

RECONSIDERING ARCHIVAL CLASSICS

Lester J. Cappon and the Relationship of History, Archives, and Scholarship in the Golden Age of Archival Theory

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Introduction

In the mid-1990s, the hip magazine *Wired* conducted an “interview” with futurist Marshall McLuhan who, at that point, had been dead for a decade and a half. At the beginning of the essay, the following advisory was provided: “The fallacies of this interview with McLuhan are as follows: About a year ago, someone calling himself Marshall McLuhan began posting anonymously on a popular mailing list called Zone (zone@wired.com). Gary Wolf began a correspondence with the poster via a chain of anonymous remailers. McLuhan (who would have been eighty-five this year) said he now lives in a beach town in Southern California named “Parma.” (This town does not exist.)

I am indebted to a number of people who assisted me in my work on Lester Cappon. Stacy Gould, university archivist, and John Haskell, associate dean for Administration and director of Manuscripts and Rare Books, and the other staff of Special Collections, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, were extremely helpful in my use of the Lester J. Cappon Papers. Stephen E. Haller, director of Archives and Records at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation guided me through the records held by that organization relating to Cappon’s career there. Mike Plunkett, director, Albert H. Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia Library and his staff were also very helpful during my visit to this repository. Tim Ericson, until recently head of Archives and Special Collections, Golda Meir Library at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, provided some useful information on Cappon’s family background. Michael O’Malley, a student in the archives program at the University of Pittsburgh during the academic year 2002–2003, worked on a project for me examining historians’ attitudes toward archives and archival records; I have integrated some of his citations into this essay. Finally, Dawn Schmitz, another archives student and a fine graduate assistant during the fall 2003 term, did initial proofreading of my first drafts of Cappon’s essays.

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One after another, tiny hints, confirmed by third parties close to McLuhan decades ago, convinced Wolf that if the poster was not McLuhan himself, it was a bot programmed with an eerie command of McLuhan's life and inimitable perspective. After many rounds of e-mail, the conversation got down to the meat of the matter: "What does McLuhan think about all this new digital technology?"¹ In one sense I wish I could have done this with Lester J. Cappon who, incidentally, died only eight months after McLuhan. In another sense, I feel as if I have done this, but instead of using electronic mail, I had to draw upon the rich correspondence and array of published writings left behind by Cappon. Indeed, as I was reading through Cappon's personal papers, I began to have vague feelings about the kind of richness of documentation subsequent generations of archivists have lost (ironically) by relying and becoming dependent on this more rapid means of communication.

Much of what follows is the result of my "debating" with Lester J. Cappon, two generations removed from me in professional circles. I met him only once and briefly at a Society of American Archivists meeting toward the end of his life, and I am sure I was a minor blip on his radar screen; although I had published a number of essays by that point, I was still far from making any really substantial contributions to archival knowledge (or, at least, the debate about this knowledge) that would have attracted his attention. Many of the struggles Cappon had with his professional identity (was he archivist, historian, editor, all of these, or something else?) people of my generation (including me) had also gone through. Either the concerns Cappon continuously dealt with in his writings and correspondence have not been resolved, or they are merely endemic to that of most modern professions (and I suspect that a little of both are true). In this way, as I plowed through the documentation related to Cappon, I felt as if I was reliving some of my own personal debates and decisions.

My debate with Cappon is far more complicated than this, however. Cappon disparaged many of the activities I have been engaged in, especially over the last fifteen years. He steadfastly perceived archives to be the province of historians, while I have argued that archives (more broadly, records) are fundamentally administered for other reasons like accountability and corporate memory, with their value for historical research an important but often secondary matter. Cappon disliked the technical and skills orientation of library schools, and he spent decades complaining about any move to educate archivists in that realm. I have spent fifteen years teaching and working in a school of information sciences, and I have argued about the advantages of having graduate archival education programs in such venues (although I, too, share many of Cappon's concerns about the quality of intellectual environment and

¹ Gary Wolf, "Channeling McLuhan," *Wired* 4 (January 1996), available at <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/4.01/channeling.html?pg=1>.

orientation toward both teaching and scholarly work). Cappon was a staunch critic of the increasing professional specialization within society and the university, fearful of the kind of vocational-technical mindset that forms with such a focus. Within library and information science schools I have been an advocate for specialization, and within the archival community I also have testified to the need (in my opinion) for nurturing specializations supporting both work with specific types of records and recording media and investigation about the nature of records and recordkeeping systems. As a result of these and other matters, I have found myself both wanting to ask Cappon questions to understand better his perspective and desiring to debate him about some of the views that he held.

Despite all this I possess great empathy for Cappon as a pioneering American archivist, and for years I have had an interest in seeing a set of his primary essays on archives and documentary editing brought together and published, both as a kind of testament to the careers of pioneers such as him, and because his writings engage and inform us today. Nearly twenty years ago, in one of those furious professional debates about the relationship of history to archives and vice versa, I wrote a brief essay using Cappon as an example of how the two disciplines relate to each other. I termed Cappon a “model historian-archivist,” and I noted then that his wide-ranging essays deserved publication as a volume. I drew on Cappon to argue that the acrimonious and intriguing debate of the early 1980s represented little that was new, since Cappon (and some others) had been wrestling with such matters for a full half-century before. In my earlier essay I drew on Cappon to contend that, unlike some then debating the essence of the archival discipline, Cappon was not afraid of change and held firm to the idea of a “dynamic archival profession while upholding the concept of the archivist as historian and scholar.”² Now I would modify this somewhat after investigating in much greater depth Cappon’s career. I admire Cappon’s scholarship and the tenacity of his convictions, but I am not sure he did not fear some of the changes he thought he saw happening to the archival community (especially in the last decade of his life). What has emerged for me now is a more human and humane sense of a man who became a leader in the developing American archival profession, but who also lived long enough to see some of his ideas and convictions about that community begin to decline. It is something, I think, we all must face one day, and Cappon has proved to be for me an interesting gauge of some of my own professional doubts and fears (offering yet another reason why I wish we could sit down over his preferred drink, bourbon, with his favorite music in the background and quietly work through all this).

² My essay was published as “Archivists and Historians: A View from the United States,” *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984–85): 185–90.

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Except for the occasional citation to one of his essays, Lester J. Cappon seems to be relatively unknown to the present generation of archivists.³ Yet, Cappon, along with Jenkinson, Leland, Norton, and Schellenberg (and others), was part of a small, sturdy group of individuals who spanned other disciplines in the formative era of the modern archival profession to create a working body of archival knowledge, theory, and practice (and for that reason, if no other, he deserves attention). In many ways, Cappon is the quintessential proponent of an archival knowledge based on historical scholarship, and in this aspect of the field, his writings (like Norton's on the relationship between records management, organizational management, and archivy) seem to remain prescient more than two decades after his death.⁴ In his essays, the most important of which were published in the last quarter-century of his life, Cappon speaks to us about the substance, foundations, and principles of archival work. These essays reflect his considerable soul-searching about the knowledge and identity of the archivist, and his own strong sense of both history and archives propelled him to be elected president of the Southern Historical Association (1949), the Society of American Archivists (1957), and the Association of Documentary Editors (1979), one of that small group who took leadership positions in *both* archival and historical associations (and of a kind we will likely not see again because of the continuing evolution of the disciplines).⁵

³ As one indication of this, Elizabeth Yakel of the University of Michigan and Jeannette Bastian of Simmons College in their study about graduate archival education found, in all of the courses being offered today in North America, only five citations to Cappon's published writings. His 1982 posthumously published essay on archival theory is being used in one course; Cappon's 1956 essay on "Historical Manuscripts as Archives" is being used in one course (one I teach at the University of Pittsburgh); Cappon's study of Walter Benjamin and the origins of the American autograph trade is being used in one course; his 1976 "Archivist as Collector" essay is being used in one course; and, finally, Cappon's article "A Rationale for Historical Editing Past and Present" is in place in one course. Elizabeth Yakel to the author, 28 May 2003. Given Cappon's seminal role in the formation of the American archival community, he truly is a neglected figure (perhaps suggesting the profession's neglect of its own history). Moreover, in the past five years of the *American Archivist* (1998–2002), there is not a single citation to any of Cappon's writings or work. This seems strange, especially as the topics covered in the journal reflect many of the same matters Cappon spent so much time working on.

⁴ With the exception of Waldo G. Leland, each of these individuals is remembered today for their landmark books. Margaret Cross Norton's writings were assembled into a volume that resurrected her influence: Thornton W. Mitchell, ed., *Norton on Archives: The Writings of Margaret Cross Norton on Archival & Records Management* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975). T. R. Schellenberg's principal books were *The Management of Archives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965) and *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956). Sir Hilary Jenkinson's continuing influence emanates from *A Manual of Archive Administration* (London: Percy Lund, Humphries and Co., Ltd., 1966; reprint of 1937 ed.).

⁵ Cappon also devoted considerable time and effort to various professional associations. For the Society of American Archivists, for example, he functioned as secretary from 1942 to 1950, then the key administrative position within the organization.

Formative Years

Cappon was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, right at the beginning of the twentieth century. His father, Jesse, was a prosperous Milwaukee businessman, the president of a bank and a lumber company.⁶ He was initially interested in music, earning a diploma from the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music in 1920; but he also manifested an interest in history and went on to earn degrees at the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1922 and 1923 and at Harvard University, acquiring a Ph.D. in 1928 (concerning the southern iron industry in the antebellum period).⁷ Along the way he was an English instructor at the Boys' Technical High School in Milwaukee (in 1923–24) and an assistant in history at Radcliffe College (1925–26). At some point in the mid-1920s (probably in 1926), Cappon came to the University of Virginia where he worked with Dumas Malone on a southern historical bibliography with funding assistance from the university's Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, eventually leading to a couple of publications on Virginia historical publications and newspapers.⁸ A college friend, Walter Holzbog, years later remembered Cappon as being "serious and meticulous in his school work." Holzbog described him as remarkably energetic and possessing, even in his early twenties, a "private library," reflecting that Cappon had "already shown signs of being a scholar."⁹ Such traits

⁶ A brief sketch of Jesse Cappon is available in the *History of Milwaukee City and County*, vol. 2 (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1922), 187–88. In the biographical sketch it is stated that Cappon's millwork and lumber business "has steadily grown under the wise management and capable control of Mr. Cappon, who has ever closely studied trade conditions and has built up his business on a sound principle that success is the result of maximum effort accomplished through minimum expenditure of time, labor and material. Moreover, he has never sacrificed quality for quantity and his patrons recognize that the best can be obtained from his factory." Given that sketches in such volumes were often penned by the subject or, at least, based on interviews, this description perhaps captures something of the home environment Lester grew up in.

⁷ Lester J. Cappon, "History of the Southern Iron Industry to the Close of the Civil War," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1928). Cappon continued to work on the topic for a time, preparing a small pamphlet entitled *Iron Works at Tuball: Terms and Conditions for Their Lease as Stated by Alexander Spotswood on the Twentieth Day of July 1739. Together with an Historical Introduction by Lester J. Cappon of the University of Virginia, and a Map of Virginia Showing Germana in 1738* (Charlottesville: Printed for the Tracy W. McGregor Library of the University of Virginia, 1945).

⁸ There are references to the funding of these projects in the records of the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, RG-2/5/1.871, Box 1, University of Virginia. See the minutes of the Executive Council for 29 October 1926, 26 November 1927, the 1927 annual report of the Institute, and the 1929 annual report. What I don't know, although it is not fundamental to the substance of this essay, is what brought Cappon from Harvard to Virginia. One presumes some sort of academic relationship propelled Cappon to make the move.

⁹ A copy of a chapter (devoted to Cappon) of Holzbog's self-published memoir is included in the Lester J. Cappon Papers, 90 C17, at the College of William and Mary (hereafter cited as the Cappon Papers), Box XXI, Folder 4. The Cappon Papers is a wonderfully dense collection of materials related to Cappon's career after 1945, and the papers reflect Cappon's own sense about such materials. In advising Philip C. Brooks about what to do with his own papers at the time of his retirement, Cappon commented, "While I have not reached a final decision [regarding where to place his papers], I think we are in agreement that one's papers for retention ought to be kept intact in a single repository"; Lester J. Cappon to Philip C. Brooks, 14 April 1972, Cappon Papers, Box VI, Folder 15.

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appeared very quickly; indeed, as Dumas Malone noted in his foreword to Cappon's massive 900-page bibliography on Virginia history, the original intent had been to do the entire South but that the "limitation of the scope of the work has been considerably due to the embarrassing thoroughness with which Dr. Cappon proceeded upon his laborious task. It soon appeared that years would be required to cover even a few of the Southern states, so it was decided to concentrate attention upon the commonwealth wherein our chief interest lay."¹⁰ Today, reading these words, it is difficult to know if Malone was being completely laudatory, stressing Cappon's careful scholarship, or if this was a bit critical, expressing frustration about the slow pace that Cappon's research approach created. Regardless, we know that Cappon was a serious scholar from his earliest days.

Cappon had a long career as both archivist and historical administrator, working as an assistant professor of history and archivist at the University of Virginia from 1930 until 1945 (and, like most archivists of this time and for a number of decades afterward, Cappon discovered the emergent profession quite accidentally). Not surprisingly, Cappon's work on the Virginia bibliography stoked his interest in the archival sources of Virginia (since he included what few manuscript materials were available in public archives and libraries) and brought him to the attention of the University of Virginia administrators who were then renewing their intention to build the school into a major research institution. In the mid-1930s, he turned down an offer to work for the newly established National Archives, being concerned about the larger bureaucracy, although he did briefly run (on a part-time basis) the Virginia Historical Records Survey (HRS) for the federally administered Works Progress Administration.¹¹ In the mid-1930s, as he advised the HRS work in that state, Cappon observed that the archives field was transforming, noting that "Events of the past year point to a new era in the science of archives in the United States, to large-scale co-operation in providing guides to archives and manuscript collections of all kinds, and to a journal for discussion of problems and

¹⁰ Lester J. Cappon, *Bibliography of Virginia History Since 1865* (Charlottesville: The Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, 1930), vii.

¹¹ "The Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon," an interview conducted by Stephen M. Rowe on 12 May 1976, as part of the Oral History Program of Colonial Williamsburg. I used the copy in the Archives of the College of William and Mary, although the copyright is held by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Cappon's comments about this part of his work experience is on pages 119–20 and 133. In the Cappon Papers is a copy of the oral history interview Cappon did at the request of the National Archives Oral History Project (Box VI, Folder 15). In this interview Cappon comments that in the course of his fieldwork for the University of Virginia, he also began to examine the state of Virginia's county records, beginning to compile his own inventory before the establishment of the Historical Records Survey and commenting that he never continued this work because of the HRS (finishing only his 1936 bibliography of Virginia newspapers).

policies.”¹² The observation, penned in 1937, indicated that Cappon had fully engaged with the young American archival community,¹³ and field collecting and historical research remained lifelong obsessions with the transplanted Virginian. No wonder that Cappon, despite his intense interest in building significant archival collections, did not stick very long with the HRS; in answering a question forty years later for a master’s thesis on the history of the Virginia HRS, Cappon indicated that the purpose was achieved of hiring people in the depression but that the “percentage of college graduates in Virginia was low, of persons with higher degrees minimal, and the training of the ‘common man’ and woman on the job was time-consuming.”¹⁴ Cappon’s sense of a future for an archival discipline could not be played in this arena, and he certainly showed no signs of believing that *anyone* could become an archivist.¹⁵

The writing of his annual reports as an archivist while at the University of Virginia, an exercise he seems to have taken on his own initiative, provided a kind of journal of his maturing sense of work and identity as a professional archivist (although he was to spend much of his later career struggling with his identity).¹⁶ Cappon suggested that it was on the basis of his published annual reports, with their lengthy and detailed reports about collecting, that Luther Evans, directing the national Historical Records Survey, was propelled to ask him to direct Virginia’s part of the HRS.¹⁷ These reports speculated about the identity of the archivist, the nature of archival knowledge, the archivist’s education, and a host of other themes that would resound through his more important published essays (and I will cite these as appropriate in this essay). These reports, slowly becoming more mature and self-reflective, were the forum for Cappon’s own

¹² *Seventh Annual Report of the Archivist University of Virginia Library for the Year 1936–37* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1937), 1 (see also a description of his HRS work on pp. 2–3 of this report).

¹³ That Cappon was already well known and respected in the archival community, beyond being a founding member of the new professional association, is clear from his authorship of the report on the 1940 annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists; Lester J. Cappon, “The Fourth Annual Meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Montgomery, Alabama, November 11 and 12, 1940,” *American Archivist* 4 (January 1940): 13–25.

¹⁴ Lester J. Cappon to Gerald R. Virgilio, 2 April 1974, and Virgilio to Cappon, 26 March 1974, Cappon Papers, 90 C17, Box X, Folder 5.

¹⁵ As it turns out, however, the HRS served as a breeding ground for an entire generation of archivists. A decade after the HRS, the following conclusion was asserted: “The [W.P.A. Historical Records] Survey produced other indirect results. It aroused in localities and states an awareness of the value of records and the need of preserving them, and it encouraged the establishment of state archives departments. It also provided training for archival directors and workers; many state archivists, curators of state and local records collections, National Archives and Library of Congress Staff members got their start in the Historical Records Survey organization.” David L. Smiley, “The W.P.A. Historical Records Survey,” in *In Support of Clío: Essays in Memory of Herbert A. Kellar*, ed. William B. Hesseltine and Donald R. McNeil, 25–26 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1958).

¹⁶ Apparently, Cappon was also a compulsive diarist, although his diaries, located at the College of William and Mary, are closed until August 2006, the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death.

¹⁷ “Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon,” 135.

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concept of scholarship, as well as indicating his own efforts to develop a workable profile for a field that was largely unknown by both the public and even scholars wanting access to historical records.¹⁸ Years later, in a letter to Maryland State Archivist Morris Radoff, Cappon had an opportunity to reveal his sense of the role of published reports in the profession. Cappon, hearing that the Maryland program might cease the publication of its annual reports, argued that “published annual reports of archivists serve a very useful purpose. Of course they should contain real substance in essay form, not merely data compiled in lists and statistical tables; and they ought to include some reflections by the archivist that relate his work to the profession and to the public.” Cappon continued, “I suspect that some of our colleagues in the profession do not give sufficient weight to the annual report as an important feature of the year’s work or as a contribution to the advancement of archival science and scholarship.”¹⁹ In everything that he did, Cappon was a careful craftsman and scholar.

Signs of a Change

By 1940, and the end of his first full decade of work as an archivist, Cappon seems to have become interested in expanding his professional range of responsibilities, perhaps reflecting as much as anything the general nature of the still-emergent discipline, vacillating then between historians and librarians (much like today but with a much less well-developed body of knowledge or community).²⁰ If his annual reports are any indication, Cappon was obsessed with matters like the proper education and status of the archivist, as he recognized the need for building a critical mass of working, knowledgeable archivists. In 1938, Cappon ruminated that the archivist was “somewhere between the librarian and the historian,” a new creature. “Like the physician emerging from the barber’s trade in colonial days, the archivist aspires to professional dignity in his own name.”²¹ In these reports, by the end of the decade, Cappon was

¹⁸ Newspapers reporting on the appointment of the first Archivist of the United States played with the fact that the president was uncertain about the pronunciation of archivist and the appointee, R. D. W. Connor, joked about how the archivist was not an anarchist; Hugh T. Lefler, “Robert Digges Wimberly Connor,” in *Keepers of the Past*, ed. Clifford L. Lord, 117–18 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965).

¹⁹ Lester J. Cappon to Morris L. Radoff, 11 May 1961, Cappon Papers, Box V, Folder 6.

²⁰ Today we have multiple journals, from local to national and international associations holding meetings and sponsoring training, a much larger and better developed professional literature, distinctive graduate programs, and listservs and the World Wide Web jammed with opportunities for building an archival community. Sixty years ago almost none of this was in place. A community at that time was held together through personal contacts, formal and informal meetings at a range of professional associations, and the Society of American Archivists in its most fledgling state of existence. Cappon was a master of this older form of networking, as his personal and professional correspondence suggests.

²¹ *Eighth Annual Report of the Archivist University of Virginia Library for the Year 1936–37* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1938), 1.

regularly writing about the nature of archival scholarship and education, especially the latter. Also in 1938, Cappon wrote about the need for archival training in universities “with a well established manuscript division in their libraries, in direct connection with graduate work in the social sciences and the humanities, rather than in library schools.”²² Two years later, Cappon was even more adamant about the need for the right kind of archival education, cautioning that “We must guard against plainless exploitation and unintentional debasement of this new profession.”²³ It is possible that some of the stridency displayed in his later reports reflected some questioning about his position at the University of Virginia, although Cappon remained convinced of the critically important role that a university such as Virginia plays as a collector of historical sources, supplanting the older historical society because of the university’s unprecedented concentration of scholarly expertise.²⁴

By the late 1930s, Cappon was trying to make a change in what he was doing in Charlottesville. In early 1939, Cappon wrote to the head of Virginia’s history department, where he had taught without additional compensation a course each year since 1929, asking to be promoted to an associate professor of history.²⁵ While one interpretation may be that Cappon simply was asking for the recognition he thought he deserved for his decade of services in the history department, it may be that Cappon wished to position himself to play a greater role in the development of educational programs for the preparation of archivists (especially since archivists and historians were openly engaged in discussing the needs for such education).²⁶ A more revealing letter from Cappon’s

²² *Eighth Annual Report of the Archivist*, 3.

²³ *Tenth Annual Report of the Archivist University of Virginia Library for the Year 1939–40* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1940), 7.

²⁴ On 31 October 1941, Cappon presented the Goldwin Smith Lecture at Cornell University on the topic of “The University Library’s Opportunities for Collecting Research Materials,” and a typescript of the talk is in the Cappon Papers, Box VII, folder 5. Cappon’s talk about the essential role of the university as an archives for historians and other scholars suggests that whatever personal concerns he may have had while at the University of Virginia at this time, he remained convinced about the critical need for universities to develop aggressive collecting programs of historical materials.

²⁵ Lester J. Cappon to T. Cary Johnson, 27 March 1939, University Librarian Office Administrative Files RG 12/1/1.681, Box 21, University of Virginia Archives (hereafter cited as Librarian Files).

²⁶ Here is how one historian characterized the developments of the time in his historical records manual: “At a meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association in 1940, Solon J. Buck, United States Archivist, discussed ‘The Training of an Archivist.’ Pointing out the growing interest in archives management, the need of special training, and the lack of provision for it by the universities, he suggested the possibility of apprenticeships in the National Archives. A few months later, in cooperation with the American University of Washington, D.C., a training program was planned to include classroom instruction, actual work in the National Archives, and discussion in seminars. With the Maryland Hall of Records also cooperating, a short training course on preservation and administration of archives was offered at the American University to custodians of institutional and business archives.” Homer Carey Hockett, *The Critical Method in Historical Research and Writing* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1955), 258–59.

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boss, Harry Clemons, to the history department suggests that Cappon had a far more ambitious agenda. Writing to support Cappon's request for a change of status in the history department, Clemons describes the changing nature of the archival profession and suggests that Virginia could become a center for the education of archivists at both the undergraduate and graduate levels and take advantage of Cappon's "strategic training and experience."²⁷ Nothing came of the request. It is possible that Cappon became uneasy about his work and future at the university as a consequence. In 1941, for example, Cappon applied for the position of superintendent of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, perhaps motivated by the fact that Wisconsin was his home state but perhaps also a result of Cappon's sense of needing another venue for pursuing his professional agenda.²⁸ A few years later, when Cappon was considering the position at Williamsburg, Julian Boyd urged him to take it because "at Williamsburg, you will be one of the leaders in a new and promising venture." Boyd added, "You already have a well-established reputation in the profession and the respect for your work is universal. But in Williamsburg I believe that the recognition will be more substantial and the handicaps will be fewer."²⁹ Management at Colonial Williamsburg had been thinking for a number of years of establishing an archives, having hired a consultant in 1940 to determine the kind of person that was needed.³⁰ Cappon had been thinking along these lines for a number of years as well, and off he went.

Professional Transitions

In 1945, Cappon moved 120 miles eastward to become the editor of publications at the Institute of Early American History and Culture in Williamsburg, Virginia, a post he held until 1955 when he became its director. Cappon also functioned as the director of Colonial Williamsburg's newly established Archives and Records Department from 1945 until 1952. Whatever wanderlust Cappon might have been feeling in the late 1930s and early 1940s disappeared a few short years after his arrival in the old and under-reconstruction former capital of the Virginia colony. Shortly after going to Williamsburg, in 1948, Cappon rebuffed the idea of pursuing a potential opportunity (one that did not materialize in any event) because "It would doubtless take considerable urging to get

²⁷ Harry Clemons to T. Cary Johnson, 29 March 1939, Librarian Files, Box 21.

²⁸ J. D. Hicks to Harry Clemons, 8 April 1941 and Harry Clemons to J. D. Hicks, 2 April 1941, Librarian Files, Box 21.

²⁹ Julian P. Boyd to Lester J. Cappon, 20 March 1945, Cappon Papers, Box VI, Folder 12.

³⁰ Roscoe R. Hill, "Report on a Survey of the Records of the Williamsburg Restoration and a Proposal for Establishing an Archive," dated 1940, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives.

me out of Virginia.”³¹ Cappon similarly rebuffed later opportunities for other positions outside of the state. In 1950, Cappon determined that he would not pursue an assistant directorship of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library because he had “always been engaged in some historical research and occasional writing,” along with some teaching, and that he “would not like to get into a situation where administrative duties would take most of my time.”³² And the leaders of the Williamsburg operations were reluctant to see the possibility of Cappon leaving. In 1950, Carl Bridenbaugh, director of the institute, transformed Cappon’s duties to be more focused on editing its publications. Bridenbaugh explained the change in this way: “For the past four years I have had the distinct feeling that you were spending too much time at your work, but would do nothing about it because the Institute did not command all of your services. I hope that from now on you will spend *less* rather than more time at your work; you should have leisure for contemplation and reading.”³³ It is possible to interpret this in a couple of ways, either that Cappon was showing some strain and dissatisfaction with the burden of his responsibilities or that this was nothing more than the classic miscalculation of an administrator about the amount of time it takes to manage records (and Cappon certainly was not one to shirk such matters). Or, perhaps, Bridenbaugh knew that Cappon was receiving regular offers or expressions of interest in his service. Doubtless Cappon was straining a bit with his various responsibilities, as he turned down the editorship of the *American Archivist* in 1948 because the position was too “time-consuming.”³⁴ Whatever the case, Cappon’s primary writings on archival theory and documentary editing emerged after this change, suggesting that he did have a bit more time to reflect.

Cappon spent a quarter of a century in Williamsburg. In 1969, he went to the Newberry Library in Chicago to become a senior fellow there, and he stayed to edit the *Atlas of Early American History* and then held posts at the Newberry as a distinguished research fellow and emeritus research fellow until his death in 1981. Cappon’s work on the atlas was the result of a long-term interest in maps as historical sources, dating back at least to the 1950s and probably extending back into his early fieldwork collecting for the University of Virginia and reflecting his

³¹ Lester J. Cappon to Ernst Posner, 18 February 1948, Cappon Papers, Box IX, Folder 7.

³² Lester J. Cappon to Philip C. Brooks, 29 November 1950, and Philip C. Brooks to Lester J. Cappon, 22 November 1950, Cappon Papers, Box VI, Folder 14.

³³ Carl Bridenbaugh to Lester J. Cappon, 24 May 1950, Cappon Papers, Box V, Folder 18.

³⁴ Lester J. Cappon to Harry Clemons, 26 June 1948, University Librarian Office Administrative Files, RG 12/1/1.681, Box 21, University of Virginia. Cappon had been approached by Helen L. Chatfield and Ernst Posner who sent him a letter dated 15 May 1948 (in the Cappon Papers, Box IX, Folder 7). Cappon wrote to Ernst Posner that he could not do this, because “I would have to sacrifice other interests in research and writing which I am gradually developing in Williamsburg”; Lester J. Cappon to Ernst Posner, 20 May 1948, Cappon Papers, Box IX, Folder 7.

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careful attention to the variety of historical sources available to the scholar.³⁵ The atlas project became possible for Cappon as a result of a windfall estate gift to the Newberry and because the Newberry's director, Lawrence Towner, had been a protégé of Cappon's at the institute in the mid-1950s.³⁶ To historians, Cappon is probably best known for his editorship of the aforementioned atlas and a two-volume edition of the correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, published in 1959.³⁷ Cappon decided to stay on in Chicago after the completion of the project because of the Newberry's immense research resources, the music performances, and general cultural attractions;³⁸ to an outdoorsman like Cappon, the harsh Chicago winters did not seem to matter. To archivists, however, Cappon should be known for an intriguing array of essays he wrote on archival theory, history, and practice from the mid-1950s until his death.

Cappon was candid about his own limitations in preparing to work as an archivist. In an oral interview toward the end of his life, Cappon noted that he "didn't have any formal training [as an archivist] because there wasn't any in those days,"³⁹ perhaps partially explaining his lifelong interest in education. Cappon also noted his first archivist position at the University of Virginia "was not truly archives work," but that he was there, initially at least, as part of the staff of the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences, working as a research associate under Dumas Malone and as part of an effort to strengthen the research of the history and other social sciences departments (although records at the university suggest that Cappon's primary focus was his archival work).⁴⁰ While

³⁵ Cappon presented a paper about the need for such an atlas in 1961 at the Association of American Geographers, later published in a somewhat revised version as "The Case for a New Historical Atlas of Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 28 (January 1971): 121–27. See also Cappon's "Geographers and Mapmakers, From About 1750 to 1789," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 81, no. 2 (1971): 243–71 and his "Retracing and Mapping the Bartram's Southern Travels," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 118 (December 1974): 507–13 for some commentary about the progress of combining historical research methodologies with geographer's approaches.

³⁶ "Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon," 101–105.

³⁷ Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959); Cappon, ed., *Atlas of Early American History: The American Revolution, 1760–1790* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

³⁸ Lester J. Cappon to Philip C. Brooks, 19 January 1977, Cappon Papers, Box VI, Folder 15.

³⁹ "Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon," 1.

⁴⁰ "Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon," 3, 4. Cappon had started work as a research associate in 1926, was given leave to complete his dissertation, and was mostly working on *The Bibliography of Virginia History Since 1865* published in 1930 by D. Appleton-Century Company. The same publisher also produced his *Virginia Newspapers: 1821–1935; A Bibliography with Historical Introduction and Notes* published in 1936. For his work on the bibliography, Cappon mostly worked in the resources at the Library of Congress, acknowledging the problems with the archival and library repositories in that state that he was later to work to rectify. The newspaper index was, in Cappon's opinion, part of a series of guides to Virginia's historical sources that would ultimately include volumes on the inventory of state and county archives and manuscript collections (indeed, the title page included a subtitle for the volume as *Guide to Virginia Historical Materials Part I*); the closest Cappon came to achieving this was in the various inventories published as part of his annual reports as the archivist at the University of Virginia.

Cappon was working as a part-time history lecturer and bibliographer, the University of Virginia decided that it was important to develop a manuscript collection to support the research of its faculty. Cappon was appointed to develop the collection and, as he tells it, “for want of a better title, I guess, they called me archivist. My work was essentially collecting,” and Cappon would spend most of his time “out in the field.”⁴¹ At times, he even resorted to radio broadcasts about the importance of historical manuscripts and their collecting, striving to drum up popular interest in archival work.⁴²

Cappon’s time at the University of Virginia was documented by the aforementioned series of published annual reports in which his sensibility and at least partial identity as an archivist (Cappon always wrestled with his professional identity, seeming to lean to his work as a historian) were clearly formed. From the very beginning of his time as archivist, Cappon was interested in creating an inventory of historical manuscripts in Virginia, and he diligently worked to create a statewide inventory through the 1930s, traveling all over Virginia and using every opportunity (even when outside the state) to acquire records related to the state.⁴³ Cappon was struggling with the idea of being a professional archivist, and he mused in one report that he could not bear to reject any manuscript: “No manuscript is rejected because, as the prospective donor often remarks, it is ‘of no interest’ or ‘only personal’ or ‘not old enough.’ Even when library space is limited, it is dangerous business to declare *ex cathedra* what has historical value and what has not, and, in any circumstances, who shall judge what the scholars of future generations will prize most highly or regard as most trivial?”⁴⁴ This was a perspective that Cappon would modify later as he grew along with the American archival profession.

Even when Cappon went to Williamsburg in the mid-1940s, he was only working as an archivist at best 50 percent of the time, and he himself thought that the responsibilities of being the institute’s publications editor were more demanding and took more of his time.⁴⁵ Regardless of how much time Cappon was supposed to be working on the records of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and the institute, he took his responsibilities very seriously, attending to nearly every detail of the records. For example, Cappon worked to find

⁴¹ “Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon,” 7, 10, 12.

⁴² Lester J. Cappon, “The University of Virginia’s Activity in the Collection and Preservation of Historical Manuscripts,” radio broadcast, over WCHV, 25 May 1938, 8966-b, University of Virginia Special Collections.

⁴³ *First Annual Report of the Archivist University of Virginia Library for the Year 1930–31* ([Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1931], 1, 2, 5, 10–16; *Second Annual Report . . . for the Year 1931–32*, 1–3, 5.

⁴⁴ *Third Annual Report . . . for the Year 1932–33*, 3.

⁴⁵ “Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon,” 25.

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the best sort of paper to be used for carbon copies of correspondence and other records, finally settling on a yellow carbon paper of “partial rag” content.⁴⁶ Cappon was most concerned about the poor quality of records being used for administrative records, “classifying them [the records] as to quality of paper needed in relation to use and degree of permanence.”⁴⁷

Most interesting, Cappon quickly adapted to his role as *both* archivist *and* records manager. In his first annual report at Colonial Williamsburg, Cappon wrote: “The word ‘archives’ connotes older or inactive records, but most archivists today are concerned not only with inactive records from an administrative point of view but also with their relation to current records and the form in which these are created.”⁴⁸ Cappon conducted surveys of records, sent questionnaires to staff members about their records, worked on retention and disposal schedules, and created a records-management and filing manual.⁴⁹ He wrote a lengthy report with numerous suggestions not only for managing archival records but for administering current records, including how to handle the central files, improving the creation of records, developing retention and disposition schedules, adopting microfilm methods, and the like.⁵⁰ Undoubtedly, some of this was due to Cappon building off of the original 1940 consultant report which recommended that the archivist should be a “person trained in history, who has attained his doctor’s degree and who has had the opportunity of using extensively old records,” but who also can “analyze the processes which went into the making of the records.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, Cappon seemed to work effectively as a records manager and to grasp the nature of the functions associated with such responsibilities.

⁴⁶ “Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon,” 54–55.

⁴⁷ “Colonial Williamsburg Annual Reports of Administrative Offices and Department Heads for 1948,” 72. Cappon later reported that the foundation adopted the use of a “50% rag paper for all file copies of inter-office memoranda and outgoing letters”; “Colonial Williamsburg Annual Reports of Administrative Offices and Department Heads for 1949,” 87, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives. Cappon also co-authored an article with Ernest H. Priest and Luta M. Sewell, “Creation of Records: The Program of Colonial Williamsburg,” *American Archivist* 14 (April 1951): 117–25. While primitive by today’s preservation or records management standards, the article is a clear demonstration of Cappon’s concerns for the administration of current records within an organization.

⁴⁸ “Colonial Williamsburg Annual Reports of Administrative Offices and Department Heads for 1946,” 31, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives.

⁴⁹ “Colonial Williamsburg Annual Reports of Administrative Offices and Department Heads for 1946,” 32, 34–35, 36; “Colonial Williamsburg Annual Reports of Administrative Offices and Department Heads for 1947,” 112–13; “Colonial Williamsburg Annual Reports of Administrative Offices and Department Heads for 1948,” 71, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives.

⁵⁰ Lester J. Cappon to Kenneth Chorley, “Report on Records and Archives,” 19 April 1946, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Records.

⁵¹ Hill, “Report on a Survey of the Records,” 19–20.

Early Writings

Cappon's more traditional historical writings, as they began to appear in the early 1930s, reveal sensitivity, as well, to archival issues. In his 1935 essay on the publishing by Northern troops in Virginia during the Civil War, Cappon notes that soldiers' diaries and other similar sources provide only a modest glimpse into these soldiers' lives. Cappon finds in the newspapers published by the troops a better source: "One of the most engaging sources of information, fragmentary though it be, on this life behind the lines is the newspapers published by northern troops in some ten or twelve different Virginia towns. Many of them express merely the momentary exultation of victory; others are more illuminating in their comments on the contemporary scene and more characteristic of war journalism."⁵² Cappon's interest in newspapers and his command of their changing tastes and shifting values as historical sources come through with his assessment that "Most of these crudely printed sheets served as a means of relaxation for the soldier as well as an expression of his ego. To the civilian they were a source of irritation, although, in most instances, they were not intended as such. The fleeting glimpse they afford us of life behind the lines cannot be equaled. And with all their obvious prejudice and antagonism, they appear quite innocuous in comparison with the carpetbag press of reconstruction days."⁵³ More often than not the topics of Cappon's historical researches were about individuals who reflected his own interests. He wrote an essay, for example, about Edward Channing and Albert Bushnell Hart's collaboration on the 1896 *Guide to the Study of American History*, a work of bibliography and breadth much like many of the projects Cappon himself became involved with in his long career.⁵⁴ Such essays appeared right up to the end of his long, productive career and life, although the number of historical essays without a focus on archival or editing matters declined and disappeared by the late 1950s.⁵⁵

⁵² Lester J. Cappon, "The Yankee Press in Virginia, 1861–1865," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 2nd series, 15 (January 1935): 81–88 (quotation, 81). Cappon's regard for the newspaper as a historical source, one that should be inventoried along with archives and historical manuscripts, remained evident through the first part of his career. In addition to his inventory of Virginia newspapers compiled in the 1930s, Cappon cocompiled with Stella F. Duff the *Virginia Gazette Index, 1735–1780* (Williamsburg, Va: Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1950) and wrote with Duff an essay about newspaper indexing reflecting many of his convictions about the newspaper as a source and about the kind of people qualified to do such work; "Comprehensive Historical Indexing: The Virginia Gazette Index," *American Archivist* 4 (October 1951): 291–304.

⁵³ Cappon, "Yankee Press," 88.

⁵⁴ Lester J. Cappon, "Channing and Hart: Partners in Bibliography," *New England Quarterly* 29 (September 1956): 318–40.

⁵⁵ Lester J. Cappon, "The Soldier's Creed," *Ohio History* 64 (July 1955): 320–27 is one example of a historical essay, considering a rationale for the Civil War authored by an Ohioan.

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Cappon's interest in archival topics was certainly exemplified by his writings about collecting and documentary publication. In some of his early essays on the former, Cappon tried to wrestle through with the reasons for the stalled start of professional and scholarly historical inquiry in Virginia. One reason was the slack in building archival holdings: "The pride of the Virginian in his three centuries of history, much of it embracing the main stream of American development, has been outweighed by his perennial indifference to the preservation of its rich material and to the writing of his own history."⁵⁶ Cappon thought that the lack of repositories for conducting research led to an isolation among scholars, fostering an antiquarianism that was propounded by a "mixture of nationalism and southern sectionalism."⁵⁷ The result was ironic. Cappon mused, "Virginia, it is safe to say, has been no more careless of her local archives than most states, but with so large a proportion of statesmen whose signatures and holographs are a part of the records, her losses and relative lack of archival consciousness have been magnified."⁵⁸ Cappon also pointed to the post-Civil War era economic problems initially restricting the development of historical materials in Virginia, producing few notable repositories and few private collectors.⁵⁹ The lack of repositories and prominent collectors was the reason that he expended so much of his energy in field collecting and building the University of Virginia's archives and special collections into one of the strongest in the Southeast.

Cappon's interest in collecting encompassed a sense of the acquisition of manuscripts and records as critical to the professional identity of the archivist, but he also remained concerned about what was appropriate collecting. His entire career at the University of Virginia seems to have been focused on collecting, and his reputation in the field seems to have been known. His work on collecting records documenting the Second World War indicates that, in a few short years, he had modified his position about archival functions such as appraisal. Whereas, in the previous decade Cappon was reluctant to admit that anything should be destroyed, he now wrote about the "superabundance of records." "In our day the problem of selection is as difficult as that of collection. Since our judgment in accepting and rejecting will affect future users as well as ourselves, we must be fully aware of the subjective values that enter into our

⁵⁶ Lester J. Cappon, "Two Decades of Historical Activity in Virginia," *Journal of Southern History* 6 (May 1940): 189–200 (quotation, 190).

⁵⁷ Cappon, "Two Decades of Historical Activity in Virginia," 192.

⁵⁸ Cappon, "Two Decades of Historical Activity in Virginia," 198.

⁵⁹ Lester J. Cappon and Patricia Holbert Menk, "The Evolution of Materials for Research in Early American History in the University of Virginia Library," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 3 (July 1946): 370–82. This was also a summary of Cappon's career at the University of Virginia, partly reflecting how the research collections had grown under his care.

decisions.”⁶⁰ Cappon was one of the first to consider the autograph collecting business, researching and publishing an important essay on Walter R. Benjamin’s autograph business started in 1887 (although today we might see Cappon’s assessment as a bit too laudatory).⁶¹ Still, the history of the commercial autograph trade and its implications for archival work remain largely ignored today.

Throughout his career, Cappon wrote essays striving to encourage the use of archival records by historians.⁶² Indeed, for Cappon, the essence of scholarship for the archivist was in documentary editing and the production of useful finding aids drawing historical researchers to records, since the “field of scholarship” for the archivist is “however narrowly or broadly defined, . . . history.”⁶³ Cappon very much prefigured the emergence in the 1970s of the public history movement. He wrote a brief essay, but one full of suggestions about the richness of potential historical research, about the records of the Confederate Bureau of Ordnance.⁶⁴ Cappon wrote essays about the holdings of the University of Virginia.⁶⁵ In such essays Cappon demonstrated his bridging between archivists and historians. In his essay about the papers of colonial governor William Blathwayt, Cappon provided considerable insights into how Blathwayt created and administered his papers. However, this was not like the later diplomatic essays written by Canadian and other North American archivists; Cappon’s eye was always on how to “whet historians’ appetites and promote their research.”⁶⁶ Cappon consistently wrote essays evaluating the state of historical research and the need for improving certain aspects of such research.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ “Some Problems of Contemporary War History,” *War Records Collector* 1 (December 1944): 37–40, reprinted in *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 48 (April 1945): 578–83 (my quotation is on page 581 of the latter version).

⁶¹ Lester J. Cappon, “Walter R. Benjamin and the Autograph Trade at the Turn of the Century,” *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* 78 (1966): 20–37.

⁶² Along with the use of such records, Cappon wanted historians to understand some of the basic principles underlying archival administration. Some contemporaries of Cappon did have such an appreciation. Louis Gottschalk, in his classic, traditional volume on historical research methods, reflects such understanding when he writes, “Usually, however, if the document is where it ought to be – for example, in a family’s archives, or among a business firm’s or lawyer’s papers, or in a governmental bureau’s records – its provenance creates a presumption of its genuineness”; Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 123. Cappon emphasized the importance of provenance in most of his writings.

⁶³ Lester J. Cappon, “Tardy Scholars among the Archivists,” *American Archivist* 21 (January 1958): 3–16 (quotation, 3).

⁶⁴ Lester J. Cappon, “A Note on Confederate Ordnance Records,” *Journal of the American Military Institute* 4 (Summer 1940): 94–102.

⁶⁵ Cappon and Menk, “Evolution of Materials.”

⁶⁶ Lester J. Cappon, “The Blathwayt Papers of Colonial Williamsburg, Inc.,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 4 (July 1947): 317–31 (quotation, 331).

⁶⁷ Lester J. Cappon, “The Need for Renewed Interest in Early Southern History,” *Journal of Southern History* 14 (February 1948): 108–18.

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As I will comment on, Cappon's idea that the essence of the archivist rested in the work of the historian, the historical mission of understanding the past, and training in historical methods did not absolve Cappon of the need to criticize weaknesses within the historical community. From time to time, he argued against the creation of new professional associations, such as a proposal in the late 1960s to establish a new organization of manuscript curators, partly because of the nature of archival theory and its connection to history, but also because Cappon deplored the "fragmentation of professional activities which in many quarters suffer from undue specialization in an age of specialization."⁶⁸ Even as he criticized historians for their lack of understanding of archives and archival principles, Cappon time and time again urged individuals wishing to hire archivists to seek those with historical training, or those considering an archival career to seek such an educational background, perhaps best demonstrating Cappon's constant struggle with professional identity.⁶⁹ Likewise, Cappon's competent work as a records manager did not alleviate him of the need to be suspicious of records managers and their perspectives. Cappon's greatest invective was reserved for librarians, and in this his views were generally never much clearer than that they lacked historical orientation and focused on techniques. In the early 1950s, Cappon's involvement in the efforts that led to the *National Union Catalog of Manuscripts Collections* brought to him a sense of unease because of the involvement of librarians rather than archivists and manuscripts curators. He never recognized that the bibliographic standards developed and used by librarians would be essential for all such archival descriptive standards.⁷⁰ Such views seem to have been generated over time; early on in his career he urged librarians to assist in the collecting of historical manuscripts and to establish a clearinghouse of information about the repositories holding such materials,⁷¹ and during the Second World War he urged

⁶⁸ Lester J. Cappon to Richard C. Berner, 6 June 1967, Cappon Papers, Box VII, Folder 25.

⁶⁹ Lester J. Cappon to R. B. Downs, 10 September 1962, Cappon Papers, Box IV, Folder 18, advising him to hire a university archivist (at the University of Illinois) with "historical training, at the M.A. level certainly, if not further graduate work."

⁷⁰ Lester J. Cappon to Philip C. Brooks, 21 April 1952, Cappon Papers, Box V, Folder 9. Cappon's involvement was a result of his chairing the Joint Committee on Historical Manuscripts. The committee was jointly sponsored by the American Association for State and Local History and the Society of American Archivists; see Roger Thomas (SAA secretary) to Lester J. Cappon, 9 January 1951, Cappon Papers, Box V, Folder 9. Cappon, despite such reservations, was a supporter of national efforts to create standardized bibliographic controls to the vast array of finding aids and guides produced by archivists and manuscripts curators, as seen in his survey and critical discussion, "Reference Works and Historical Texts," *Library Trends* 5 (January 1957): 369–79.

⁷¹ Lester J. Cappon, "Co-operative Individualism for Virginia Libraries," read at the annual meeting of the Virginia Library Association, University of Virginia, 4 November 1932, University of Virginia Special Collections.

statewide cooperative efforts, with local and state libraries playing critical roles, in documenting war efforts and activities.⁷²

Much of Cappon's writing had to do with the collecting and appraising of records. Early in the days of World War II, involved in discussions about how to collect and preserve the records of that war, Cappon turned his attention to understanding how similar efforts worked during World War I. The result was a lengthy report for the Social Science Research Council and a spin-off essay on the World War I projects. Cappon was fascinated by these efforts, mixed as they were with deliberate scholarly investigation and patriotic and memorial intentions. Cappon noted how the state-directed projects extended their work into the local community, a "desirable" approach "because in some communities the interest in war history was a sort of spontaneous expression of patriotism which needed direction and deserved encouragement. It behooved the professional historian in charge of the state program to appreciate the unique value of certain local materials and to realize that in this field he was largely dependent upon the help of the amateur."⁷³ The relationship of the amateur and professional, especially in the area of collecting, was to remain an interest to Cappon throughout his long career. These projects sought a diversity of material — including the government records of the emergency agencies, unofficial and nongovernmental agencies, newspapers, personal manuscripts, war posters and photographs, and museum objects — all of the sorts of materials in which Cappon also maintained a lifelong interest. Indeed, Cappon brought a breadth of interest to the notion of what historical sources represented. In an essay about the provincial South, Cappon lamented the lack of interest by many historians in local communities, criticizing the historian who has been "loath to suffer the drudgery of investigating tax returns, census figures, and voluminous county records in order to break new ground and establish new conclusions. . . ." He also thought that the "study of local history also involves some appreciation and understanding of the elements of folk culture. Although they have been within the province of other disciplines in our modern compartmentalized learning, the historian can find clues and evidence for his investigation in balladry and tall tales, phonetics and linguistics, folk music and art."⁷⁴

⁷² Lester J. Cappon, "The Collection and Preservation of War Records in Indiana," *Indiana Historical Bulletin* 20 (April 1943): 163–68; "The Development of War Records Projects in the States, 1941–1943," *Bulletins of the American Association for State and Local History* 1 (March 1944): 189–226.

⁷³ Lester J. Cappon, "The Collection of World War I Materials in the States," *American Historical Review* 48 (July 1943): 733–45 (quotation, 736–37).

⁷⁴ Lester J. Cappon, "The Provincial South," *Journal of Southern History* 16 (February 1950): 5–24 (quotation, 24).

Mature Thoughts about Archival Knowledge

At the heart of Cappon's writings was an emphasis on both how the skills and attitudes of the historian continue to play a role in archival work (or other related work), and how far the archivist has moved from being a historian. Midway in his long career, in the early 1950s, Cappon found himself starting to write a series of essays exploring the notion of archival professionalism (although the notion of professionalism was never an attractive theme for him to work on). In the earliest of these essays, Cappon observed the difficulties that archivists, trained primarily as historians, had in dealing with recent records, searching for the historical sensibilities that still seem to be prevalent. He described how easy it is for the archivist, working in this fashion, to slide into becoming a records manager. Cappon understood, however, the historical knowledge that even the records manager must possess to administer records. For example, Cappon worried about how appraisal had "become associated too exclusively with appraisal in bulk, much of which requires only a superficial examination, if any, to consign records to or spare from destruction. . . . Appraisal requires, of course, historical knowledge and judgment." Cappon believed that these archival techniques were "essentially of the nature of historical methods." Cappon identified the scholarly contributions that the archivist would make to all varieties of the public and researchers.⁷⁵ Like many of his published writings, this essay was the result of an invitation to speak at a conference, in this case at the Society of American Archivists annual meeting.⁷⁶ Leon de Valinger, extending the invitation in his capacity as the SAA program chair for that year, asked Cappon to talk about professional identity because although most archivists had started as "teachers or scholars of American history," things were changing. "In recent years there has been the entrance into our ranks a number of people who have had little or no scholarly background. Some of us feel that this has debased the profession and that, whereas an American archivist never achieved the status in his own Country as European archivists have, we were certainly more than file clerks."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Lester J. Cappon, "The Archival Profession and the Society of American Archivists," *American Archivist* 15 (July 1952): 195–204 (quotation, 202).

⁷⁶ Of his most formative writings, thirteen were first presented at conferences, including the Southern Historical Association (1938, 1947, 1949), Society of American Archivists (1951, 1957), University of Virginia Bibliographical Society and The History Club (1955), National Genealogical Society (1955), American Theological Library Association (1958), Massachusetts Historical Society (1966, 1978), American Historical Association (1968), Association of American Geographers (1961), and American Philosophical Society (1978).

⁷⁷ Leon de Valinger, Jr. to Lester J. Cappon, 7 June 1951, Cappon Papers, Box IV, Folder 19.

Cappon was a good choice for such assignments. In the North American archival profession, Cappon was also one of the first to argue that the distinctions between archives and manuscripts were more artificial than real. In an essay that presages the kinds of writings that proliferated in the late twentieth century as a result of the increasing issues raised by computer technologies, Cappon laments the various “artificial barriers” erected between archivists, manuscripts curators, and various other records professionals. Reviewing existing definitions in the context of the relative youth of the archival profession, Cappon argues that “often the line between institutional archives and personal papers cannot be easily or sensibly drawn.” Cappon sees how manuscripts and archives are “often complementary in content,” and writing at a time when basic professional standards were much more fuzzy, he then comments on problems of mixing records from different creating sources because of the similar content. He concludes that the “Classification of historical manuscripts into a few broad categories in terms of archival definitions, with due allowance for the inevitable exception to every rule, leads to the conclusion that numerous bodies of historical manuscripts are really archival records under an assumed name.”⁷⁸ In practice today, unfortunately, one hears too often about individuals functioning as archivists who do not grasp such distinctions or subtleties. A decade ago, in one of the revisions of the SAA graduate education guidelines, many lamented that personal manuscripts and historical manuscripts administration had been ignored at the expense of a focus on archives, missing the fact that archives encompass personal papers as articulated by Cappon many years before.

Cappon’s essay, presaging many debates about the nature of records and recordkeeping systems in the late twentieth century, was part of a long interest in writing a basic manual on historical manuscripts administration, a work he never completed. In a letter to his closest friend, Philip Brooks, Cappon indicated that this essay was originally planned for the book, but that the editor of the *American Archivist* had contacted him because he was “short on material.” Cappon hoped this would re-energize his work on the manuscript.⁷⁹ Cappon continued working on the book manuscript, tentatively titled *Historical Manuscripts: Their Acquisition, Arrangement, and Accessibility for Research*, until well

⁷⁸ Lester J. Cappon, “Historical Manuscripts as Archives: Some Definitions and Their Application,” *American Archivist* 19 (April 1956): 101–10 (quotations, 105, 107, 109–10).

⁷⁹ Lester J. Cappon to Philip C. Brooks, 18 January 1956, Cappon Papers, Box VII, Folder 25.

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into the mid-1960s.⁸⁰ He had support in the late 1950s to travel to Great Britain to “see something of the records and more especially to talk with archivists and curators about common problems and differences of approach toward objectives generally accepted in both countries.”⁸¹ Cappon visited twenty-eight cities or boroughs, examining forty-three repositories. Cappon was fixated on adhering to archival theory respecting provenance, and his archival reports and correspondence are filled with references to such matters. In his last annual report for the University of Virginia, Cappon had harped on the problems of dealers “breaking up organic collections of manuscripts and offering them for sale piecemeal.”⁸² The similarity of his early reports and essays with his later writings suggests that he was intending to include many of these, in somewhat revised form, in his book (one that might have had as much an impact as Schellenberg’s two works).

Many of his essays remain classics, the best statement on the subject. His 1957 essay about the relationship of history to genealogy and vice versa remains the best scholarly treatment on genealogical research. Building from the commonalities of both, Cappon discussed how antiquarians, historians, and genealogists all organized and went off in separate directions in the late nineteenth century. Cappon wrote about this in much the same way that he would write about the professionalization of archival work. Near the end of the essay, Cappon mused, “Historical genealogy as the handmaid of history sees through the foibles of ancestor-hunting, when it rides rough-shod over the sources of

⁸⁰ Lester J. Cappon to William J. Robbins, 15 September 1959, Cappon Papers, Box VII, Folder 10. By 1966, Cappon indicated that he had the manuscript about two-thirds completed; Lester J. Cappon to H. G. Jones, 23 November 1966, Cappon Papers, Box VII, Folder 25. In 1967, Cappon sought permission for a leave to work on this book and another unnamed one on historical editing; Lester J. Cappon to Carlisle H. Humelsine and Davis T. Paschall, 22 March 1967, Cappon Papers, Box VIII, Folder 2. In the Cappon Papers (Box XV, Folders 7–14) at William and Mary there is a manuscript of the book with the following chapters: chapter 3, “Family Papers: Hazards of Survival and Problems of Preservation”; chapter 4, “The Private Collector and the Public Interest”; chapter 6, “Duties and Responsibilities of Research Libraries”; chapter 7, “Canons of Accessibility and Use”; chapter 9, “Physical Problems of Preservation and Documentary Reproduction”; chapter 10, “Classification, Arrangement, and Description”; and chapter 11, “Works of Reference and Their Relative Value.” The description of his book in the American Philosophical Society’s *Yearbook* indicated what other chapters would be: chapter 1, “To Whom It May Concern: Archivist, Historian, Layman”; chapter 2, “Some Definitions and Their Applications”; chapter 5, “The Role of the Dealer”; a different chapter 7, “Historical Developments in the Manuscript Field: In Great Britain, In the United States”; chapter 12, “Historical Editing and Documentary Publication”; and chapter 13, “The Curator as Historian.” In this arrangement, chapters 1 through 7 constituted “Part I: Collecting” and the remainder of the chapters formed “Part II: Arrangement and Description.” *The American Philosophical Society Year Book 1959* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1960), 583. As part of this, Cappon collected materials ultimately appearing in his essay, “Collectors and Keepers in the England of Elizabeth and James,” in *Sibley’s Heir: A Volume in Memory of Clifford Kenyon Shipton* (Boston: The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1982), 145–71.

⁸¹ *The American Philosophical Society Year Book 1959*, 582.

⁸² *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Archivist University of Virginia Library for the Year 1944–45* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1945), 10.

history and fabricates the document desired for self glorification. . . . The genealogist needs the historian to broaden his perspective and deepen his comprehension of the ultimate objectives. By the same token the genealogist is useful to the historian, lest he underrate the personal element in his narrative.”⁸³ One can easily imagine how Cappon could shift this quotation to reflect his view of the relationship between history and archives, the historian and the archivist; and, again, the scholarly inquiry into genealogy remains relatively ignored. Also customary for Cappon was that, in the process of preparing the paper published on genealogy, he examined numerous genealogical magazines and decided to prepare a bibliography of such periodicals to “bring them into focus for the first time as a medium of information, both scholarly and popular,”⁸⁴ a task that prefigured later academic historians drawing on genealogies for social and other history. His steady and careful approach was reminiscent of his work under Dumas Malone three decades before.

Although Cappon never seemed to take adamant stances on the emerging nature of archival professionalism, he consistently provided gentle reminders that there were important issues to be addressed in the training, status, and image of documentary editors and archivists. In a 1958 essay on the “historian as editor,” Cappon criticized historians who held a “condescending attitude toward the historical editor, vaingloriously boasting that the historian does his own writing, the editor only edits the manuscripts of others” (and in this essay Cappon is addressing the work of documentary, journal, and monographic series editors). Cappon, acknowledging that editors of this era were coming both from the ranks of the amateurs as well as from professionally trained academic scholars, did hold to the notion that natural attitude and aptitude were more important than formal educational preparation. While he lamented the lack of formal training available to prepare editors, Cappon believed that editing “cannot be taught in a formal sense.” Rather, Cappon thought that editing “rests upon the creative genius within the man. Editorial ability can only be polished, not established, by training and experience. The technique can be learned, but the inspiration must be inborn. It would seem then, that the historical editor is born, not made by the process of formal training. And he is discovered largely by the happy accidents of time, place, and opportunity.”⁸⁵ In

⁸³ Lester J. Cappon, “Genealogy, Handmaid of History,” *National Genealogical Society Quarterly* 45 (March 1957): 1–9 (quotation, 9).

⁸⁴ Lester J. Cappon, “Preparing a Bibliography of American Genealogical Periodicals,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 66 (1962): 63. The bibliography was published as a separate pamphlet, *American Genealogical Periodicals: A Bibliography with a Chronological Finding-List* (New York: New York Public Library, 1962).

⁸⁵ Lester J. Cappon, “The Historian as Editor,” in *In Support of Clío: Essays in Memory of Herbert A. Kellar*, 173, 176.

this way, Cappon reflected the sense of his era, that documentary editors and archivists were more born than made, but this may also have been a logical view to take since there were so few formal courses to take if one wanted to be either.

The Education of Archivists and Their Colleagues

Cappon's primary contribution to professional matters may have been his quiet work to educate individuals as editors and archivists. Some of this came through his actual teaching, whenever he could insert it, and the rest came through his writings. Cappon worked to have graduate history students introduced to the fundamentals of documentary editing, going to a variety of universities (Duke, Harvard, Louisiana State, Princeton, Virginia, and Yale) and teaching a one-day introduction on editing (what he described as a "road show" or an "informal sort of seminar").⁸⁶ In the late 1940s and early 1950s (1947–1953), Cappon was teaching sessions during the summer in Ernst Posner's archives program at American University.⁸⁷ Perhaps building on his experience at Posner's program, Cappon became the head of a six-week long summer institute offered at Radcliffe, where he had briefly taught thirty years before.⁸⁸ Featuring an extensive reading list and distinguished guest speakers, the institute covered the full range of archival administration during Cappon's leadership from 1956 through 1960.⁸⁹ The program continued until 1960, when it was suggested that the institute would be taken over by the Harvard Business School's summer school programs, a prospect that Cappon worried would interfere with the administration of the archives training and harm its reputation,

⁸⁶ "Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon," 97–99.

⁸⁷ Various notes and documents about his teaching in this program are in the Cappon Papers, Box IX, Folder 6. Cappon seemed to focus on sessions on the "collection of manuscript material" and the "publication of manuscript material."

⁸⁸ Apparently the institute had been going on awhile before. In a letter to his friend Philip Brooks, Cappon indicated that Arthur Schlesinger had asked Cappon if he would take over the institute since Earle Newton's connection with it had ended; Lester J. Cappon to Philip Brooks, 18 January 1956, Cappon Papers, Box VII, Folder 25.

⁸⁹ In Box V, Folder 3 of the Cappon Papers is a reading list for the 1960 institute, covering the following topics: archival theory and practice; national archives in the United States and Europe; state and local archives; records management; university archives; business records and history; historical manuscripts; historical editing; photoduplication; state historical societies; local historical societies; historical preservation; historical museums; and historical restorations. Cappon was also very adept at attracting the leading individuals in the field, such as Waldo G. Leland, Ernst Posner, Lyman Butterfield, Ed Alexander, and others; Lester J. Cappon to Philip Brooks, 15 February 1956, Cappon Papers, Box VII, Folder 25. In Box XI, Folder 8 there is the 1958 published brochure for the institute, indicating that the program is for "college graduates and employees of archival agencies, historical societies, and museums. Students will devote full time for six weeks to the study of archival and historical resources and programs, and have an opportunity to examine representative institutions in operation. These related fields offer opportunities for historical work which are less generally known than those in academic teaching and ought to be more widely recognized."

causing him to withdraw from any involvement.⁹⁰ One of the institute's students provided a description of the 1957 version, relating that it was a "strange mixture" of subjects and that it "takes a lot of work" because of the reading, adding that Cappon was stressing records management as a critical aspect of archives work.⁹¹

After his Radcliffe institute days, Cappon's involvement in archival education seemed to decline, although his concerns did not. Shortly after giving up running the summer institute, Cappon heard that the University of Denver (with the endorsement of the American Association for State and Local History) under Dolores Renze, the state archivist, would be offering an institute patterned after the Radcliffe version. Cappon, who had little regard for Renze, lost his temper: "What concerns me chiefly is the wide-open condition that exists in archival and related training. Fools will always step in where angels fear to tread, and this is a free country for both."⁹² Such concerns have continued to resonate for decades since Cappon wrote this assessment, although the lack of regulation and development is far more obvious in the records management realm (something that would not surprise Cappon).

Cappon's educational concerns were not restricted to the archival community. Instead, year after year, Cappon made comments in letters that, while he argued for the foundation of archival education being based in history departments, were nonetheless critical of what historians were doing to support such education. In 1970, after interviewing graduate students for work on the Newberry's atlas project, Cappon related to a colleague that the "shortcomings in bibliographical knowledge of graduate students reflects in part those shortcomings in their mentors." He interviewed one student who was interested in archives and manuscripts and historical editing, but the student told him that

⁹⁰ Lester J. Cappon to Mary I. Bunting, 6 December 1960, and Lester J. Cappon to Mary I. Bunting, 17 December 1960. On the suggestion that Cappon should move the institute to Colonial Williamsburg, Cappon retorted that the area "lacks the variety of institutions in close proximity that Greater Boston provides for the field trips that have been an important feature of the Radcliffe Institute." It was an important indication of how interconnected theory and practice were in Cappon's approach to training archivists.

⁹¹ "The course of Mr. Cappon relates a great deal to records management. This means that a company should keep all its records until non-current and then turn them over to an archival institution (or company) to keep with the understanding that they could destroy some of the duplications and non-essentials. The central idea is economy of space and at the same time saving what's valuable." George Green Shackelford to his mother, 30 June 1957, George Green Shackelford Papers, No. 3525-AL, University of Virginia.

⁹² Lester J. Cappon to Robert H. Bahmer, 19 October 1961, Cappon Papers, Box IV, Folder 23. In the Cappon Papers there are letters concerning Cappon's dislike of Renze and Leon de Valinger, the Delaware state archivist, primarily because of efforts by the two to control the Society of American Archivists. For example, Cappon wrote a "frank" letter in 1963 about the future of the Society of American Archivists, arguing the need for a dramatic change and airing complaints about Renze's interference in various committees; Lester J. Cappon to Morris L. Radoff, 13 February 1963, Cappon Papers, Box IV, Folder 20. Radoff was then serving as head of SAA's Nominating Committee.

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“when some of his professors learned of his interests, they tried to discourage him from the Ph.D. program in history and advised him to a library school. His unwillingness to take their bad advice arouses my admiration for him.”⁹³ A quarter of a century before, Cappon advised an individual’s mother about how he, while studying at Princeton, should prepare for an archival career in corporations, noting that archivists working “today have entered through considerable university training in the social sciences, particularly in history,” and suggesting that he contact Ernst Posner at American University.⁹⁴

Archival Scholarship

It is possible to read his publications as an extension of classroom teaching. Cappon was a critic of poor scholarship, as when a 1961 reprint of the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition was issued exhibiting a failure to “put the work in its proper setting” and even confusing matters about the publication’s original title, author, and editor. This enabled Cappon to preach about the responsibilities of the historical editor, responsibilities that “involve more than the making of an accurate transcript of the text. They require the editor to elucidate the text in greater or lesser degree by appropriate annotation, unless his objective is merely a reprint. They also require him to provide the essential historical background, usually in the form of an introduction that comprehends the nature of the documents and their provenance.”⁹⁵ Cappon was especially caustic about archivists who seemed uninterested in any form of scholarship, and it was a feeling that he held to throughout his career. His idea that such scholarship resided at least partly in administrative history providing context and background for understanding records was well in advance of others who picked up on this theme.⁹⁶ In the late 1930s, Cappon acknowledged that the “craftsmanship” of archival work “can be learned in a short time and in many institutions can be executed more economically by assistants.” Cappon was adamant about the centrality of scholarship from the “social sciences and humanities,” necessary, in his opinion, “to interpret the background and content of the manuscripts and relate them to documents elsewhere and to printed works; to discriminate in the acquisition and rejection of new material;

⁹³ Lester J. Cappon to Whitfield J. Bell, Jr., 15 December 1970, Cappon Papers, Box V, Folder 19.

⁹⁴ Lester J. Cappon to Mrs. L. W. Cabell, 17 November 1947, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Archives.

⁹⁵ Lester J. Cappon, “Who Is the Author of *History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark (1814)*?” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 19 (April 1962): 264, 265–66.

⁹⁶ Cappon wrote in 1941 that “it is clear that developments in ‘archival science’ and the ‘philosophy of archives’ will not only serve as a cause but also benefit by the results of research in administrative history,” *Eleventh Annual Report on Historical Collections University of Virginia Library for the Year 1940–41* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1941), 6.

and to decide questions of policy in making manuscripts accessible directly, by photographic copies for use elsewhere, or by publication.”⁹⁷ It is perhaps why, in his earlier years, Cappon was concerned about appraisal decisions, not trusting those who might be in the position to have to make such decisions.

Twenty years later, Cappon selected the issue of scholarship by archivists as the theme for his presidential address to the Society of American Archivists. Besides his insistence on the archivist as a historical scholar, Cappon also believed that the “archivist is a scholar . . . because of the function he performs and the process he supervises.” He saw the archivist as building a body of knowledge that sees “archives as records of enduring value [that] embody historical truth within them,” with the archivist responsible for ensuring that that truth could be teased out.⁹⁸ Cappon speculated about the published contributions of archivists, past and present, and whether these contributions reflected current historical scholarship (suggesting that Cappon’s notion of an archival body of knowledge was less distinct than as a branch of historical study). Cappon argued that the archivist should publish, not to be “spoon-feeding the historian,” but to bring under archival control the “records of substantial content for productive research.” Still, Cappon believed that archivists were being “tardy” in providing systematic, scholarly aides to their records and in documentary editions.⁹⁹ It is doubtful that Cappon would be impressed today with the stress on bibliographic or descriptive standards that support archival representation, often with little emphasis on any dimension of historical scholarship, although he certainly would be supportive of the greater involvement in and control of such standards by archivists (although he would be perplexed about why so many have educational grounding in library and information science).

Cappon also worked and wrote at the height of the era when evidence from archives and other sources was looked at as crucial for understanding what had actually occurred in the past. However, Cappon, a careful scholar practicing rigorous scholarly standards, was not afraid to acknowledge that subjectivity, judgment, and interpretation were critical forces in historical and archival work. Cappon believed that the historical editor “stands between the reader and the text. Should he [the editor] then be unobtrusive, self-effacing, overly modest, leaving the naked text to the user in utter privacy? Hardly so. The fact is often overlooked that subjective judgment to some degree enters inevitably into the editorial process. This evaluation may antedate the actual editing, for the decision to publish usually entails preliminary selection from the whole body of

⁹⁷ *Ninth Annual Report of the Archivist University of Virginia Library for the Year 1937–38* ([Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1938], 3).

⁹⁸ Cappon, “Tardy Scholars among the Archivists,” 5.

⁹⁹ Cappon, “Tardy Scholars among the Archivists,” 10.

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manuscripts, to keep within the limits of the prescribed volumes, or of the available funds.”¹⁰⁰ While Cappon died long before the advent of postmodernist influences on archival theory and before the more strident of the claims about the lack of veracity of texts in historical scholarship, he at least was aware that serious issues were at play about how sources were used and interpreted. (Although it is doubtful Cappon would have been interested in the literature suffused with postmodern scholarship, hermeneutical approaches, and multi-disciplinary jargon obscuring the essence of knowledge about archives and records or not supporting the more basic concerns of making such records available to historical scholars.)

Cappon’s sense of the historical utility of archives allowed him to roam freely among and to discourse with other fields, while sounding a very basic message. In a 1958 address to the American Theological Library Association, Cappon expressed concern about talking to librarians and also to those in the theological seminaries, noting that at best he was a “layman” in such matters. However, Cappon resorted to the historical work of archivists to make the connection: “Yet the archivist as historian approaches the records of a divinity school not with a narrow concern for their use in administrative and internal operations, but rather with the hope of finding evidence of the school’s impact on other institutions in the past and on the issues of the present.” Ranging over biblical references to recordkeeping, Cappon discoursed on the state of religious archives in the United States in the context of overall archival development and produced one of the earliest assessments of such archives. In typical Cappon fashion, he used the opportunity to call upon the seminary representatives to do better (with their archives), noting “it is high time that the seminaries take stock of the records within their own bailiwicks before the forces of man and nature further dissipate and destroy them. It is high time that theologians in centers of learning give thought to archival good works in their midst, which ‘are good and profitable unto men.’”¹⁰¹ What comes clear here is that Cappon was a zealous missionary for the cause of archives, and he would take every opportunity to preach.

While Cappon consistently stressed the historical value of archives, he also readily acknowledged other uses and values. In his address to the theological librarians, Cappon commented on the “dual service of an archives,” their continuing administrative use (the “main reason for establishing an archives”), and their value for historical research both about the “current problems” faced by the seminaries and their denominations and more broadly for an

¹⁰⁰ Cappon, “The Historian as Editor,” 182.

¹⁰¹ Lester J. Cappon, “Archival Good Works for Theologians,” *American Archivist* 22 (July 1959): 297, 306.

understanding of the role of religion in society.¹⁰² Despite Cappon's recognition of the administrative value of archives, he was no supporter of modern records management. Cappon was part of the generation of archivists and historians witnessing the birth of records management, but his own views seem to be based on personal experiences. When Cappon went to Colonial Williamsburg at the end of the Second World War, he found that while there was a central files department, records were scattered all over the historic area, requiring a great effort to inventory them. However, in 1952, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation brought in a consulting firm to evaluate how the current records were being administered, and the result was that the archives was transferred to the treasurer's department. This was, observed Cappon, a "crummy suggestion." While he recognized that the mandate of the consultant was to make the foundation more business savvy, Cappon worried about what it was doing to the archival function: "It always seemed to me that because the archives are the records of the whole organization, the archivist ought to be responsible to as near to the top as possible of the organization because when you get involved in matters of policy, you don't have to go through a lot of channels of people that don't know anything about it anyhow."¹⁰³ At this point, Cappon became a consultant to the archives, and more of his attention was spent on editorial and other administrative responsibilities. His views about what happened at Colonial Williamsburg suggest why he worked in later years to gain independence for the National Archives from the General Services Administration, a victory he did not live to see, as well as explain his convictions about the role of records management.¹⁰⁴

The Documentary Editor and the Collector

If Cappon had labored hard to establish the archival profession, he also was one of the founding archivists of the emerging field of documentary editing. In the 1960s and 1970s, Cappon wrote a seminal series of essays on historical editing. In his foundational essay, "A Rationale for Historical Editing: Past and Present," Cappon argued that the "historical editor of source materials is a

¹⁰² Cappon, "Archival Good Works for Theologians," 306–307.

¹⁰³ "Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon," 21, 24, 28, 35.

¹⁰⁴ Shortly after these experiences, Cappon commented on the debates within the Society of American Archivists about the certification of professional archivists, noting that he thought certification "might serve to draw a meaningful distinction between bonafide archivists and file clerks, especially in view of the expansion of the field of records management which, though unrelated to archives, is concerned mostly with problems of current records and relatively little with the content of records in the sense in which the archivist is fundamentally concerned with this problem." Lester J. Cappon to Dolores Renze, 8 June 1953, Cappon Papers, Box IV, Folder 23.

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historian whose responsibility consists, first, in transmitting authentic and accurate texts of all extant documents within a rational frame of reference, with due respect for archival principles, and, second, in making these texts more intelligible." Cappon then laid out a set of "basic rules, derived from historical method," including concern for the "authenticity of the document" and "textual accuracy." Cappon also noted that the editor is a "discoverer of sources and a collector of manuscripts," and he continued to discourse on matters of annotation, all of his principles very much mirroring how he viewed the archivist as a professional.¹⁰⁵ For example, he mused on who is a historical editor: "Historical editors must be recruited from the historical profession. As products of the graduate schools they ought to be exposed to the discipline of editing as a worthy, challenging pursuit."¹⁰⁶ Cappon had been arguing about this for the archivist since the 1930s.

Cappon brought together a lifetime of interest in documentary editing, preparing both a history of and rationale for the vocation that remain essential readings on the topic (even if they are being neglected in the graduate education of both archivists and editors). While in these essays Cappon did not speculate about the role of the modern archivist, mainly because his histories dealt with the era prior to the formation of the modern archival profession, he did dwell on one of his own essential functions as an archivist, collecting.¹⁰⁷ Given Cappon's interest and leadership in this area, it is not surprising that he was approached to and did fill the slot of "President-Elect" for the organizing of the Association of Documentary Editors,¹⁰⁸ or that the Lester J. Cappon Fellowship in Documentary Editing was established with Cappon's financial support at the Newberry Library.¹⁰⁹ The energy Cappon put into founding a new professional association, more than forty years after his work with the formation of the Society of American Archivists, might have been a

¹⁰⁵ Lester J. Cappon, "A Rationale for Historical Editing: Past and Present," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 23 (January 1966): 57.

¹⁰⁶ Cappon, "A Rationale for Historical Editing," 74.

¹⁰⁷ Lester J. Cappon, "American Historical Editors before Jared Sparks: 'they will plant a forest. . .'," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 30 (July 1973): 375–400; "Jared Sparks: The Preparation of an Editor," *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings* 90 (1978): 3–21. These two essays constitute a history of American documentary editing until the mid-nineteenth century. Cappon also wrote a history of English documentary editing in the early nineteenth century, published as "Antecedents of the Rolls Series: Issues in Historical Editing," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 4 (April 1972): 358–69.

¹⁰⁸ Don Jackson to Lester J. Cappon, 6 October 1978, Cappon Papers, Box V, Folder 10.

¹⁰⁹ The fellowship has been described, in a Newberry press release, as follows: "This award for postdoctoral scholars provides up to \$5000 to support historical editing projects based on Newberry sources. It supports residential research in the Newberry's collections in preparation of the edition, and also can defray other costs related to its preparation and publication, including travel, photocopying, digitization, copyright fees, publication subventions, and so forth. Application is by letter to the Committee on Awards (see address below in Application Instructions), with an attached budget listing anticipated expenses by category, with supporting documentation as relevant."

respite for him since documentary editors were more closely allied with historians; in the inaugural issue of the Association for Documentary Editing newsletter, Cappon wrote, "The fledgling historical editor, in contrast to the archivist, is not involved in another profession. He remains a historian, expecting to win recognition by fellow historians. Fulfillment of this expectation presents an opportunity to the new Association for Documentary Editing."¹¹⁰

The penultimate statement about collecting was Cappon's "The Archivist as Collector," responding to one of the most important and most cited SAA presidential addresses ever given, F. Gerald Ham's "The Archival Edge."¹¹¹ Ham's address was a critique of archival appraisal and collecting, in which he complained about these activities being uncoordinated, unfocused, and, most importantly, leaving great gaps in the documentation. He called for new strategies that were not tied to the "vogue of the academic marketplace" or that attempted to respond to the "narrow research interests rather than the broad spectrum of human experience." "If we cannot transcend these obstacles," Ham opined, "then the archivist will remain at best nothing more than a weathervane moved by the changing winds of historiography."¹¹² Ham cataloged the various challenges confronting the archivist, and he looked at more cooperative and more strategic approaches. He argued that archivists must engage in the "demanding intellectual process of documenting culture," with the archivist becoming the "research community's Renaissance man" (making informed decisions based on comprehending both records and society and the organizations creating records).¹¹³

One can imagine how Cappon, with half a career focused on collecting, would respond to Ham's criticism. Cappon started by politely stating that the essay was "stimulating," but he then argued little that was new. Cappon contended that each generation of archivists collects "anew," and he used the essay to state for the umpteenth time that this was the reason why the "archivist and curator of manuscripts should be trained in history, the essential underpinning

¹¹⁰ Lester J. Cappon, "A New Generation of Editors," *ADE Newsletter* 1 (March 1979): 4. Early in the history of the ADE, Cappon appealed to the association to support the renewed emphasis on the movement for an independent National Archives, threatened again by an appointee early on in the Reagan administration to head the General Services Administration who wished to decentralize the holdings of the National Archives and which, argued Cappon, would adversely affect the support of documentary editions via the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. Cappon wrote, the "continued support [of such projects] will be assured with most certainty, not from a managerial administrator, but from a historian-archivist who lends support to scholarship through his role on the commission"; Lester J. Cappon, "Editors' Concern with Archivists in Crisis," *Newsletter of the Association for Documentary Editing* 2 (February 1980): 5.

¹¹¹ F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975): 5–13.

¹¹² Ham, "The Archival Edge," 8.

¹¹³ Ham, "The Archival Edge," 13.

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for archival theory and practice.¹¹⁴ Cappon expressed concern about Ham's stress on "recent" records, but mostly he worried that the direction Ham had set might even lead to the archivist creating records.

The primary criticism Cappon reserved for Ham concerned how collecting was done and for whom it was carried out. "Research collections are not generated by superimposed proposals from a national planning office," Cappon grouched, "but rather by the initiative of archivists and historians and interested laymen with specific records in mind and a *local* nucleus of support on which to build."¹¹⁵ Cappon saw Ham's address, in other words, as a repudiation of his own work and career, and Cappon also was still working on the premise that archives exist for scholars and historians. It was a phase of Cappon's last contributions to archival theory, ones that remain critical for understanding the shifting from one generation of archivists to another. Cappon's sense of collecting remained focused on the good, old-fashioned business of tracking down leads, winning over reluctant donors, and building repositories of important papers,¹¹⁶ attitudes reflecting the pre-eminent sensibilities of other archivists and local historians of his formative years.¹¹⁷ Ironically, from most readings of Ham's essay, it is hard to see just how far Ham had strayed from the needs of scholarly historians; indeed, one can interpret Ham's essay as an extension of his efforts at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin to build appraising and collecting approaches on the emergence of new historical research trends, and these researchers were newly minted scholars with interests in social, women's, ethnic, and radical history. More telling is that Ham's essay became the cornerstone

¹¹⁴ Lester J. Cappon, "The Archivist as Collector," *American Archivist* 39 (October 1976): 429.

¹¹⁵ Cappon, "The Archivist as Collector," 434.

¹¹⁶ In his 1943–44 report while at the University of Virginia, Cappon provided a good portrait of his collecting approach. He described how he had heard about manuscripts at an "old residence near Lynchburg." Then, Cappon continued: "Since the only sure access to the papers I learned, was through the good offices of several relatives involved in the matter, the road to my destination was round-about through many counties, intermittently during the course of a year or more. With the proper groundwork laid, I enjoyed a cordial reception by the owner and was taken without much delay to the attic of the old farmhouse. A hasty glance convinced me that the contents, by their casual appearance and thick coating of dust, were an accumulation of many decades. The manuscripts in question were easily found in an old truck and proved to be well worth the prolonged efforts to secure them." Cappon also acquired a stack of old newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, leading the donor to comment that Cappon "would make a good forager for an army. I am not sure he meant the remarks as a compliment, although I passed it off as such. When I left for home my car was filled to capacity." *Eighth Annual Report on Historical Collections University of Virginia Library for the Year 1943–44* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1944), 12–13.

¹¹⁷ Compare the following assessment from a standard local history manual with Cappon's own sensibilities and activities: "When interviewing old residents inquire whether they have any old letters, diaries, or account books, for these will be found an excellent source for local history material. Such old papers may be in almost anyone's attic or basement, or they may be deposited at the local or state historical society. Old letters and diaries often give a more truthful and vivid picture of the past than any other kind of record. They are more likely to be accurate than recollections told or written long after the events recounted." Donald Dean Parker, *Local History: How to Gather It, Write It, and Publish It* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1944), 32.

of a foundation for an entire generation of new musings about and practices in archival appraisal, leading to notions such as documentation strategies, functional analysis, and macro-appraisal that have generally captured the intellectual discourse in this sector of the North American archival community. Cappon showed that he was somewhat out-of-step, except as a spokesperson for the traditional sector of the community. A few years after he wrote the collecting essay, Cappon confided to a colleague that he had “refuted” the “many unsound statements” in Ham’s address.¹¹⁸ He had not achieved this, of course. That he was still engaged by the ideas behind archival methodologies revealed, however, that he had an important role to play, perhaps for as long as he cared to do so or as he lived.

Debating to the End

An analysis of Cappon’s published writings finds that many were entries into contemporary debates within the field, but his essays were always diplomatic and polite as he engaged both his friends and foes. Cappon viewed himself as being able to hold his own in any difficult situation. When asked about how he was able to get along with the notoriously difficult Carl Bridenbaugh when the latter was directing the institute, Cappon related, “I never had any real problem getting along with him, I guess maybe because if an issue came up between us I wasn’t afraid to speak my mind, stand my ground, tell him how I felt about it.”¹¹⁹ Cappon’s diplomacy served him well in his efforts to build bridges between historians and archivists. When approached to speak to historians about the drive for re-establishing the administrative independence of the National Archives, Cappon elected to develop a historical view of the development and functions of the National Archives while making poignant points about the role of historical scholars. In planning the talk before the American Historical Association, Cappon indicated to H. G. Jones that the “purpose would not be to focus attention on or provoke argument over the administrative status of the National Archives, but rather to point out what it does for scholarship, what it ought to be doing in addition, and how scholars can help themselves by lending professional support to NA. I don’t think controversial issues should be soft-pedaled; some will undoubtedly be raised, by the commentators and from the floor, but I don’t regard the occasion as a

¹¹⁸ Lester J. Cappon to Wilcomb E. Washburn, 18 May 1979, Cappon Papers, Box X, Folder 12.

¹¹⁹ “Reminiscences of Lester Jesse Cappon,” 83–84.

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debate.”¹²⁰ This was typical of how Cappon approached such matters, first always laying out the premise of archival work or the value of archives that would serve as a contrast to what he thought his target had lost or neglected. Personalities were never an issue in his public writings (although his private correspondence shows he possessed strong feelings about some prominent individuals in the field); rather, a remarkably consistent, one might argue obstinate, set of basic principles served as the basis of what he would deliver in speeches at meetings and in his published essays.

Given Cappon’s stature and his views about the historical basis of archival practice, it was natural that he would be called upon to be an advocate for the restoration of the administrative independence of the National Archives, a primary subject of debate during the 1960s. Speaking before the American Historical Association, in an effort to rally historians behind lobbying for the archives’ independence, Cappon reminded his listeners that “in contrast to prevailing conditions in European countries, the incentive for a national archives in the United States came from imperative considerations of historical research, not of articulated administrative needs.”¹²¹ Building on his earlier writings on historical manuscripts as archives and commenting on the fact that detailed finding aids such as those usually found in research libraries are not possible in government agencies, Cappon lamented that a relatively small number of historians was using the holdings of the National Archives. “This is not the occasion to argue the case for courses on historical method that embrace archival problems, but we must concede that the older generation cannot train the fledglings if it is ignorant of the way they go and of the essential preparation before they set out.”¹²²

Cappon’s discourse about the plight of the National Archives presented him the opportunity to summarize some of his thoughts about modern records management and historians’ connection to archivists. Throughout his writings, Cappon comments on records management in a manner suggesting that he

¹²⁰ Lester J. Cappon to H. G. Jones, 22 May 1968, Cappon Papers, Box IV, Folder 18. Cappon could be, of course, much more direct. In his letter to Robert L. Kunzig, head of the General Services Administration, Cappon bluntly stated that the “secret of success” of the National Archives has been having formally educated historians, with doctorates, at the helm of the institution; Lester J. Cappon to Robert L. Kunzig, 24 April 1969, Cappon Papers, Box IV, Folder 18.

¹²¹ Lester J. Cappon, “The National Archives and the Historical Profession,” *Journal of Southern History* 35 (November 1969): 479.

¹²² Cappon, “The National Archives and the Historical Profession,” 484. This was a consistent theme in both his published writings and his professional and personal correspondence. Responding to a letter from Charles Lee, director of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, about a paper he had given about historians’ nonuse of archival records, Cappon mused, “Your point is well taken that professional historians often fail to examine archival material pertinent to their research or to train their students in the use of it. The sins of omission of the fathers have descended on to the children through several generations.” Lester J. Cappon to Charles E. Lee, 16 November 1964, Cappon Papers, Box IV, Folder 18.

recognized its necessity (in light of the increasing quantity of modern records) but worried about its implications for historical documentation. In his presentation before the American Historical Association, Cappon chronicled the rise of federal records management, the necessary relationship between the archivist and records manager, and the lamentable results of the Hoover Commission in relegating archival work to a position below that of records management with its emphasis on “economy and efficiency, the darlings of management.”¹²³ In this, Cappon tried to hammer home the potential losses of records to historians. Tackling other issues, such as the ownership of presidential records and the work of the National Historical Publications Commission in supporting documentary editors, Cappon tried to convince his historian colleagues that the “National Archives has not achieved public or scholarly recognition”¹²⁴ that it deserved, while suggesting a number of initiatives that the National Archives itself should undertake. As he stated, the “moral of the story may bear repeating: the historian is the ultimate beneficiary of enlightened archival programs.”¹²⁵ In principle, “historians need to be more archival-minded.”¹²⁶ He had been saying this for thirty years, and he would continue such arguments for the remaining decade of his life.

Cappon was attracted to issues that challenged his ability to discuss the importance of archival principles, the nature of archival scholarship, and the relationship of history to archival knowledge. Toward the end of his life and after efforts to deal with the matter of presidential records raised in the mid-1970s by the resignation of Richard M. Nixon, Cappon decided to tackle the matter, especially in light of the wide range of attitudes held toward presidential libraries, and especially in the post-Watergate era. As he related it, the “emotional atmosphere during a period of crisis often clouds our perspective and diverts attention from basic issues to attendant circumstances.”¹²⁷ Cappon runs through by now very familiar themes, matters of the ownership of the records, the primary uses of archives, access to such records, the purpose of records management, all the while wrestling with the nature, purposes, and costs of presidential libraries, all within a general historical framework of presidential records. Cappon clearly wrote the essay, unfortunately without any of the

¹²³ Cappon, “The National Archives and the Historical Profession,” 486–90 (quotation, 489). As he related more directly to a colleague, “I do not have confidence in the records managers’ sense of historical values and thus of preservation when they have a free hand”; Lester J. Cappon to H. G. Jones, 31 May 1967, Cappon Papers, Box IV, Folder 18.

¹²⁴ Cappon, “The National Archives and the Historical Profession,” 495.

¹²⁵ Cappon, “The National Archives and the Historical Profession,” 497.

¹²⁶ Cappon, “The National Archives and the Historical Profession,” 499.

¹²⁷ Lester J. Cappon, “Why Presidential Libraries?” *Yale Review* 68 (October 1978): 11.

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standard documentation, because “what was seldom discussed by archivists a few years ago [who owns such records] has been converted into a vital issue through political crisis” and an issue that would not be easily answered.¹²⁸ Cappon was worried, however, because “what is significant pertains to the maintenance of archival principles, impartial professional services, and the promotion of scholarship. When the National Archives recovers its independent status, as it must, that will further advance all these objectives.”¹²⁹ Cappon did not live to see the National Archives achieve that independence (although he would have been critical of how little has really changed as a result).

In Full Stride until the End

The end of Cappon’s life came suddenly on 24 August 1981. Lawrence Towner, director of the Newberry Library, wrote in the program for Cappon’s memorial service the following: “Striding briskly up Rush Street after dinner on August 24, twenty-eight days before his eighty-first birthday, Lester Cappon dropped dead on the sidewalk, we like to think in full stride, as usual: there was no way he would die in bed.”¹³⁰ The broadside included a photograph of Cappon in his familiar outdoor hat, and Towner’s reference was to Cappon’s lifelong interest in horseback riding, hiking, and river trips (along with music and bourbon).

Nevertheless, by the end of his life Cappon was struggling to finish projects and showing signs of being a bit out of step with what was happening in various professional circles. In the mid-1970s, he pitched the idea of publishing a collection of essays entitled *An Atlas in the Making*, focusing on how the early American historical atlas had been done. Cappon promised that “although the essays will contain some information already in the *Atlas*, they will provide a correlation of subject-matter which is scattered throughout the text of the *Atlas*, plus additional information and generalizations that will be useful to future scholars on history and geography.”¹³¹ Yet, the book never came about because some contributors never completed their essays and because some submissions were of uneven quality. Cappon seems to have made up for the loss of this project by continuing to publish about historical mapmaking until the end of his life.¹³²

¹²⁸ Cappon, “Why Presidential Libraries?” 33.

¹²⁹ Cappon, “Why Presidential Libraries?” 34.

¹³⁰ *Beethoven and Bourbon: A Celebration of Life; Lester J. Cappon September 18, 1900–August 24, 1981*, Broadside 1981.T68, University of Virginia Special Collections.

¹³¹ Lester J. Cappon to Stephen E. Wiberley, Jr., 3 August 1976, Cappon Papers, Box V, Folder 17.

¹³² Lester J. Cappon, “The Historical Map in American Atlases,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69 (December 1979): 622–34. These essays, in combination with the ones he wrote while working on the *Atlas* provide an ample view of Cappon’s idea about such projects; Lester J. Cappon, “Cartography and History: The Atlas of Early American History as a Case Study,” published in an unknown source with a copy located in the Cappon Papers, Box XII, Folder 4.

In his latter years, Cappon began to seem more rigid as well as somewhat persnickety.¹³³ He also began to argue with archivists who thought that the new technologies were transforming basic principles. In 1979, he wrote one author of such an argument and categorically stated that “archival principles are not altered by changes in procedure or in the physical nature of the records. Whatever their physical characteristics, they must be evaluated as to their primary origin, or their derivative nature, in using them for administrative purposes of historical research.”¹³⁴ In fairness to Cappon, this is a debate without end, and some archivists today would probably agree with him, but his letter took a tone that suggested that he was slipping. Whereas in earlier debates, Cappon provided much more detail about his position, by this point all he did was restate an assumption (albeit an assumption fully fleshed out in his decades of writing). Had the issue of machine-readable or electronic records emerged in full force a decade or two earlier, I think we would have seen Cappon delve into the history of recordkeeping as he had genealogical research or documentary editing or the administration of presidential libraries.

After a lifetime of trying to get historians to be more sensitive to the use of archival records, Cappon, by the end, also seemed to come across more as the slightly curmudgeonly traditionalist when considering newer historical scholarship. In 1978, he argued that history is narrative, “however much the historian may evolve theories, deal with problems, and revert to ‘scientific’ history. The ‘quantitative’ historians (God spare us from the terminology!) are assembling detailed data and arriving at new generalizations in local history; but they are the ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water’ for the historian with perspective who will write the *history*.”¹³⁵ Indeed, as if to affirm this, the last project Cappon was working on at his death, “Oral Documentation of the Revolutionary Generation: Jared Sparks as Recorder,” was rejected by reviewers as being “rambling,” possessing “no consistent argument,” as being too “anti-quarian” and “strangely incohesive.”¹³⁶ I doubt, personally, that Cappon’s work was that out of step, but he certainly represented an old school approach to

¹³³ Cappon wrote a letter to the AASLH executive director complaining that a list published in *History News*, “Who to Call in AASLH,” should be “Whom.” It is hard to know if Cappon was being tongue-in-cheek, but he sounded off to George, “As my connection with the Association dates from its founding in 1940, I retain a feeling of concern for the high quality of its magazine.” Lester J. Cappon to Gerald George, 15 January 1981, Cappon Papers, Box IV, Folder 11.

¹³⁴ Lester J. Cappon to Joseph Andrew Settani, 28 September 1979, Cappon Papers, Box IX, Folder 12. The letter was in response to Settani’s article, “A Revolution in Archives: Theory and Principles” (although I have no record of the article having been published). This may have been a manuscript sent by Settani to Cappon.

¹³⁵ Lester J. Cappon to Wilcomb E. Washburn, 25 May 1978, Cappon Papers, Box X, Folder 12. Cappon’s letter was a reaction to an essay by Washburn about Samuel Eliot Morison.

¹³⁶ These reviewers’ comments are in Cappon Papers, Box XVIII, Folder 19.

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documentary sources and research that seemed out of favor (although had he lived longer, Cappon would have seen a re-emergence of interest in such approaches).

Cappon's writings did not end with his life. His last published essay appeared the year after his death, a retort to Frank Burke's 1981 essay on archival theory. Burke believed that there was little to archival theory because there were no laws and no testing of universal principles. What passed for archival theory was based on practice and experience. Burke argued that even Ernst Posner, a historian, did not move much beyond practice. Theory, thought Burke, should be based on the nature of human organizations, and it had to be grown in the academy not in the workplace. Burke also thought most of the kinds of issues that archivists would be prone to theorize about, such as arrangement and description or educating archivists, were not worthy of the time and attention. Archivists need to consider the "larger questions," and they needed some faculty located in the academy to do this. Burke also dismissed the contributions of the historians to archival knowledge: "One might also look to the historian, formerly the proud and paternal cohort of the archivist, but more recently the parent who skipped out and hasn't been heard from for a decade or more."¹³⁷

At the age of eighty years, Cappon was motivated to respond once again. In submitting his response to the *American Archivist*, just a month before his death, Cappon wrote, "I concluded that he [Burke] is confused about archival principles and practice, about archives and history, and concerning the role of theory in the philosophy of archives."¹³⁸ His published response suggests both how consistent he had been in his career about his notion of the archivist, and that, for as long as he would live, Cappon would be a participant in the debates about archival theory, knowledge, purpose, and practice. As he had throughout his career, Cappon stressed the notions of provenance and *respect des fonds*: "From common-sense practice developed this abiding, doubly significant principle of archival administration, which proved advantageous likewise in eventual use of the records for historical research."¹³⁹ Cappon reiterated the importance of the authentication of records and their custody, as extension of these archival principles, arguing that "by this means the *truth* of the records is confirmed: the concern is with not the substance of the texts, but, rather, the genuine origin and continuous preservation of the records. This truth is the essence of archival theory."¹⁴⁰ At times, it is difficult to see just what the issues were for Cappon

¹³⁷ Frank G. Burke, "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981): 44.

¹³⁸ Lester J. Cappon to Deborah Risteen, 20 July 1981, Cappon Papers, Box V, Folder 7.

¹³⁹ Lester J. Cappon, "What, Then, Is There To Theorize About?" *American Archivist* 45 (Winter 1982): 20.

¹⁴⁰ Cappon, "What, Then, Is There To Theorize About?" 20.

about Burke's arguments, since much of what Burke was arguing for was a new and more rigorous scholarship into the nature of records and recordkeeping that would energize the work of archivists. Cappon's contention about the truth of records, perhaps, puts him into the older generations of historians and archivists with a positivist perspective. Some of Cappon's other assertions seem to be a bit more convoluted. He re-emphasized his long-held belief that "by and large, the archivist is at heart an historian."¹⁴¹ However, he also criticized Burke's questions by stressing that, in his opinion, they are not archival they are historical, inadvertently suggesting that archives are just there for historians and archivists are historians' helpers (views that Cappon did not seem to hold judging by his writings over the previous half-century). It may be that Cappon's attitude about the direction set by Burke had more to do with the potential transformation of archival literature from scholarly into more technical or philosophical musings. Cappon took dead aim at two new developments—the "mounting invasion of the 'information specialist' of little learning and the sociologist pursuing his studies draped in horrendous terminology."¹⁴² Some archivists, today, would probably agree with Cappon that this is exactly what has happened to the archival literature.

Like his collecting essay rebuttal to Ham a few years before, Cappon's response to Burke did not show him at his best (except as a historical figure in the development of the North American archival community). Cappon's full stride was now a half-step, but his contributions to the development of the profession and the body of archival knowledge continue to reveal him as a figure that should not be ignored (except at the expense of not understanding the history of one's discipline).

¹⁴¹ Cappon, "What, Then, Is There To Theorize About?" 21.

¹⁴² Cappon, "What, Then, Is There To Theorize About?" 24.