The scientific concept of observation has been developed in the sciences (such as physics), and also in the humanities (such as philosophy), as well as in the social sciences. It is an expanding concept that can explain many phenomena of modern societies. So the increasing establishment of research as different from actual practice in new disciplines institutionalizes observation as reflection on practical experiences and as a source of advice for changes in practice. A central assumption, useful for this concept, is that observation produces information because it is the management of distinctions. “Observation is any operation, that makes a distinction; thus it is the basic operation of understanding.”\textsuperscript{15}

Understanding needs a specific distinction, a question, that is formulated in advance. The formulation of the question is the key for guiding the observation and is necessary to gain information and to perceive and realize it. In this concept, information is a process and not an entity that can be stored or transported from “A” to “B.”\textsuperscript{16} Information is a selection of something interesting, distinguishing it from the unnamed remainder. It is the result of an interpretation of phenomena that are observed in light of the preceding question. In modern cybernetics, the notion of second-order observation was formulated to explain how a third person can see reasons for the choices made by the initial observer. Every observation is bound to a blind spot, which is marked by the place of the observer himself and which can only be seen in action from the position of another observer, focusing attention on the first one. This is what archives enable societies to do. Archives allow the observa-


\textsuperscript{15} Niklas Luhmann, \textit{Social Systems} (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 73.

tion of administrations and are the result of those organizations observing their own environments and synthesizing information resulting from decisions based upon organizational objectives. Second-order observation makes these selections both understandable and necessary. It shows how these selections have influenced operations. The investigation of archives thus elucidates the reasons for what happened in the past. And these reasons can only be seen, after the choices were made, when they exist in the past and therefore are no longer changeable. So, too, the investigation in archives also has its own effect on the observed phenomena. It defines them as closed and finished operations that cannot be influenced any more, at least as long as they are observed. Such observation can lead to information necessary to change the reality as it was produced by those phenomena observed. If administrations transfer their records to archives as independent institutions with the professional task to open them for public use, they give up influence on the further developments of the actions from which the records emerged. This is the important activity of archives. They actively create past, but without shaping it, because they act as interfaces to it.\(^{17}\)

Time is constituted by a double distinction. First, it distinguishes between actuality and nonactuality, and in the sphere of nonactuality, it distinguishes between future and past, depending on the possibilities to influence the events.\(^{18}\) Past events cannot be changed and this allows societies to reassess and understand them in a different light. The decision to finish an activity, to look at its results, and at its way of working, is the decision to let it become the past. On the other hand, if the past should still be rethought, changed, or reformulated, it can be influenced and so its fate is subject to future developments. In that case, the past cannot be used as a trigger for other activities like answers or reactions. Only actions or events which are allowed to become the past can be used as anchors for further connected operations. Only such finished operations offer connectivity. They can show their reasons and they can be evaluated as either having achieved their goals or not. As interfaces with time, archives are providers of access to the past, and through these finished actions, they create their connectivity. They are not drivers of information and knowledge, but enablers for investigations. If archives interfere with the creation of records, archivists intermingle into the operations and adopt the same biases of the creators. They do not allow the operations to become past and thus offer connectivity. Any sort of second-order observation becomes more difficult. Insight into the reasons for the administrative activities is obscured.

By creating the past without shaping it, archives are open for research in history. Historical researchers are not only one of the main clients of archives.


Historical research has also transmitted its methodological approach to archival sciences. As a science, it has developed very specific methods, distinct from other disciplines, with the essential characteristics for understanding facts that cannot be changed any more. History is mainly an analytical science and that is what archival sciences have inherited from it. The subjects of historical research are social phenomena that are definitely past, because these phenomena can no longer be influenced by the actions of today or tomorrow. It tries to understand what happened by finding out the implicit internal reasons. Understanding is the opposite, but also the prerequisite of acting. It does not come to an end if it tries to correct what it sees or to make it conform to a model. Instead, it wants to know why the model did not work in a concrete situation and thus delivers the knowledge needed for changes. Because historical research does not change the things it analyzes, it can see them in their own time-dimension or context, identifying the preceding triggers and motives, and the following results as time sequences that do not just follow each other chronologically, but that are intermingled by reasons, by the opening of possibilities, and by selections which close them again.

Archival science has adopted this analytical approach to those social phenomena which use writing for collaborative activities. With this methodology, archival science has developed an independent discipline. This type of thinking and analyzing, without touching and getting involved as a party to the events, is essential for the historical method. It is also an integral part of archival theory. Archivists need to understand and to use this approach more than they need any specific historical knowledge. This means neutrality towards the content and the purposes of the phenomena, but it does not exclude scientific passion and desire for truth and verity. Instead, it is the prerequisite for learning from passions and desires, seeing how they achieved what they wanted, or comprehending why they failed.

Archival theory accepts the distinction between past and present and even creates it through archival functions. Archivists are the specialists to manage the transition from present to past, concerning collaborative actions and experiences, in such a way that the past remains useful for future presents. That means archivists use oblivion as well as memory to manage the possibility to later choose between both or to reverse that selection whenever it is needed. Archival work consists of the management of access and closure, of preservation of materials in unchanged shape as the basis for constantly changing memories. These functions of archival institutions require special professional skills, which are offered by a new concept for a lifelong qualification, based on an intensive pre-employment scientific education, completed by a consistent program of continued training and supported by scientific research. That is the basis for the qualification concept of the Marburg Archives School.
The Aims of Archival Training in the Marburg Qualification Concept: A Holistic Approach

These reflections on the place of archives in a society that starts to learn to manage memory and oblivion have implications for the conception of which skills and knowledge are needed for the archival profession. It is a radically neutral position towards the content of memory, thus providing the necessary instruments and polishing the glasses for the perception of common pasts. Archivists need to know how social memory works, in which forms it is required for decisions concerning future activities, and how it can be supported without violating rights of individuals. Archivists must efficiently handle the methods of opening access, including appraisal and description, using the latest and best technological tools to enhance accessibility to the holdings that they shape and preserve in authentic and unchanged states.

The basis of the Marburg concept is the three-pronged approach to archival qualification with the whole professional community as a target group. It consists of pre-employment training, post-graduate continuing education, and research in archival sciences. (see Figure 1) The educational program adopts an external view of archives, a view not yet involved in the actual daily problems of archives. But as a beginning experience it does integrate several months of insight into practical work. It lays the foundation for a generalist approach and provides the theoretical explanations of central areas of the profession as prerequisite for future specialization and for the solution of future problems.

**FIGURE 1.** The Marburg Concept’s Three-Pronged Approach

Archival research: discussion of fundamental principles
Post-graduate continuing education deepens or specializes the knowledge. It brings together experienced people who have identified problems in their own work and are searching for solutions. Archival research discusses professional concepts in projects and colloquia. It develops new ideas and practices that are then proposed for critical review and further experimentation. Archival research profits from being free from the constraints of daily work and can formulate principle questions before it delivers new answers or reflections to the archival community. These three areas are tied through publications, papers, and projects with external funding; by the professional identity of the educators; and by the participation of trainers and students in conferences and colloquia. The combination of the three areas represents a natural division of labor.

In pre-employment training, discussions of fundamental archival issues are led by highly qualified participants, primarily history Ph.D.s. These individuals have attained practical experience in the field and they point to areas where further reflection is needed, thus providing the impetus for research. New research results are directly introduced into the training via course syllabi and projects. By assuring a strategic qualification, this prepares students for future specialization in the continuing education program, where the practical problems of daily work can be treated. Continuing education refreshes one’s skills and allows for specialization. It gives the teachers very intense feedback regarding actual problems in daily work. Three hundred participants come together each year from different fields to exchange ideas and accumulate their problem-solving capacities. Research is used to identify similarities of problems. It develops common strategies and prepares fundamental solutions. Research can also develop theory, as needed, for emergent practices. Theory and practice are combined and not separate in this model. Theory is the reflection on practical experiences, and practice is the proof-testing for theory. The intelligent combination of theory and practice helps archivists to cope with future problems.

Pre-employment training follows a consistent idea. Teaching strategies are consciously different from those in other university disciplines, such as history or libraries. They aim at qualifying professionals as archivists, not as historians or information specialists. The goal is for students to gain knowledge of the basic principles of archives and to retain an openness for innovation as the basis of a generalist approach. The trimester structure helps to use the training period of sixteen to eighteen months in an effective way. Historical research methods, freed from their contents of describing former events, provide students with the skills to adopt a consultative approach concerning records management. This is supported by a deep understanding of all forms of records in use today and of their respective influences on decision-making processes.

Archival science as a training subject has four main parts:

- Terminology introduces the archival thinking and enables students to become confident rapidly.
• The typology of record structures is the essential part of archival science. It is its most analytical component. The results of the analyses influence all methods of appraisal, description, and presentation. It links archival science to administrative science where business processes and especially decision-making processes are studied in depth.

• Appraisal as a topic consists of the history of appraisal theory, a discussion of appraisal concepts, and the presentation of different practical approaches to appraisal. Important in this context are the new methods for the documentation of appraisal decisions to support the reconstruction of the past.

• Description and presentation has dramatically changed since the availability of the Internet. Finding aids can finally become what they were always intended to be: navigation tools. Too often they had been just listings of holdings for the internal use of the archivists themselves.

Training in archival science is complemented by instruction in preservation management and in the legal implications of archival and administrative law. Archival science is further backed by the auxiliary sciences of medieval and modern diplomatics, and by historical subjects concentrating on administrative history.

The continuing education program offers functional qualification and specialization for practitioners. It changes each year to accommodate new trends, needs of the participants, and in response to previous seminars. The actual program reflects the experiences of past years as well as of publications or debates, and training needs, which have become obvious. There is one person responsible for coordinating each seminar. This person invites experts for presentations. The standard number of participants is fifteen. Small groups create a high degree of participant involvement and as a result, the seminar can address many of the specific problems raised by participants. Written evaluations provide feedback about the relevance of the subjects treated, the methods used, and the course material that was distributed. These are used to improve future seminars. The continuing education seminars are offered cooperatively with the Association of Archivists in the Media, the Association of Business Archives inside the German association of archivists, and the archives administration of Baden-Württemberg. Eleven percent of the participants come from other countries, mainly Switzerland and Austria.

The Marburg Archives School maintains an active publications program. The proceedings of the colloquia are published as a series. Topics have included legal implications (1990), office automation (1992), appraisal (1994), rationalization and management of archival repositories (1996), archival description (1998), and digital archives (1999) for the fiftieth anniversary of the school. The publications series is growing by two to four volumes per year. Other than the proceedings of colloquia, it consists of course materials, such as a glossary, a list of abbreviations that were used in administrations in former
Archival training is done on a variety of levels with the direct involvement of students. Research projects are externally funded. One research topic was the determination of criteria for the conversion of primary resources to more durable material or the restoration of the original based on the concept of intrinsic value. Two expert groups were convened. They developed a list of questions and discussed criteria for the application of different strategies for preservation, including digital originals. Another project supported the development of a software application for on-line finding aids. The project was managed by a former student with a Ph.D. in medieval history who became an Internet expert during the project. The resulting software package allows repositories, even small ones, to describe their holdings with a dBase database that generates HTML files. In turn, this permits browser-supported navigation through their holdings. The main part of the software package is the generator, written in Perl, that creates HTML files from the dBase database. An important part of the project was the integration of supplementary information for users on such topics as administrative history and appraisal and description decisions made during archival processing. These types of information and documentation are available to researchers when they are needed. This means that they appear on the web page as links and are easily accessed with the click of the mouse. These options are also created automatically by the Perl generator. With this high-tech and low-budget tool, archivists can offer users much of the information, gathered during processing, without overloading the presentation.

A New Syllabus for Post-Doctoral Training

As of the year 2000, the form of the post-doctoral training will change slightly in order to enhance its relevance as professional training and to deepen the theoretical qualification of the participants. During an eight-month practical training course, participants will move through a series of four-week practical engagements in different administrative agencies and archival repositories. At these sites, students will see and understand how records emerge from daily work in administration and what different kinds of archives exist. Their work during these practical engagements will be evaluated and later integrated into the final grades. Four written and two oral examinations, including diplomatics and archival law in the written parts and archival sciences and administrative history in the oral parts, will be administered at the end of the two-year training period. The new syllabus consists of four learning areas: archival sciences, administrative sciences, auxiliary sciences, and history. Students receive four to six lessons per day.

19 The criteria are available at available at <http://www.uni-marburg.de/archivschule/intrinsengl.html>.
new area of administrative sciences synthesizes knowledge from the other areas concerning organizations, the procedures of administrations, and their influence on record structures and integrates them into a consistent concept together with the management and organizational skills needed for a career in administration. The new combination allows students to adopt a more holistic view of the structures and types of records as well as their functions, especially in comparison to oral forms of administrative communications. This approach treats electronic records as a separate type of communication for administrative purposes and seeks to better understand their implications. In the area of history, a new course called “History-History” will provide students with an opportunity to reflect on the research method of historical observation. Subjects to be covered include the veto-right of the sources, the question of historical truth, and the characteristic signs of historical methods compared to other disciplines, such as law. This seminar is intended to give students the opportunity to reflect on the past as historians and to develop a personal identity in the future profession.

An interesting new experience is a two-month transfer phase that combines theory and practice. Each student must develop a solution for a practical problem and demonstrate the capability to reflect on practical problems and construct solution strategies. It will give students the chance to create something new in an intermediate situation where contacts with experienced archivists are possible and with a teacher available for consultation. The result will be a report, subject to evaluation as part of the final exams.

The future needs archivists with an increased flexibility grounded on a sure and firm basis. The general foundations play an important role and are not replaceable. Based on a well-grounded professional practice, continuing education training adapts to practical needs as it enlarges the professional knowledge. Research follows the development of the profession and identifies areas where concepts have to be discussed and where new intellectual and theoretical foundations are needed. Research then can identify concepts that will be useful and necessary in the future and adapt them to new environments. Research can also offer archival solutions for other disciplines, such as administrative sciences and social sciences.

This model of an integrated approach to qualification, combining pre-employment education, continuing education, and research is the basis for the Marburg Archives School’s entry into the new millennium. Our evolution of education and research is not finished and the experiences of the years to come will surely change it again. The Marburg Archives School has tried to open up new perspectives and opportunities as it adapts archival training to a changing world. Using memory and the past for the construction of the future requires well-grounded professional skills for archivists, and at Marburg students develop a professional identity and are challenged with the responsibility of ensuring the capability of societies to use their own past.