

## PERSPECTIVE

# The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape

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## Abstract

Historians and archivists approach the documentary past differently, as they consider, respectively, the “archive” (singular) and “archives” (plural). The former focuses on issues of power, memory, and identity centered upon the initial inscription of a document (or series of documents). The latter concentrates on the subsequent history of documents over time, including the many interventions by archivists (and others) that transform (and change) that original archive into archives. Despite making good common cause in lobbying over public policy and initially sharing values based on objective, scientific history, the two professions have drifted apart in recent decades. This essay explores the reasons for this divergence by analyzing the history of the two professions and highlighting resulting misconceptions that

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Editor’s note: This essay was originally published in the *Canadian Historical Review* vol. 90, no. 3, (September 2009), the Canadian equivalent to the *American Historical Review*. The first half of the essay is intended especially for an audience of professional and academic historians in Canada. Although this first section may seem familiar to archivists who know Cook’s writings, it summarizes the scholarship about the Archive (singular and often capitalized, as a concept in critical theory) and hypothesizes that this scholarship does not engage archivists or our literature because these external writers about the archive think that nothing happens in the archives (plural and lower case, our institutions and profession). In the second section, Cook lays out a research agenda for the history of records and archives, research that I hope American archivists will undertake in the spirit of this year’s seventy-fifth anniversary of the Society of American Archivists. With the exception of editing for conformity to style, the article has not been altered by either the author or the editor. I am grateful that Terry Cook allowed me to reprint this article to make it more broadly available.

blind both to deeper nuances of the multiple contexts surrounding records that may enhance their understanding and use. It concludes that archives are not unproblematic storehouses of records awaiting the historian, but active sites of agency and power. Until recently, it has been in the interests of both professions to deny (or at least not interrogate) the subjectivity of archives. Both professions could benefit significantly, therefore, from a renewed partnership centered upon the history of the record to produce better history.

The archivist-historian relationship is critically important to enabling (and sometimes compromising) many aspects of historical research. This relationship has been central as well to defining the identity of both professions since their modern genesis in the nineteenth century. Yet this symbiotic interaction remains largely unexplored in the literature of historians, leading to misunderstandings between two professions that should be natural allies. This failure is especially surprising because “the archive” has been the subject of an outpouring of stimulating writing by historians (and many others) in the past decade. The “archive” (singular) is usually engaged by such scholars as a metaphoric symbol, as representation of identity, or as the recorded memory production of some person or group or culture. But there seems little awareness (with rare exceptions) of the history of the archive, from after that initial creation or inscription to its appearance in the archival reference room, or of the internal concepts and processes that animate actual archivists working inside real archives (note plural), or of the distinct body of professional ideas and practice those archivists follow, or of the impact all this has on shaping both the surviving record and historical knowledge. This essay seeks to break these silences by analyzing the character of this relationship over its mutual and then diverging histories, the resulting concepts, and recent radical changes in the archival landscape.

Over three decades ago, in 1975, archivists in English Canada withdrew as a formal section of the Canadian Historical Association to form the independent Association of Canadian Archivists. Since that time, the archival profession in

Author’s note: A shorter version of this long-gestating essay was initially presented as the opening keynote address to the first biennial International Conference on the History of Records and Archives, held in Toronto in 2003, and reworked versions again in 2007–2008 as the first W.F.M. Stewart Lecture at the University of Calgary, and to the Society of Archivists, Ireland, in Dublin; to the Archive Fervour /Archive Further: Literature, Archives, and Literary Archives conference in Aberystwyth, Wales; and The Philosophy of the Archive conference, Edinburgh, Scotland. Many valuable comments were received from Sharon Anne Cook, University of Ottawa; Tim Cook, Canadian War Museum; Tom Nesmith, University of Manitoba; and Joan M. Schwartz, Queen’s University. Their welcome suggestions, as with those of the CHR’s three anonymous reviewers, have allowed me to improve the essay significantly.

English Canada has flourished.<sup>1</sup> Its principal scholarly journal, *Archivaria*, has had a major impact on national and international thinking about archives. The very existence of its thousands of pages, joined by a score of other peer-reviewed archival journals in the English-speaking world alone, is evidence of a rejuvenated discipline with a rapidly expanding body of knowledge. New programs for graduate education in archival studies inaugurated in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s both reflect and encourage this disciplinary expansion; their master's degrees have since become the de facto entry-level requirement for employment as professional archivists in most archival institutions in the country.<sup>2</sup> New alliances have been formed with records managers and information technology specialists on the one hand, and with librarians and museum curators on the other, while the traditional historian-archivist bond has faded as somewhat passé. In turn, historians (again, with those rare exceptions) have lost touch with many changes affecting the four core archival functions of appraisal and acquisition; arrangement, processing, and description; preservation; and public programming of the very primary sources central to both professions, to say nothing of the demographic, economic, and technological challenges facing today's archives.<sup>3</sup>

This distancing between historians and archivists has occurred despite sharing common intellectual and professional roots in the nineteenth century, and much common development since. Indeed, until the past few decades, the overwhelming majority of Canadian archivists were educated in history, supplemented by some on-the-job training and a four-week specialized course in archival methods. Archivists participated actively in the Canadian Historical

<sup>1</sup> The Archives Section of the Canadian Historical Association was a vibrant group publishing its own newsletter and journal, and holding sessions as an integral part of the CHA annual conference. Archivists in Quebec had earlier formed, for French-language archivists, the Association des Archivistes du Québec in 1967, with its own journal, *Archives*. After much debate, the Association of Canadian Archivists accordingly formed as an English-language rather than as a bilingual association. The two archival associations remain separate in linguistic solitude, but co-operate for common cross-Canada purposes through the Bureau of Canadian Archivists, which is composed of senior representatives from both associations. This essay is limited to exploring archival ideas in English-speaking Canada, with related international perspectives; its conclusions may also reflect more the experiences in large and mid-sized archival institutions.

<sup>2</sup> Master's-level degrees in archival studies are now offered (from west to east) at British Columbia, Manitoba (jointly with Winnipeg), Toronto, Montreal, McGill, and Laval, four in conjunction with library and information sciences schools, two (Manitoba and Laval) in conjunction with history or heritage departments. There are offerings of stand-alone archival courses in several library schools, but these do not meet the Association of Canadian Archivists' educational guidelines for a full-time, two-year, postgraduate degree. In addition, there are diploma and certificate programs for archival technicians offered by several community colleges, indicating that the work of the "archival assistant" now is also increasingly complex.

<sup>3</sup> The two-part article by New Brunswick archivist Fred Farrell, "The Changing Face of Archives: Will You Recognize Us?" in the Canadian Historical Association's *Bulletin* 33 (2007) suggests by its very title this interprofessional gap. Farrell's columns report on the demographic, political, technological, and funding crises besetting archival institutions today, rather than the historian-archivist relationship per se.

Association, as long-time editors of its journal and Historical Booklet series, as members of its executive board, and as regular conference attendees. Historians in turn were the most identifiable of archives' researcher clientele, if not the most numerous compared to genealogists. Yet perhaps the very closeness of that century-long historian-archivist relationship fostered perceptions in both professions that now hinder understanding the realities of archives and forging closer partnerships with each other. And so, this essay argues, the archive(s) has become a foreign country for historians.

So designating the archive consciously references David Lowenthal's much acclaimed book, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*. Lowenthal took his title from L. P. Hartley's novel, *The Go-Between*, which begins with these lines: "The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there."<sup>4</sup> Lowenthal argues that this idea of a sharp distinction between past and present dates from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Before that time, the past and present seemed similar places rather than foreign countries. Past events were believed to be animated by the same passions that governed their present-day equivalents. A past so perceived became a rich source of examples for discerning universal notions of morality and virtue, and their opposites. Many in that earlier era certainly drew inspiration from the past, especially from the classical antiquity of Greece and Rome, for their own art and sculpture, philosophy and literature, rhetoric and architecture. But they felt no great need to preserve the actual artifacts from that past. Indeed, many such artifacts lay crumbling in ruins, often despoiled or ransacked, or, if collected, done so only, as Lowenthal rightly notes, as "an antiquarian, quirky, episodic pursuit."<sup>5</sup>

With the nineteenth century, this attitude toward the past changed dramatically. Because of the revulsion (symbolized by Romanticism) felt toward the dirty, crowded present of the Industrial Revolution, especially when contrasted with idealistic notions of a chivalrous medieval past; because of the sharp separation of the past (*ancien régime*) from the present that was both *raison d'être* and vivid legacy of the French Revolution; and because of the post-Napoleonic nationalisms springing up across Europe that sought continuity and legitimacy in long-distant historical roots for their region or locality, nineteenth-century observers came to view the past, Lowenthal asserts, as a place quite different from the present. Attitudes toward the preservation of artifacts from that past consequently shifted radically as well, from the antiquarian to the professional, from passive neglect to active collecting. This collecting *mentalité* was also influenced by a growing nineteenth-century empiricism that venerated facts, statistics, and the scientific method, manifested

<sup>4</sup> L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953), cited in David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xvi. The novel was made into a well-received film in 1971.

<sup>5</sup> Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, xvi–xvii, and *passim*.

in part through the enormous public interest in collecting natural specimens and their detailed classification and display.<sup>6</sup> The new and appealing technology of photography paralleled this development, by creating the illusion that one could capture—or collect—life’s “reality” with factual precision through visually truthful images.<sup>7</sup> Growing imperial consciousness in Europe similarly led to the systematic collecting of colonial “facts” and artifacts as a means, when presented to citizens at “home,” of confirming the mastery and superiority of the imperial center, of defining the “other” in contrast to the self.<sup>8</sup> Even the then-popular hand-copying of overseas documents to fill nascent archives and historical societies in Canada and the United States was likewise an attempt to collect and re-present the past in forms more accessible for historians and other writers.<sup>9</sup>

This new collecting *mentalité* and reverence for a distant past led to the establishment in Western countries of “public” museums, galleries, libraries, archives—even zoos—as major state institutions to preserve artifacts, specimens, images, books, and records. Such accumulations were previously almost exclusively the private purview of monarchs, the church, interested aristocrats, or inspired (often eccentric) private enthusiasts. The collections now housed in these new nineteenth-century public institutions represented both a democratization of culture and an exertion of social control over popular taste.<sup>10</sup> In all these developments, Lowenthal concludes, noting the irony, “If recognizing the past’s difference promoted its preservation, the act of preserving made that difference still more apparent. Venerated as a fount of communal identity, cherished as a precious and endangered resource, yesterday became less and

<sup>6</sup> As entrees to this large field, see Lynn Barber, *The Heyday of Natural History, 1820–1870* (London: Cape, 1980); George Emery, *Fact of Life: The Social Construction of Vital Statistics, Ontario 1869–1952* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen’s University Press, 1993); and Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> See Joan M. Schwartz, “‘Records of Simple Truth and Precision’: Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control,” *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000): 1–40.

<sup>8</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), especially chap. 10; and Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993). The extensive work of Ann Laura Stoler is very suggestive; for a good introduction and many cross-references, see her “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” in “Archives, Records, and Power,” ed. Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, special issues, *Archival Science: International Journal on Recorded Information* 2 (2002): 87–109.

<sup>9</sup> For examples, see Ian E. Wilson, “‘A Noble Dream’: The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada,” *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–1983): 16–35; and Randall Jimerson, “American Historians and European Archival Theory: The Collaboration of J. F. Jameson and Waldo G. Leland,” *Archival Science* 6, nos. 3–4 (2006): 299–312.

<sup>10</sup> For these themes in the evolution of museums, see Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995). Compare, as but two examples of many possible, Michael H. Harris, *History of Libraries in the Western World*, 4th ed. (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 1999); and R. J. Hoage and William A. Deiss, eds., *New Worlds, New Animals: From Menagerie to Zoological Park in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

less like today.”<sup>11</sup> The very act of archiving, then, ensured that the past was perceived as different from the present, more foreign than familiar, and, equally, that the archiving act itself imbued the newly collected and accessible documents with different meanings and, accordingly, different uses.

In this new nineteenth-century perception of a distinctive past worth preserving, re-creating, and retelling, both professional history and professional archives were born, and both were soon suffused with self-identifying mythologies. This archives-history and archivist-historian relationship seems worth probing in some detail, for there are significant assumptions on both sides of the equation that blur important nuances about the past. These misunderstandings mean that both professions approach records with less subtlety than is desirable for producing the best archives and the best history. Since the professional separation of archivists and historians in Canada in the 1970s, an unhealthy divergence has occurred between the two professions, despite lobbying together on such public policy issues as privacy, copyright, electronic/digital records, opening the historical census records, or the future of Library and Archives Canada. This essay, then, reflects on the archives-history relationship since the early nineteenth century, explores the evolution of Canadian archival ideas in recent decades, and suggests possibilities for fruitful cross-professional interaction to counter that divergence and improve accordingly work by both archivists and historians.

The argument here is that the archive(s) is a foreign country to many historians. Of course, it is one that they visit frequently—but perhaps mainly as tourists passing through, focusing on their guidebooks, intent on capturing appealing views, but overlooking their surroundings, not talking to the local inhabitants about what they do, thus failing to understand the country’s real character and animating soul. And might archivists in their present rush to standardization, digitization, and outreach programs stressing numbers of “hits” and clients rather than substance also be changing into rather general tour guides less suitable for such specialist visitors (as historians), content to lead the tourists to the obvious, the well known, the visually appealing, the easy

<sup>11</sup> Lowenthal, *Past Is a Foreign Country*, xvi–xvii. Also supporting and expanding Lowenthal’s arguments, as summarized here, are Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); and David Gross, *Lost Time: On Remembering and Forgetting in Late Modern Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000). Donald R. Kelley, in his *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), warns that these divisions between the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century views of history were not rigid: some later trends were foreshadowed, and some earlier patterns lingered in changed environments. From the archival perspective, there was by archivists a similar blurring across time, for there were active collectors of rare manuscripts, maps, and prints from the Renaissance onward, and some pre-nineteenth-century archival methods had been articulated, such as diplomatics, for distinguishing between authentic records and forgeries. But the state-based “public” nature of archival work in the nineteenth century, and its professionalization and methodological articulation, mark a fundamental shift in attitude and activity, and soon followed in articulated theory, making Lowenthal’s interpretation still convincing.

to locate, the popular or politically correct, but less willing, or now, in some cases, less able, to take visitors off the beaten path to the back roads where the real country may be experienced? If the past was perceived in the nineteenth century as a foreign place by both professions, the treatment accorded to that past has likewise diverged into foreign spaces.

Nothing marks this divergence more starkly than the archival function of appraisal. As archivists appraise records, they are doing nothing less than determining what the future will know about its past: who will have a continuing voice and who will be silenced. Archivists thereby co-create the archive. Archival appraisal decides which creators, functions, and activities generating records will be represented in archives, by defining, identifying, then selecting which documents and which media become archives in the first place. Appraisal is also the gateway function to all subsequent archival activity. Once records are appraised as having archival value and are acquired or protected by the archival institution, even being in that privileged state does not ensure their equal treatment thereafter. They are continually reappraised for their “value” when the archivist decides, against the realities of huge backlogs, limited resources, and pressing external and professional demands, which records are to enjoy all or many or only some of numerous subsequent archival processes, more or less in the following sequential order: placing the records into more “logical” arrangements and groupings; providing varying levels of technical processing for machine-dependent film and sound archives and for computer-generated digital records; analyzing series or groupings of records to highlight the salient people, places, ideas, and events, in the mere paragraph or two of a typical archival description, for a series of records that may contain a million pages or a thousand images; creating for some few records more detailed catalogs, listings, or finding aids or specialized or thematic guides; furnishing conservation services and stabilization of the physical recording media; implementing migration (especially for audio-visual and digital records) to new storage media and new viewing or software platforms as old environments deteriorate or become obsolete; storing in premium environmental conditions or less so; copying for preservation or diffusion by microfilming or digital scanning; and finally—and the function most directly visible to researchers—deciding (through many complex processes, including the archivist’s own education and experience) which of all these already heavily filtered records, by choices made by all the preceding processes, should now be featured in exhibitions (in-house and online), publications, educational outreach programs, specialized reference service guides, or as online finding aids and digitized images of actual documents. And that same initial archival appraisal decides, with finality, which records are to be destroyed, excluded from the archives and thus from all these subsequent archival processes and enhancements, thereby effectually removed

from societal memory, from the “archive.” By this appraisal process, to come to the harsh bottom line, about 1 to 5 percent of the total available documentation of major institutions is preserved, and an even smaller percentage from the totality of records of all possible private citizens, groups, and organizations.<sup>12</sup>

Appraisal as a function challenges most fundamentally historians’ stereotypes and archivists’ self-perceptions (at least traditionally) about the archivist’s role in society.<sup>13</sup> If archivists are now rarely depicted as aged antiquarians stooped over piles of ledgers in dusty basements, they are not perceived as constructing social memory to reflect contemporary needs, values, and assumptions; that is the role of historians and other users of the archive. Rather, the archivist is viewed by historians as a kind of honest broker, or informed tour guide, between the original creators of the record and its later use by researchers. This perception is not surprising, since archivists through the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century have depicted themselves as just such guardians of the documentary past, not as its ongoing co-creators. Indeed, archivists in Britain until very recently were called “keepers” to reflect this curatorial mindset. The first major archival theorist writing in English, Hilary Jenkinson of the Public Record Office in London, best articulated early in the twentieth century this guardian or keeper role as the archival ideal.<sup>14</sup> In discussing the possibility of the archivist doing historical work, Jenkinson offered this telling reflection later in life: “[The archivist] will almost certainly make from time to time interesting [historical] discoveries and must sometimes be allowed the pleasure of following them up, in off hours, himself. The appropriate motto seems to be . . . ‘Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn’: we must allow him . . . a few mouthfuls; while reminding him that his primary duty is to tread; and hoping that he will not, in the process, tread on any, or many, toes.”<sup>15</sup> Jenkinson’s self-describing metaphor is disturbing in characterizing the actual archival work itself as mere treading, remembering that an ox is a castrated bull designed for tedious work, and that the term in popular parlance denotes someone who is clumsy and dull, if solid and reliable. Canada’s first dominion archivist, Douglas Brymner, revealed a similar

<sup>12</sup> For a historical overview of the evolution of concepts and strategies for appraisal, see Terry Cook, “Macroappraisal in Theory and Practice: Origins, Characteristics, and Implementation in Canada, 1950–2000,” *Archival Science* 5, nos. 2–4 (2005): 101–61.

<sup>13</sup> On the history of modern archival ideas, including many sources relating to these broad assertions that follow, see Terry Cook, “What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 17–63.

<sup>14</sup> Jenkinson’s major tome, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, appeared in 1922, was revised and updated in 1937, and is very widely cited and honored in archival discourse.

<sup>15</sup> Hilary Jenkinson, “The English Archivist: A New Profession,” in *Selected Writings of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, ed. Roger H. Ellis and Peter Walne (1980), cited in Tom Nesmith, “Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives,” *American Archivist* 65 (Spring/Summer 2002): 28.



mindset, when designating the work he did arranging archival records as “purely mechanical,” requiring “no special qualifications.”<sup>16</sup>

This curatorial, neutered, and self-deprecating professional mindset held by archivists continued its grip well past the classic period of shaping archival theory. Until the 1980s, at least in Canada, archivists were often termed the “handmaidens of historians.”<sup>17</sup> In retrospect, that phrase is astonishing for its servility and its gender connotations. Yet it carries insight too. Just as women, until the past generation, were largely invisible in historical memory, relegated to being the silent and usually unrecognized supporters of male accomplishment, so too archivists have remained invisible in the construction of social memory, their role poorly articulated and rarely appreciated, their self-image equally passive. Just as patriarchy needed women to be subservient, invisible “handmaidens” to maintain male power, so historians required archivists to be neutral, invisible partners of historical research to maintain unchallenged the central professional assumptions of historians. The father of modern scientific “objective” history, Leopold von Ranke, made this gendered connotation very explicit: He described an archival collection he was using as “absolutely a virgin. I long for the moment I have access to her . . . whether she is pretty or not.” He saw archival documents as “so many princesses, possibly beautiful, all under a curse and needing to be saved.” A nineteenth-century French historian, approaching archives to do research, spoke of being determined “to force open the doors and thrust past the keepers of the harem.” The notion of the archives as virginal territory, a fetishism toward documents bordering on the obsessive, was evident. One historian wondered how, in doing archival research, he could “avoid being seduced, intoxicated, and bewitched by the issues whose essence oozes from these leather bindings and heaped-up cartons.” Of course, the point was to be so seduced; a team of French historians wrote, on finding untouched archival documents, that “every discovery induces rapture.”<sup>18</sup> The need by historians, for methodological, epistemological, and gender reasons, to have a nonproblematic, pure, virginal archive, ready for the historian to discover and exploit, almost by definition required the archivist

<sup>16</sup> *Report on Canadian Archives*, 1889, cited in Nesmith, “Seeing Archives,” 28.

<sup>17</sup> For an indication of this accepted “handmaiden” parlance, see Hugh A. Taylor, “The Discipline of History and the Education of the Archivist,” in *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections by Hugh A. Taylor*, ed. Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 2003), 52; or his book review in *Archivaria* 9 (Winter 1979–1980): 234–35. Taylor was the leading Canadian archival thinker of his generation from the 1970s to 1990s.

<sup>18</sup> All examples and citations are from Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Research* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 116, 124. Whether the “handmaiden” motif has been discarded (in addition to the factors that follow later in this essay) because of the substantial shift in the gender composition in the past quarter century of both the historical and archival professions, from overwhelmingly male to majority female, would be worthy of investigation, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

to be an invisible caretaker, a docile handmaiden, the harem-keeper of the documentary virgins.

One of the first to challenge this cumulative image of the passive, curatorial archivist was W. Kaye Lamb, a past president of the Canadian Historical Association and the fourth dominion archivist of Canada, as well as its first national librarian. As a well-respected archivist and historian, Lamb saw clearly the misconceptions across the historian-archivist divide. He chided historians in 1963 for likening the work of archivists “to a vacuum cleaner—a remark . . . intended to be complimentary, within limits, . . . to commend the industry and thoroughness with which we hunted out material and brought it all together. But there . . . our abilities ended. Really important things began to happen only when some historian opened the bag of the vacuum cleaner, sorted out its contents, and made intelligent use of the good things he found there.” Lamb complained that, to many historians, the archivist was “essentially a hack: a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. He collects things, cleans them, catalogues them, puts them on shelves, and eventually takes some of them off shelves and puts them on a table when a historian wants them. All this is true enough, but it neglects entirely those aspects of the archivist’s job that call for intelligence, knowledge, and judgment to such a degree that the assignment can be a little frightening.” What frightened Lamb, coming back full circle to the argument being presented here, was the archival function of appraisal:

Out of a vast mass of material, a high percentage of which must be destroyed, he must try to identify and retain those items that are most likely to be of interest and significance in the years to come. Unlike the historian, the archivist cannot place any convenient subjective limitation on his field of interest. Somehow or other he must find means to pass judgment on the probable value of source material that may relate to virtually any aspect or period of the history of the state or country with which his institution happens to be concerned. . . . Sources can wait for the historian for years, but if they are to be there to await his pleasure, some archivist may have to make up his mind in a hurry and act quickly in order to secure and preserve them.<sup>19</sup>

Such appraisal, and especially the concomitant destruction of all other records not selected, was as frightening to historians as it was to Lamb.<sup>20</sup> That archivists are continually making such judgments may account for the historical

<sup>19</sup> W. Kaye Lamb, “The Archivist and the Historian,” *American Historical Review* 68 (January 1963): 392–93. For an extended analysis of Lamb’s archival ideas, their implementation at the Public Archives of Canada, and in turn across English Canada, see Terry Cook, “An Archival Revolution: W. Kaye Lamb and the Transformation of the Archival Profession,” *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005): 185–234.

<sup>20</sup> For a classic statement of historians’ nervousness over Lamb’s new emphasis on appraisal and destruction, see C. P. Stacey, “The Public Archives of Canada at the End of Its First Century,” *Historical Papers* (1972): 11–22. See, too, the critiques offered by historians Joy Parr, “Case Records as Sources for Social History,” *Archivaria* 4 (Summer 1977): 122–36; and Veronica Strong-Boag, “Raising Clio’s Consciousness: Women’s History and Archives in Canada,” *Archivaria* 6 (Summer 1978): 70–82.

profession's sense of denial, or at least its failure to engage with the archival profession on matters of archival substance.

This idea among historians of an "invisible" or natural or nonproblematic archive has long roots, going back to the rise of the new "professional" historian of the nineteenth century and the development of a "scientific" approach to researching and writing history. These new historians eschewed the grand historical narratives typical of a Gibbon, a Macaulay, or a Carlyle, who dipped into archives only to supplement memoirs and literary sources when writing their magisterial tomes. That older history was viewed more as literature, as sweeping morality plays rather than dispassionate analyses based on fact; such histories were a manifestation of the very conflation of past and present that David Lowenthal delineated for that earlier period. By contrast, the new scientific or professional history, best represented by von Ranke (despite his documentary princesses), tried to re-create life in the past "as it really was" through rigorous scholarship, debate in the university graduate seminar, and the full immersion by the historian in archives. This new historical scholarship was especially centered on a self-consciously "objective" methodology of examining exhaustively all relevant archival sources in order to discover the "facts" about the past. As one scholar summarizes the new professional historian's mindset, "Historical facts are seen as prior to and independent of interpretation: the value of an interpretation is judged by how well it accounts for the facts; if contradicted by the facts, it must be abandoned. . . . Whatever patterns exist in history are 'found,' not 'made.'"<sup>21</sup>

Animated by such assumptions, the new historian required, almost by definition, a nonproblematic archive, one that accumulated organically, without interference or mediation by the archivist, beyond the limited curatorial and cleaning activities, such as Lamb mentioned. If records in archives were the critical portal to discovering the facts about the past, then the archive certainly could not be acknowledged as the product of the subjective process of archival appraisal, or of active interventions by archivists to shape and reshape the meaning of records in all the other subsequent archival activities across the never-ending life (dare I say, the *history*) of its documentary holdings. Of course, the new professional historians did not take archival texts at face value: paleography, diplomatics, and source criticism were mandatory topics of study in the new nineteenth-century history graduate

<sup>21</sup> Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity" Question and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 2, and *passim*. Of course "amateur" historians with a large popular appeal and writing on grand sweeping themes, such as George Bancroft and Francis Parkman, continued to exist in the nineteenth century alongside the new academic historians, but now they used primary documents much more in their narratives. It is fair to add, as Donald Kelley and others have noted, that von Ranke's reputation for extolling scientific objectivity in historical research was in part a later construction projected on him to suit the needs and status of an evolving historical profession, rather than an accurate reflection of how von Ranke actually practiced his own historical research.

seminars in order to test the veracity of the content, dating, and authorship of individual documents, but there was no apparent concern about the archival values, and processes that placed these documents within an archives in the first place and in front of the historian in a particular order, context, and highlighted priority in the second.

This tradition continues to the present day. Even postmodernist historians rarely confront the mediated nature of archives as appraised and selected records, as curatorial institutions, as professional activity, or as a body of theoretical and practical knowledge. For example, in the past ten to fifteen years, there has been a tremendous outpouring of historical writing on memory, on how societies commemorate the past through institutions, media, and symbols that reinforce the power and identity of communities in the present. These works range from analyses of historic sites to war memorials, from commemorative events to public holidays, from theater, music, and film to cemeteries, antiques, and ruins. Equally, an impressive number of books have been produced by historians that probe the founding, evolution, and animating values of nineteenth-century museums, art galleries, libraries, and zoos, all as state-sponsored, public institutions deeply engaged in constructing cultural memory. And yet in this rich vein of writing, there are still very few historians' monographs that do the same for archives—despite national, state, and local archives being created, and then defined and shaped, at the very same time as those other cultural institutions about which the postmodernist historians were writing, *and* despite archives being the external cultural institution with which historians are most familiar, that is, not counting their own universities.<sup>22</sup>

This invisible archive is rarely engaged even by those scholars addressing the theory or methodologies of historical research or the history of the historical profession. Peter Novick, in his influential 1988 book, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, manages, over 629 pages of text, not to mention the role or impact of archives, and of the archival choosing and subsequent (re)arrangement and description of historians' source material, as having an influence on the question (or even possibility) of historical objectivity.<sup>23</sup> A study published in 1998 by seventeen Canadian historians, *On the Case: Explorations in Social History*, is "organized around a single question:

<sup>22</sup> The shining exceptions to this rule are monographs by such medievalists and classicists as Michael Clanchy, Patrick Geary, Jacques Le Goff, or James Sickinger, all, significantly, addressing the history of archives many centuries before 1800, when modern archives and modern professional history were born.

<sup>23</sup> By stark contrast, for an incisive theoretical consideration of the tension of the objectivity expectations and subjectivity realities of historians and archivists, from an archival insider, see Hans Booms, "Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage: Issues in the Appraisal of Archival Sources," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987): 69–107 (originally in German in 1972); and also the extended discussion in Cook, "Macroappraisal in Theory and Practice."

what is the value of ‘case files’ in the practice of social history.” Yet the book contains no substantive reference to archival interventions, despite readily available published literature by archivists on the theory and methodologies underpinning the archival appraisal of case files, including their extensive sampling and selecting methods, which obviously has a fundamental impact on the shape and “value” of what remains for the historian to use.<sup>24</sup> Donald Wright’s recent CHA booklet, *The Canadian Historical Association: A History*, virtually ignores the substantial interaction of archivists with historians within the CHA: in his analysis of the complaints (and occasional defections from the CHA) of thematic subgroups of historians devoted to women’s, military, “national,” and similar fields of history, there is no discussion of the first and biggest such subgroup to leave the CHA (the archivists in 1975), no acknowledgment that archivists for decades shaped and edited both the scholarly journal and main booklet series for the association, and no hint that from 1945 to 1966 the CHA was a formal participant in the Public Records Committee approving all archival appraisals and destruction recommendations for all records in the federal government.<sup>25</sup>

In a very fine reflective essay on historical practice that appeared in the *Canadian Historical Review* in 1995, Joy Parr, one of Canada’s leading gender and social historians, quite rightly exhorts her colleagues to consider that the process of historical meaning-making begins not as they write their books and articles within some interpretive framework, but long before, “from the moment the archives boxes are opened” and the documents therein are read

<sup>24</sup> Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson, eds., *On the Case: Explorations in Social History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), quoted from introductory material and dust jacket. The oversight was reinforced when the editors of the *Canadian Historical Review* convened a special “CHR Forum” to discuss the book, inviting six participants: all historians and no archivists. In her probing review of the book, archivist Carolyn Heald notes the symbolic irony of an archivist sorting case files being depicted as the cover illustration of the book, without any analysis inside of what impact his work might have as he acquires (or destroys) and describes case files for researchers; see *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999): 161–64.

<sup>25</sup> Donald Wright, *The Canadian Historical Association: A History*, CHA Historical Booklet no. 62 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 2003). His related book, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), has more coverage of archives as site or sponsor of historians’ own work, but not interrogated in their own right as shaping the very nature and possibilities of that professionalized history.

with or against the grain.<sup>26</sup> Fair enough, yet the picture is considerably more stark than Parr paints. I would assert that a major act of determining historical meaning—perhaps *the* major act—occurs not when the historian opens the box, but when the archivist fills the box, and, by implication, through the process of archival appraisal, destroys the other 98 or 99 percent of records that do not get into that or any other archival box. And, further, what of the layers of archival interpretation animating arrangement and description—and the formative assumptions underpinning these processes—that lead the historian, or not, to the 1 or 2 percent of surviving records in that box, and all other relevant boxes; and highlight, or do not, the complex interrelationships among creators of records, their surrounding organizational cultures, patterns of contemporary record communication and use, and the record-shaping characteristics of information technologies and recording media—all these deeply affecting the meaning of the surviving records. All these knowledge filters reflect in turn the depth, quality, and presentation of the archivist's own research into the records' many and continually altering contexts, and the social/cultural attitudes and backgrounds of the archivist—into, in short, the records' own history and the archivist's need and ability to unravel that history as the very foundation of performing well all the archival functions and processes mentioned earlier.

Yet this evolving history of the archival record remains the great silence between archivists and historians. The role of archivists as co-authors of that history remains invisible. Since Jacques Derrida's landmark volume *Archive Fever* appeared in English in 1996, which brought the postmodern turn directly to the archive(s), this odd silence has finally begun to break, at least at the rarefied level of journal literature and conference papers. Yet even so, the archive so engaged is centered upon the original inscription, not the subsequent (including archival) history of the record. Even after Derrida, there is still expressed in historiographical writing, as recently as 2007, the hope that, in contrast to the often commercially driven "archives" appearing on websites that are "evident[ly] interpretive[,] . . . scholars who use professionally organized archives have come to expect that archivists will make their data available in a *disinterested*

<sup>26</sup> Parr, "Gender, History and Historical Practice," 372. To her considerable credit, Parr is one of a single handful of Canadian historians who have directly expressed historians' concerns with the substance of archival practices over the past thirty years; see her "Case Records as Sources for Social History," *Archivaria* 4 (Summer 1977): 122–36. For a similar engagement, see Strong-Boag, "Raising Clio's Consciousness." Another engaged historian has been Robert A. J. Macdonald, who challenged archivists' assumptions and practices in "Acquiring and Preserving Private Records: A Debate," *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994): 155–57, 162–63. Significantly, such conversations addressing the substance of archivists' work (as opposed to public policy issues such as access and privacy, or hours of service) are rare and occurred fifteen to thirty years ago in the literature. A more recent Canadian exception to these generalizations is Tim Cook's *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), which integrates the creation and control of documents (records management) and their archival collecting (filling those boxes) with the impact this had on the subsequent writing of history. But then before becoming a military historian, Cook worked as an archivist at the National Archives of Canada and saw firsthand the archival role in shaping the possibilities of historical writing.

and non-directive way”—evidently without interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Even those historical scholars who eschew such lingering visions of the archives as objective and who challenge their fellow “‘historians’ comparative silence about the personal, structural, and political pressures which the archive places on the histories they end up writing—as well as those they do not”; and who argue eloquently instead for seeing the archives as constructed and contested exercises in power and exclusion, the very processes of which “shape all the narratives which are to be ‘found’ there,” even these sensitive writers still exclude any serious consideration of the archive from inside the archives.<sup>28</sup>

In summary, despite the impressive external theorizing on the “archive” in recent historical writing, what is still missing is the voice of the archivist, who, after all, is the principal actor in defining, choosing, and constructing the archive *that remains*, and then in representing and presenting that surviving archival trace to researchers. Given the sensitivity of many of those same historians to the past marginalization from history of women, certain ethnic groups, the working classes, or First Nations peoples, it is all the more surprising that such historians studying the archive have marginalized the archivist. Can one imagine writing about the history of nursing or engineering without researching any of the literature produced by nurses or engineers? Yet in my reading of works by those few historians recently writing directly on the archive, I have almost never seen citations (with very rare and then very spotty exceptions) to any of the thousands of articles, books, and published studies, let alone internal reports, produced by archivists, in English alone, in the past three decades, including no few such writings by archivists that from the inside both theorize the archive, the archives, and their historical evolution.<sup>29</sup>

There is surely more to this silence, this invisibility, than mere oversight, or a kindly trust by historians that archivists are going about their business in a responsible way, or, conversely, peevish complaints from archivists that they are not getting sufficient respect. Brien Brothman, a leading Canadian archival thinker of the late twentieth century, has asserted that historians are collectively—if maybe subconsciously—afraid to acknowledge, at least until very recently, contested archives because of their own professional mythologies. Updating

<sup>27</sup> Allan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 218–19 (emphasis added).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), 6–9, and *passim*. This stimulating volume contains but one book by an archivist (co-authored with a historian) in its extensive bibliography and no references (save to that same author) to any archivist in its index; no archivist is included among its sixteen authors; and no consideration of the ideas of even the giants of archival literature is offered when discussing the archive.

<sup>29</sup> I am happy again to acknowledge some exceptions, as mentioned above in notes 22 and 26; see also some authors in Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

Kaye Lamb's insights, Brothman believes that this exclusion of actual archives from historians' consciousness—archives as curatorial process, as institution, as profession, as assumptions and beliefs, and as archival records—is “a peculiar form of *disciplinary* repression or blindness.” Symptomatic of this blindness is the usual marginalization of discussion of archival sources as archives—not as the archive—by historians to introductions, prefaces, or postscripts in their books, and the convention in academic history of consigning source references to *footnotes* or *endnotes*, at the bottom, at the back, rather than inserted directly into the text, as is done in almost every other social science discipline. Brothman wonders if this blindness may reflect an unconscious recognition by historians that “the distancing, the spacing, between archives and history” is essential to “empowering” the traditional discourses of both professions centered upon objectivity. Without this distancing, he continues, “the differentiation between the archival object (the record or document, the artifact) and the historical object (the book, the article, knowledge [of the past]) begins to break down; archives and history begin to transgress each other, pollute each other,” threatening, if integrated too closely, “to cancel out the purity of each other's intentions, each other's object(ivity).”<sup>30</sup>

This blindness by historians has been readily encouraged by archivists, again until very recently. Many archivists are apparently satisfied being society's footnotes rather than being openly integrated into its main texts for remembering and forgetting. Doubtless some genuinely believe that upholding objectivity and neutrality is their professional duty, even if much of what they do suggests otherwise. Certainly in the traditional view of the archivist's role in society, best enunciated by Jenkinson in the 1920s, still espoused explicitly by a few archivists, and absorbed by many more as a kind of unquestioned professional ethos, archivists do not interpret, or mediate, or construct social memory. Rather, they are professional preservers, the keepers, the handmaidens. They manage or administer archives; they do not (co-)create them. Indeed, a large number of the leading archival textbooks over the past century have “management,” “administration,” “methodology,” or “manual” in their titles. Such rhetoric suggests that archivists have been more comfortable managing the records they receive, and honing appropriate methods, processes, and procedures to do so, but rather less comfortable questioning blurred origins of records; discerning structural-functional tensions within records-creating cultures; challenging allegedly “natural” orders for classifying, arranging, or describing records; or consciously creating new meanings for the records under archival control. Such reluctance goes back to the origins of the profession.

<sup>30</sup> Brien Brothman, “The Limits of Limits: Derridean Deconstruction and the Archival Institution,” *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993): 215 (original emphasis).



The modern archival profession, and the establishment of national archives all across Europe and overseas, were alike called into existence by the French Revolution, whose leaders in 1793 created the Archives Nationales in Paris as a public institution and historical source, as an agent of the cultural, social, and nationalist policy of the state rather than as an integral part of the ongoing legal and transactional business of government. The “public” archives of the nineteenth century existed primarily for history, not for administration.<sup>31</sup> Modern archives in the Western world had their genesis, then, at the very heart of the event that David Lowenthal flags as being most responsible for turning the past into a foreign country, as something to be collected, guarded, and venerated, as if on a pedestal, separated from the present, thus bearing the pristine character that the new scientific historians required for their work. Such historians, not incidentally, educated all the new professional archivists in these very values.

As archives evolved during the nineteenth century, this sense of the pristine quality of archival records was reinforced by contemporary Darwinian thinking. The pioneer archival thinkers asserted that records arranged in archives were an “organic” whole, a kind of natural selection left over from administrative processes, a “residue” deposited, as it were, from the bureaucratic river at the delta of archives. This residue the archivist then acquired and kept in original order to reflect (and thereby authenticate) the origin, the context or provenance, of that organic survival. Jenkinson entitled a major portion of his famous *Manual* “the evolution of archives” and refers to some of the “original stock” of record classes continuing to “throw out fresh branches,” while others “die out.” As did the Dutch authors of the first-ever modern textbook on archival methods, written in 1898, Jenkinson compared the archivist—when building the “backbone” of a “skeleton” for archival arrangement—to a paleontologist. In this naturalized Darwinian world, appraisal and selection by the archivist of only a portion of the total record from the whole was viewed as anti-archival, for the inevitable subjective values of the appraising archivist would do violence to the allegedly organic character of the evolved archive. Appraisal wrenches records from their original context and their original order of creation. Rather, Jenkinson cautioned the archivist to approach records “without prejudice or afterthought,” claiming that the archivist thereby becomes “the most selfless devotee of Truth the modern world produces.”<sup>32</sup> As Lowenthal suggests, if

<sup>31</sup> Janice Panitch, “Liberty, Equality, Posterity? Some Archival Lessons from the Case of the French Revolution,” *American Archivist* 59 (Winter 1996): 30–47.

<sup>32</sup> Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, rev. 2nd ed. (1922, 1937), 28, 105–6, 101, and passim; and cited in J. Conway Davies, “Memoir of Sir Hilary Jenkinson,” in *Studies Presented to Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, C.B.E., LL.D., F.S.A. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957). On the character and impact of the famous “Dutch Manual” of 1898 on Jenkinson himself and through translation into many languages, see Cook, “What Is Past Is Prologue,” 20–22; and Eric Ketelaar, “Archival Theory and the Dutch Manual,” *Archivaria* 41 (Spring 1996): 31–40.

professional historical values in the nineteenth century assumed a past firmly divorced from the present, any present-minded values of the archivist engaged in appraisal must be suppressed, or at least denied, if the ideal of objective guardianship were to prevail. Anything that elevated—even acknowledged—the work as well beyond the mechanical “treading” of Jenkinson’s ox or Brymner’s stump remover became highly problematic. And so we get the oft-repeated assertions of the archivist’s objectivity and neutrality: archivists work diligently, but quietly, behind the scenes, vacuuming and cleaning, storing and retrieving, but disturbing these natural orders and organic residues as little as possible.

In the parallel and interconnected evolution of the archival and historical professions outlined above, therefore, there are serious misconceptions: scholars using archives without questioning the heavy layers of intervention and meaning coded into the records by archivists, long before any box is opened in the reading room, and projecting that desired nonproblematic state for the archive onto archivists and archives; and archivists, responding obligingly, treating their archives without much sensitivity to the very large footprints they themselves are continually leaving on the archival record and therefore on the writing of history, or any great concern (since no one seemed interested) that their many necessarily subjective interventions (and the methods and ideas behind them) be well researched, documented, transparent, and accountable, so that these could be interrogated and understood by researchers, if the surviving archive were to be used with greater nuance. Both scholars and archivists have had, until very recently, a vested interest in perceiving (and promoting) the archives as a value-free site of document collection and historical inquiry, rather than a site for negotiating power, memory, and identity. While growing scholarly attention (including by historians) is finally being paid to the processes of records creation and inscription, and to broader issues of intentionality, representation, and memory, very little notice is still given by nonarchivists to how the record is chosen and shaped, privileged or marginalized, by the archivist’s many interventions. The ox treads on.

Surely every reader will by now be thinking that all this is a vast overstatement. Have not Canadian archivists inside the profession, as Kaye Lamb implies above, over the past fifty years become less passive—accepting, for example, appraisal as both necessary and desirable? Have they not, in two other major initiatives, promoted, on the one hand, active partnerships with records managers in order to implement better recordkeeping practices in modern institutions and to grapple with computer-generated records, and, on the other hand, borrowed from librarians to design standardized national systems for describing archives and to preserve recorded digital objects across time? Yet until very recently, such interventions, I would suggest, have been linked either to closely following research trends among historians, in terms of Lamb’s

appraisal methods, or on the other two fronts with records managers and librarians, to advancing the archival agenda in technical and methodological ways, rather than considering the theoretical and research-based knowledge posed by these new challenges—and with a focus that caused archivists thereby, perhaps not intentionally, to drive a wedge between themselves and historians.

For appraisal, many archivists have concluded in recent years that trying to mirror in selection criteria the latest subject trends in historiography, as Lamb and others suggested in the mid-century years, is too narrow. While this approach in its time was a welcome advance from Jenkinson's passive curator receiving the "residue" passed on by administrators, it continues to cast archivists too readily as handmaidens reflecting historians' wishes, rather than those of a much wider range of actual and potential users. An alternate approach to appraisal envisions archivists as active agents researching and interpreting human and organizational functions and behaviors, amid the complex contexts of records creation, judging the degree of significance or impact of these record-creating processes and citizen's interaction with them, and then selecting and constructing "the archive" accordingly to reflect these contexts, interactions, processes, and activities.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond appraisal, most major (and well-funded) archival research projects have, over the past two decades, focused on creating and implementing consistent descriptive standards and their display in a national network or on rules and models for managing contemporary digital records. Yet there remains a relative silence in archival writing (and in such mega-research projects) on the actual substance of the research-based, archival, contextual knowledge that is essential to put inside these empty standards and templates to make them mean anything.<sup>34</sup>

This focus on the methodologies, the technologies, and the mechanics of archival processes and of records preservation reveals an essential proclivity to means rather than ends, to managing rather than mediating, to remaining Jenkinson's white-coated "scientific" clinicians unsoiled by the messy interpretation of the "value" of records that is always endemic to real-life practice. But in that daily practice in the real world of actual archives, once these standards, databases, templates, and models are created—and let no one misunderstand me, it is good that they be created and much praise is due to those who have done this difficult work—the complex research-

<sup>33</sup> For a history of the values and methodologies over time that have animated the appraisal of archives, see again Cook, "What Is Past Is Prologue"; and Cook, "Macroappraisal in Theory and Practice."

<sup>34</sup> The major exception is the growing articulation from inside the profession of new ideas and perspectives about the possibilities of the postmodern archive(s) as self-consciously constructed loci of power, identity, and memory: see below note 48. Despite the impressive array of such writing in Canada and elsewhere, it has not been funded or coordinated as major research projects or with formal institutional support, but rather evolved through many one-off pieces by individual archivists and archival educators.

based knowledge of the archivist needed to fill these empty shells will always, by definition, be subjective and interpretive. And it will always be historical. It will and should be other things too—drawing (as archival studies graduate curricula do) on sociology, organizational theory, psychology, political science, anthropology, geography, philosophy, cultural and media studies, and much more—but archivists are, in the core substance of their work, researching to contextualize over time (that is, historically) records creators, recording media and processes, and the resultant records. By doing so, archivists create new knowledge through history—not history as historians do from the record’s *content*, but history as archivists do about the record’s *context*.

This focus on archival contextual knowledge amounts, in Canadian archival educator Tom Nesmith’s happy phrasing over twenty-five years ago, to “a history of the record,” before and after the record enters the archival institution. It aims at transforming content-centered information into context-rich knowledge, and applying the results to all facets of archival work. Such research by archivists amounts, in Hugh Taylor’s view, to “a new form of ‘social historiography’ to make clear how and why records were created; this should be the archival task,” a task dealing less with individual documents and series and more with “the recognition of forms and patterns of knowledge which may be the only way by which we will transcend the morass of information and data into which we will otherwise fall.”<sup>35</sup>

Archival research in this mode, by archivists, explores the history, evolving functions, ever-changing structures, legal frameworks, devolved or regional character, and organizational cultures of institutions that create records, or similarly the biographical and psychological details of private individuals creating personal records, from letters to diaries to photographs to websites. It discerns the design, changes, and biases of records classification systems, from records management file manuals to computer metadata. It tracks migrations of records (usually only portions and fragments of the total record) from one system to the next, often masked by renumbering and relabeling of file folders. It assesses the possibilities (and limitations) of recording technologies and recording media on the kind of information that may be recorded in particular times and places. It studies patterns of communications in records in all media,

<sup>35</sup> The original statement is in Tom Nesmith, “Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship,” *Archivaria* 14 (Summer 1982): 5–26, reprinted with corrections in *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, ed. Tom Nesmith (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1993). An early parallel analysis that demonstrated the value of this approach to actual archival work was Terry Cook, “From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives,” *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984–1985): 28–49. For the quotations, see Hugh A. Taylor, “Transformation in the Archives: Technological Adjustment or Paradigm Shift?” *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987–1988): 24 (original emphasis); and Hugh A. Taylor, “Towards the New Archivist: The Integrated Professional,” 1988, first published in Cook and Dodds, *Imagining Archives*, 154. From these early stirrings in the 1980s and early 1990s, the richness of this approach has been considerably expanded in theory and strategy: for a flavor of such “history of the records” by archivists primarily, see note 40 below.

how records were shared within and across organizations, the delays of time and space affecting such communication, and the impact of all this on the decision making reflected in the records. It looks at how records were used (or not) for subsequent or later transactions, and thus the interrelationships among records and their creators over time and across space. And of course, it tracks changing ownerships or provenances of the records, including destruction by their creators, subsequent inheritors of the record, or archivists, and it studies all significant interventions by the archives itself in the history of the record for any and all archival functions. This research-based knowledge by archivists into the context of the record serves collectively to understand the prominence or fore-grounding of some kinds of records and their creators and causes, and thus of certain kinds of human information and knowledge, in the past, across time, within history, and equally the shielding or marginalizing of other kinds of records, creators, recording media, causes, and knowledge. Archivists themselves need this complex array of research-based knowledge in order to perform well their daily work and decision making in the four core archival functions of appraisal and acquisition, arrangement and description, preservation and migration, and reference and public programming. The value of such knowledge for historians and other users of the record's surface content should be self-evident, for it opens many new windows to seeing/reading and understanding the surviving records anew.<sup>36</sup>

Again, the reader might likewise protest that historians have long known that societal or collective memories have not been formed haphazardly throughout history, or without controversy. As acknowledged above, historians in the past decade especially have been studying very carefully the processes over time that have determined what was inscribed and then considered by contemporaries as worth remembering and, as important, what was to be forgotten, deliberately or accidentally, in various cultures. With considerable sophistication, historians now recognize the silences in the surviving archival record, and the need to read "against the grain" to hear suppressed or marginalized voices. They are questioning the nature of records—who creates them, in support of which exercises of power, and who uses them and destroys them—but the argument here is that historians are not, in these recent questionings, considering the impact of archivists or archival institutions or archival policies and concepts on those same records.

For a mere flavoring of such recent work, one should start with the influential French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault, who back in 1969 probed the very archaeology of knowledge, demonstrating that the discursive patterns in the archival document, or in an entire information classification

<sup>36</sup> On the research agenda for archivists, see Terry Cook, "The Imperative of Challenging Absolutes' in Graduate Archival Education Programs: Issues for Educators and the Profession," *American Archivist* 63 (Fall/Winter 2000): 380–91.

system, reflect the power structures of the records creator, and that a new epistemology based on contextual social theory was needed to replace the scientific positivism of past historians (and archivists). French historian Jacques Le Goff was one of the first to make archives explicitly a subject for historical inquiry, suggesting that there had always been a politics of archival memory where, ever since the ancient world, those in power decided who was allowed to speak and who was forced into silence, both in public life and in archival records. Indeed, he shows that archives had their institutional origins in the ancient world as agents for legitimizing such power and for marginalizing those without power—an insight anticipated years earlier by Harold Innis’s work on empires and their control of the means of communication. Medieval archives, scholars such as Patrick Geary are discovering, were collected—and later often weeded and reconstructed, even rewritten—not only to keep evidence of legal transactions, as the positivist archival pioneers would have asserted, but also explicitly to serve historical, sacral, personal, and symbolic purposes, but only for those figures and events judged worthy of celebrating, or memorializing, within the context of their time. First World War archives in Britain—right under Hilary Jenkinson’s impartial nose—are now revealed by historians to have been subjected to significant tampering and alteration in order, for example, to make Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig appear less culpable for the slaughter on the Western Front over which he had command and much responsibility. The colonial records of the Belgian government’s rule in the Congo under King Leopold’s personal fiefdom were deliberately burned to hide evidence of his agents’ imperial savagery. European imperial powers more generally used records, from maps to censuses to royal commission reports, to legitimize and reinforce their own power by controlling the definition, naming, and categorizing of their subjects into marginal subaltern spaces.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Foucault’s key works for archivists are *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1970, originally in French in 1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, originally in French in 1969). For Harold A. Innis, see *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951) and *Empire and Communications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950). For the other examples cited here, see Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), xvi–xvii, 59–60, and passim; Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 86–87, 177, and esp. chap. 3: “Archival Memory and the Destruction of the Past” and passim; Denis Winter, *Haig’s Command: A Reassessment* (Harmondsworth U.K.: Penguin, 1991), especially the section: “Falsifying the Record”; and Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998). On the imperial/colonial archive, see the work by Anderson, Richards, and Stoler cited in note 8 above, and that of Antoinette Burton and Betty Joseph in note 38 below, as well as Jeannette Allis Bastian, *Owning Memory: How a Caribbean Community Lost Its Archives and Found Its History* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Greenwood, 2003), among a vast and growing array of possible titles to cite.

All these fields of investigation into “the archive”—the collective record—are extraordinarily rich, and expanding impressively, almost exponentially, in quality and quantity. In this approach, the “archive” is seen as reflecting those institutions that had the power (and resources) to articulate through written records and visual images their view of the world, and that, not surprisingly, used these recording tools in turn to order, control, name, map, depict, count, and classify that world to reflect their own assumptions and values and reinforce their own power, status, and control. Of course they also had the power and motivation (and resources) to preserve those records (no mean feat over centuries) that best served as evidence of the seeming naturalness of their own hegemony.

Influenced by such disciplines as literature, philosophy, and media, cultural, and women’s studies, historians have also been looking anew at the personal “archive,” beyond the official government or institutional record-keeping world. Feminist scholarship especially has read such an archive against the grain of its surface content to discern fresh information, for various times and places, about the degree and type of voice allowed to women, and their own agency in negotiating for space within the dominant hierarchies and discourse of power. Here the “archive” is still symbolic, metaphoric, and discursive rather than institutional, cultural, and curatorial; it is finding the voice of the anti-archive in the shadows and silences of the official institutional archives.<sup>38</sup> And on the subject of the institutional archives, the pioneering American feminist historian Gerda Lerner has traced how, from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, there has been a systemic exclusion of women from society’s memory tools, including its archives. History itself as a profession has similarly been criticized for its patriarchal assumptions, practices, and conclusions, although curiously archives and archivists have largely escaped this condemnation, at least from historians, and no historian has considered that the very arrangement (and subsequent description, and re-presentation to researchers) of archival

<sup>38</sup> An acclaimed pioneering example is the work by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, especially “Hearing Women’s Voices: A Feminist Reconstruction of History,” and “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” both appearing in her *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Building on that tradition, see Antoinette Burton’s innovative *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). A similarly nuanced study of the marginalized voices in official records, as well as in other writing, is Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company 1720–1840: Colonial Currencies in Gender* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Not only imperial or postcolonial studies follow this gender-based analysis; see Susan Close, *Framing Identity: Social Practices of Photography in Canada (1880–1920)* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 2007); Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Carol J. Williams, *Framing the West: Race, Gender, and the Photographic Frontier in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and, in an archivist-historian collaboration, Sharon Anne Cook, Lorna McLean, and Kate O’Rourke, eds., *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women’s History in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

records in multiple levels of descending orders legitimizes a hierarchical and patriarchal order as natural.<sup>39</sup>

These and many similar works suggest possible openings for a history of archives (plural) and a history of archival records, as contrasted to the history of the archive, and one done with a perspective from inside institutional archives. How, for example, have archivists in many times and places reflected these changing power struggles over records as they, as archivists, defined their profession, institutions, policies, and procedures, and of course as they made their appraisal and acquisition decisions in building actual collections of who or what was considered worth remembering? How have radical changes in the nature and media of records, the culture of record-creating organizations, the psychologies behind personal record making, the design of recordkeeping systems, and the classification, uses, and communication patterns of records—all before they arrive at the archives—affected archival theory and archival practice? Going beyond the immediate world of records and archives, how have changes over time in the cultural, legal, technological, educational, social, and philosophical trends in society influenced the archives of those societies—and the assumption, concepts, strategies, and practices of archivists within these archives? From such questions as many historians are raising about the archive, archivists have very much to learn.

To answer these and similar questions, archivists need an intellectual history of their own profession, from the inside out *and* the outside in: a partnership, respectively and ideally, of archivists and historians, for they both have much to teach each other.<sup>40</sup> Canada needs a “History of the Archive(s)” research project parallel to the successful History of the Book series. Archivists and historians both need to understand better the very ideas and assumptions about archives that have shaped their ethos, their concepts, their institutions, their collections, and their practices, if in future archivists want their institutions to reflect more accurately and accountably all components of the complex societies they serve, if they want their users—including historians—to approach (and be able

<sup>39</sup> See Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness: From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Smith, *The Gender of History*. Certainly women’s historians from Mary Beard to Lerner herself have seen the paucity of women’s sources in most archives up to the 1970s. While many collections of women’s records from individuals, clubs, and associations have been acquired since, the nature of archives themselves as institutions, created and situated within patriarchy for shoring up the status and power of their sponsors, has rarely been addressed.

<sup>40</sup> Archivists are finally turning to a scholarly analysis of the history of archives—as records, institutions, ideas, and social activity. The launching of the series of International Conferences on the History of Records and Archives (ICHORA), spearheaded by Canadian archival educator Barbara Craig, has been a great success, with the best papers from ICHORA-1 hosted by her in Toronto in 2003, published in *Archivaria* 60, and from ICHORA-2, held in Amsterdam in 2005, appearing in *Archival Science* 6, nos. 3–4, followed by ICHORA-3 in Boston in 2007 and ICHORA-4 in Perth (Australia) in 2008, publication pending in both cases, with ICHORA-5 set for London in 2010. More than a hundred papers delivered at these conferences, as well as other articles and collections, demonstrate convincingly, in many times, places, and cultures, that archives (plural) are historically contingent, reflecting the power and authority, biases and prejudices, technologies and ideologies of their contemporary societies.



to interrogate) archival collections with greater subtlety and understanding, if archivists themselves wish through such self-analysis to hone their own thinking and improve their praxis. Such a history of archival ideas requires listening to the archival discourse of different times and places, to hear again, and to discover within the context of their time, and our own, the assumptions, ideas, and concepts that underpin archival work. This collective discourse is the metatext that animates archival professional practice, often in barely recognized ways inside and certainly outside the archival profession. Analyzing this text over time and space properly forms the focus of an intellectual history of archives. Its articulation will break the harmful silence between historians and archivists.

Let me outline in very broad strokes some possible contexts for that history and the resulting archival practice, from the changing archival ethos in Canada, and internationally.<sup>41</sup> Just as many of the early professional historians focused on the political, legal, constitutional, and economic character of the nation state, so too were the first articulations of professional archival principles strongly biased in favor of the state. Almost all the classic tomes about archival methodology were written by senior staff members of national archives in Europe. Not surprisingly, most focused on government, public, or corporate records and their orderly transfer to archival repositories to preserve their original order and classification; and most relegated private and personal archives to the purview of libraries and librarians. Indeed, to this day, national archives in Europe generally look after only the official records of their sponsoring governments; national or regional or university libraries (or state historical societies, regional and local archives, or special documentation institutes) take custody of personal manuscripts. That pattern prevails in most other English-speaking countries, including England, Ireland, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, although not in Canada or Scotland with their “total archives” approaches. Why are personal archives (and their archivists) not part of most countries’ national archives? Why are those who look after government records in those archives called archivists and those who look after personal records in libraries usually labeled manuscript curators or special librarians or documentalists, with a whole range of assumptions (often negative) implied by these terms? Why are archivists of textual records called “archivists,” but those of maps, photographs, paintings, or film are called “media archivists,” as if text on paper were not a medium? Why until very recently was oral memory not considered an archival medium

<sup>41</sup> For an analysis of these broad trends among the traditional and pioneering generations, see Laura Millar, “Discharging Our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada,” *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998): 103–46; James M. O’Toole and Richard J. Cox, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006); and again Cook, “What Is Past Is Prologue.”

at all? Such fundamental divisions within the internal organization of archival memory between public and private, text and images, written and oral, are alone stark evidence that the archival endeavor, as formulated, practiced, and codified by the archival pioneers, was hardly as value free as they asserted. Indeed, the prospect of fruitful fertilization across these various divides is reason enough to understand better the historical origins of these artificial barriers.

The pioneering archival theorists all worked in an era of relative document scarcity. Their professional experience and thus their soon-codified concepts about archives came from dealing with limited numbers of medieval or early modern documents susceptible to careful diplomatic analysis of each page, or with records found in well-organized, highly centralized, departmental registry systems of the emerging nineteenth-century modern nation state. Functions of government in such nineteenth-century administrations were limited, focused, and stable within classic mono-hierarchical structures. As a result, the archival pioneers ignored the appraisal function entirely. There simply was no need for selection, as every surviving scrap of recorded information from the Middle Ages or early modern Europe was preserved. Rather, the priority was on rescuing old records from towers, dungeons, and basements, and protecting them carefully in context within the new national archives. More modern records, as noted, came to archives from government departments as “natural” residues left over from administrative processes within highly centralized and small-scale records or registry offices. This “residue” approach favored retaining as archives the policy or legal or senior-level documents most important to the government officials who made the keep-destroy decisions, rather than more transient case files where citizens interacted with the state at the “bottom” of the classic hierarchical pyramid of organizational structure. This process of winnowing the wheat from the chaff, according to administrative and political needs and priorities, was typically characterized by a very long separation in time between the currently active (and then long-dormant) records still under government administrative control and those that were centuries old and held by the archives. The records themselves were viewed as reflections of the hierarchical structures (and the activities therein) that caused them to be created. They were to be preserved impartially, therefore, as evidence of the activities of the bureaucratic office that created them.

Obviously, this approach was anything but the impartial or objective or “natural” stance claimed for it by the archival pioneers, for it sanctioned the already strong predilection of archives and archivists, as institutions and employees of the nation-state, to support mainstream culture and to showcase its most powerful records creators. Such approaches produced archival collections that privilege the official narratives of the state over the documented stories of individuals and groups in society, or even of citizens’

interaction with the state. Until the 1950s, the emphasis was, moreover, on the records of the legal, constitutional, fiscal, defense, and foreign policy dimensions of the nation state, and much less on its social, natural resource, environmental, or cultural programs. Until well into the 1970s and beyond, the traditional approach privileged policy records over operational records, let alone individual transactional-level case files. This statist approach to defining archives evidently also marginalizes purely personal papers, for these were placed, as noted, outside the purview of European and most English-speaking national archives entirely, with some happy exceptions, including Canada. The archival rules for determining the evidence qualities and authenticity of records, and thus their “value” as reliable research sources, also reflected the state archives’ perspectives on (and thus naturalized assumptions about) well-organized, centrally controlled, and officially sanctioned government records. This process thus favored textual documents in such registries, from which such rules were first derived, at the expense of other media, especially audiovisual media and oral culture, for experiencing and recording the present, and determining therefore the best archives to preserve to view the past.<sup>42</sup>

The positivist and “scientific” values permeating such thinking also inhibited archivists then, and since, from developing and documenting multiple ways of seeing and knowing and describing their records; archivists are similarly disinclined to acknowledge and display multiple and confused provenances, or migrations and mergings of records over time and of their creators and their activities. Rather, an “original order” (a classic and cardinal archival principle) was sought and (re)imposed in archival arrangement, and then perpetuated and enshrined in the descriptive finding aids presented to researchers, rather than allowing several orders or even disorders to exist among records in archives.<sup>43</sup> An even greater absence of order or system is apparent in the recordkeeping habits of private individuals, small groups, and associations, but archivists habitually “clean” up such chaos, rearranging records by name, subject, or date. Records or series of records, following archival descriptive

<sup>42</sup> Joan M. Schwartz, “Coming to Terms with Photographs: Descriptive Standards, Linguistic ‘Othering,’ and the Margins of Archivy,” *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002): 142–71; Peter Horsman, “The Last Dance of the Phoenix, or the De-discovery of the Archival Fonds,” *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002): 1–23.

<sup>43</sup> The first major statement fundamentally challenging these accepted orders was Brien Brothman, “Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice,” *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 78–100. See also the critique by Terry Cook, “The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems and Solutions,” *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 24–37; and Wendy M. Duff and Verne Harris, “Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings,” *Archival Science* 2, nos. 3–4 (2002): 263–85. Other archivists already cited such as Peter Horsman, Tom Nesmith, Joan Schwartz, and Hugh Taylor have also questioned these assumptions in terms of traditional recording media, let alone their electronic or digital counterparts. On the impact of electronic or digital recording media on traditional archival orders, see the work of David Bearman most prominently, in note 47 below.

rules and standards, are arranged and described in very detailed general-to-specific hierarchies to reflect, allegedly, their original placement in the creating agency's administrative hierarchy; each record series is placed by archivists in one such administrative hierarchical fonds, and (by current descriptive standards) in one fonds only. Archivists thereby have traditionally masked much of the messiness of records (and their creating entities) from researchers, presenting instead a well-organized, rationalized, monolithic view of a record collection (or fonds) that very often never existed that way in operational reality with its original creator or creators. The "archive" is offered (and promoted) as trustworthy evidence of actions, accurate mirrors of acts and facts, frozen in time, in reliable original orders, unaltered contexts, fixed descriptive groups, kept impartially by archivists, so that the "Truth," as Jenkinson put it, and traditional positivist historians hoped, could be found in such preserved, pristine, virginal records. Yet, ironically, as Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar has shrewdly observed, this guardianship *mentalite'* of archivists, stressing custody and control, has often made archival reference rooms and services more prisonlike than welcoming,<sup>44</sup> and archival public programming until very recently passive and unimaginative, unsuited to the needs and possibilities of an online, information-hungry, and interactive age. In short, what historians would find, if they were to examine the footprints left by archivists by such a historical analysis of the archiving function in society, is a whole series of heavily mediated filters that govern how records first are chosen to come to archives, and then are re-presented to researchers by archivists in various kinds of physical orders and containers and in varying intellectual finding aids and research guides. The neutral, impartial archive of classic archival theory, is, in reality, a place of order, control, hierarchy, reflecting the power of the state, or other sponsoring institution (a business, university, church, and so on), that called it into existence and continues to pay the bills.

But what happens if the very societal basis for this traditional archival mindset is now no longer relevant, or just plain wrong? What if, as has happened increasingly over the past century, function and structure no longer coincide in a single neat box on the classic organizational chart, but now thrive in ever-shifting structures that are multifunctional, even virtual, where work tasks and structural lines blur continually, yet archivists insist on attaching records to one single structuralist entity in the descriptive finding aids that researchers use as their principal entree to records in archives? What happens, as recent case studies show, if the official centralized registry of records never actually operated in that classic way, stymied even in Jenkinson's day, within the British Treasury at the heart of his own government, by informal conventions, localized practices,

<sup>44</sup> Eric Ketelaar, "Archival Temples, Archival Prisons: Modes of Power and Protection," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 3–4 (2002): 221–38.

social expectations, and cultural norms?<sup>45</sup> What happens when organizational cultures and workplace discourses are now transformed from vertical to horizontal, from controlling to collaborative, from stovepipes to networks, from executive fiat to internal consensus, with records created in these new milieus following these new conventions, and yet archivists still think hierarchically, and structure their archives and finding aids accordingly, increasingly out of contact with reality? What happens when records are managed on desktops by thousands of end-users in these new fluid organizations and not in some centralized, ordered, and controlled manner, if ever they were that?<sup>46</sup> What happens when the record-creating universe moves from a paradigm of scarcity and survival of medieval manuscripts to an avalanche of paper: It was estimated that each government records archivist in the 1990s at the National Archives of Canada appraised—just in terms of paper records alone—at a rate equivalent to thirteen books *every second* to choose the 1 or 2 percent that would survive as the collective archive! What happens when there are multiple orders and places and sites of records creation and use, or indeed disorders, rather than one ordered, set, fixed place for each record in this cascading avalanche of recorded information? What happens when the record itself is now no longer primarily fixed text on paper, but virtual and digital, with images and texts and sounds and voices combined, often interactively, in volumes ten or a hundred times that of the paper avalanche?<sup>47</sup> What, then, happens to archives? What, then, is the archive?

The response by archivists to this changing and challenging landscape has been at least twofold—and (perhaps not surprising, given the above historical evolution of the profession) very contested within recent archival discourse and published literature, and in actual practice. No few archivists still adhere to large portions of the traditional professional assumptions, thus rendering it difficult

<sup>45</sup> Barbara L. Craig, “Rethinking Formal Knowledge and Its Practices in the Organization: The British Treasury’s Registry between 1900 and 1950,” *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1–2 (2002): 111–36, as well as a more contemporary example by Ciaran B. Trace, “What Is Recorded Is Never Simply ‘What Happened’: Record-Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture,” in *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1–2 (2002): 137–59.

<sup>46</sup> Veteran electronic records archivist John McDonald has termed this a “wild frontier” without order, where everything goes; see his “Managing Records in the Modern Office: Taming the Wild Frontier,” *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995): 70–79. Despite much effort by McDonald and others (see note 47), not much taming is yet evident in most workplaces that create digital records or in archives that (allegedly) preserve them.

<sup>47</sup> While scores of archivists have addressed the challenges of born-digital records, the most influential has been David Bearman, through many articles and a ground-breaking research project at the University of Pittsburgh (in conjunction with Richard Cox). Many key essays are collected in his *Electronic Evidence: Strategies for Managing Records in Contemporary Organizations* (Pittsburgh: Archives and Museum Informatics, 1994). On his fundamental challenge to conventional archival approaches, see Terry Cook, “The Impact of David Bearman on Modern Archival Thinking: An Essay of Personal Reflection and Critique,” *Archives and Museum Informatics* 11 (1997): 15–37. Building on the Pittsburgh work, but using different conceptual foundations, was a Canadian project centered at the University of British Columbia; its findings are presented in Luciana Duranti, Terry Eastwood, and Heather MacNeil, *Preservation of the Integrity of Electronic Records* (Dordrecht, Ger.: Kluwer, 2002).

for them to cope with these new record-creating realities in a digital world, all while they impose increasingly irrelevant orders and rules around the records they acquire and present to researchers. More optimistically, another group of archivists is calling for a complete reinvention of archives to acknowledge that these are contingent places of power and agency that need new concepts and models to transform them—from modernist to postmodernist, from passive custodial to active interventionist, from hierarchical and exclusionary to networked and inclusive, from inward-looking and secretive to openly transparent and interactive, from dealing at the micro level with impossible volumes of individual documents to making archival decisions at the macro level of the records' context and functionality, thus moving the focus for archival activities from records as artifactual products to the complex processes of record making.<sup>48</sup>

What might such a transformed archival landscape look like? That story would take many more pages than are available, but here are some minimum expectations. Appraisal would be sensitive to the citizens, not just the state, to the marginalized and unsuccessful as much as the accepted and successful, so that archival holdings would become more inclusive and democratic. Relationships with records creators would be repositioned “up front” to influence record inscription at the time of creation rather than passively accepting long after the fact the residues allowed by the powerful or those determined by transient research trends or technological imperatives. The focus in all archival activities would be on documenting function, activity, and ideas, rather than primarily reflecting the structures, offices, and persons of origin. Description would be opened up to presenting multiple origins and orders for situating records rather than allowing only one way, would include extended essays on the deeper contextual elements enveloping the complex creation, uses, and relationships of records over their entire and continuing history, including after their entry to the archives. In the process of reference services, archivists would be openly receptive to researchers' insights, leading to an interactive annotation of record descriptions by researchers (and donors), as well as nurturing new

<sup>48</sup> For an overview summary, see the two-part article by Terry Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts,” *Archival Science* 1 (2000); and “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives,” *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 14–35. For historical, demographic, and archival reasons behind Canada's distinctive international leadership in first positing the postmodern archives, from the inside, by archivists, see Terry Cook, “Archival Principles and Cultural Diversity: Contradiction, Convergence, or Paradigm Shift? A Canadian Perspective,” *Comma: International Journal on Archives*, International Council on Archives (forthcoming, 2009). A very long footnote (20–21 n14) found in “Fashionable Nonsense” lists the most important works by such key Canadian postmodernist archivists as Brien Brothman, Richard Brown, Joan M. Schwartz, Tom Nesmith, Bernadine Dodge, Theresa Rowatt, and Lilly Koltun, joined by such influential international archivists as the Netherlands' Eric Ketelaar, Australia's Sue McKemmish, and especially South Africa's Verne Harris. Since these pioneering studies, there has been an explosion of such writing in archival journals and books of collected essays that encourage archivists to investigate their role—now and historically—in the construction of social memory (for the historical dimension alone, see note 40 above).

communities and networks of users: Web 2.0 and the wiki *mentalité* meet archives. Image and sound would be privileged equally with texts and words; feeling and emotion equally with order and logic; conversation equally with control. The visceral materiality of records in all media would be respected for the information that only physicality reveals. A deeper appreciation everywhere would be embraced that the records themselves would have detailed, contextualized, and interrelated histories, ever-evolving, opening up, rather than closed down in fixed frameworks when they cross the archival threshold. The archivist, finally, would celebrate her or his subjective, mediative role, openly and accountably, as an agent less for buttressing institutional power than for advancing archives for broader social purposes. The archivist is accepted as the conscious co-creator rather than the neutered caretaker of the archive. The ox is no more.

This is no mere pipe dream, but part of a growing professional agenda for archivists. Similar to the years following the French Revolution, there has been in the past thirty years another marked historical change in articulating the very reason why archival institutions exist—or at least public and publicly funded archives. The justification for archives has shifted from being grounded in concepts of the nation-state and its scholarly elites (primarily historians) to broader socio-cultural justifications grounded in public policies of accountability, freedom of information, and wider public/citizen use, of archives for protection of rights, heritage education at all levels, and the enjoyment of personal and community connections with the past. In their collections and services, archives have started to reflect a more inclusive view of society and of their clientele. American archival writer Gerald Ham was one of the first to set the professional goal of documenting “the broad spectrum of human experience” rather than merely mirroring government hierarchies or research trends.<sup>49</sup> German archivist Hans Booms advocated that archivists should seek to reflect in their appraisal decisions comprehensive patterns of public opinion rather than the needs or perspectives of state administrators; they should be of, for, and by the people, in Eric Ketelaar’s adaptive phrasing.<sup>50</sup> In Canada, reflecting these trends, the concept of macro-appraisal was developed first at the National Archives of Canada (and increasingly imitated internationally) to document the citizen-state interaction at the heart of two-way governance within society, rather than merely the policies and activities of government.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> F. Gerald Ham, “The Archival Edge,” in *A Modern Archives Reader*, ed. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (1975; Washington: National Archives and Records Service, 1984), 328–29.

<sup>50</sup> Booms, “Society and the Formation of a Documentary Heritage”; Eric Ketelaar, “Archives of the People, by the People, for the People,” *South Africa Archives Journal* 34 (1992): 5–16.

<sup>51</sup> The best introduction is the long summary article by Cook, “Macroappraisal in Theory and Practice,” which contains many footnote references to a significant number of supporting published essays, including related theoretical analysis and real-world case studies.

Simply stated, it is no longer acceptable to limit the definition of society's memory in archives solely to the documentary residue left over (or chosen) by powerful record creators, whether Richard Nixon or Oliver North, Soviet commissars or apartheid state police, Canadian military officers in Somalia or Queensland politicians in the Heiner Affair—to say nothing of the Enron shredding *mentalité* in the private sector. Public and historical accountability demands more now of archives, and more of archivists.<sup>52</sup>

In this gradual transformation of the archivist from passive keeper guarding the past to active mediator self-consciously shaping society's collective memory, the archive(s) itself is changed from an unquestioned storehouse of a history waiting to be found to itself becoming a contested site for identity and memory formation. The archives is thus transformed from source to subject. The implications of this change for historians, for historical research, and for historical source criticism remain largely unexplored, let alone what the archivist-historian relationship might be in this new professional context.

If the ideas, concepts, strategies, and practices of archivists inside archives were to be studied broadly by those historians now increasingly writing about “the archive” and societal memory—and at least considered by all historians for the particular groups and media and creators of records they are researching in an archives, it would become readily apparent that archivists inevitably inject their own values into every archival function, and that they shape the resulting record that researchers use (or cannot use). Thus, the history of archives, of which this essay has offered but a foretaste, may enrich the use of archives by historians. Equally, archivists need to examine much more consciously, and historically, their many choices (and the assumptions behind them) in the archives-creating and memory-formation process, and they need to leave transparent evidence of their own activity so they may be held accountable for their choices to posterity. They need to reconsider too the relative abandoning of their once-close relationship with historians, for in history applied to and within the archives, continually, by archivists, to the archive, lies much promise of better archival praxis. That they may do so without at all devaluing their new alliances with records managers, librarians, or public policy makers, or their new and wide range of other users of archives, should be obvious.

If archivists so embrace their roles in more self-conscious archives as historians of the record in its multiple and complex origins, orderings, and representations, as specialists of archival contextual knowledge through time rather than generalists of process and procedure, historians (and all others

<sup>52</sup> See the numerous arguments and case studies in Verne Harris, *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007); Richard Cox and David Wallace, eds., *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society* (Westport, Conn.: Quorum Books, 2002); and Margaret Procter, Michael G. Cook, and Caroline Williams, eds., *Political Pressure and the Archival Record* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006).



users) will be afforded richer possibilities for exploring the past through more deeply contextualized archives. In this milieu, historians may see the value of studying archives through internal archival discourse rather than external perceptions, and doing so in partnership with like-minded archivists.<sup>53</sup> Historians “cannot hope to study the history of archives without learning from the professionals who create and maintain them”; such a partnership should transcend lobbying together for better funding and access to archives to “an area of mutual intellectual interest, viz. the history of archives, archivists, and archival practices.”<sup>54</sup>

As historians and archivists alike appreciate the significance of postmodern theory for their work, they may be enticed, in the words of historian Adele Perry, “to think critically and hard about the character of our sources and what we propose to do with and say about them . . . to confront both the limitations and possibilities of our source base in a careful and systematic way.” Australian archivist Michael Piggott observes that historians and archivists “are the custodians of memory—the retrievers and preservers of the stories. . . . Because of this, we both are players in political drama and politicized history, especially in times when great national debates appeal to the past, real and imagined.”<sup>55</sup> If this deeper interrogation of sources were to occur on both sides of the reference desk, then archives may no longer be such a foreign country.

<sup>53</sup> For but two recent examples of the value of this approach, see Deidre Simmons (archivist), *Keepers of the Record: The History of the Hudson’s Bay Company Archives* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007); and Betsey Baldwin (historian), “Stepping Off the Paper Trail? Rethinking the Mainframe Era at the Public Archives of Canada” (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> Ann Blair and Jennifer Milligan, Introduction, to their edited thematic issue, “Towards a Cultural History of Archives,” *Archival Science* 7, no. 4 (December 2007): 289.

<sup>55</sup> Adele Perry, “The Historian and the Theorist Revisited,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 33, no. 65 (May 2000): 148–49; Michael Piggott, “Archivists and Historians; Archives and History” (review article), *Archives and Manuscripts* 35 (May 2007): 91. For a suggestive analysis of mutual challenges facing historians and archivists in the postmodern world, see Canadian archivist Bernadine Dodge’s “Re-imag(in)ing the Past,” *Rethinking History* 10, no. 3 (September 2006): 345–67.