

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

While I applaud what I understand to be Miss Littlejohn's main argument in the last issue of *A. & M.* — i.e. that if a university devotes any resources to an archival program, that program should first be directed toward the management of its own official archives — some of her associated views seem less plausible. For example, the notion that there could be 'archival legislation' to regulate the records of teaching departments in some way, seems to overlook the peculiar nature of university life. In my experience, records that accumulate in teaching departments tend to be a mixture of official and private material due to the very nature of the activities of the teaching staff. University teachers are not public servants; indeed, so far from it that some of them are permitted to engage in private practice while carrying out official teaching duties. Any attempt to regulate departmental records in these circumstances would rightly be seen as an invasion of privacy as well as involving the sensitive issue of academic freedom.

It may be possible in some large departmental or faculty offices to achieve a clear separation of official records, but the resulting accumulations might well prove an arid and pale reflection of the central records office which, after all, is normally designed to embrace the whole university. And to imply that there may be misgivings on the part of departments in their relations with the central administration, is to further an unhappy dichotomous view of university life — teaching departments versus the administration. In many ways teaching departments are as much involved in the administration of the university as the central administration itself, and their work can only be efficiently and economically performed through the central administration. In other words, it is not inevitably a "them and us" situation at all, despite the Ptolemaic attitude that some individuals on either side might strike.

I agree that there is a problem with departmental records, but it is one that the archivist has to solve in a personal and persuasive way. Whether he would be in any better position to do this as the head of an independent archives department seems to me doubtful. What does seem certain in such a position of independence is that he would have the major source of university archives (i.e. those of the central administration) as simply one more unit to be won over — notwithstanding any regulations that might exist. It might also be reflected that an independent archival department would hardly escape some form of board of management — to which the university librarian could well be appointed (cf. the Archives Authority of New South Wales).

Greater publicity does need to be given to the view that the administration of university archives is not a library function, but there is little need to preach to the converted; the argument must be carried to the forums and journals of university administration. In doing this, to suggest that an archives department independent

of the administration should be the pattern, may be to retard still longer the establishment of archives in those universities that lack them.

Yours faithfully,

G. L. Fischer

Dear Sir,

The note in your November issue about the formation of a Sydney Archivists Group revives a memory which deserves recording as part of the history of the profession.

An informal organisation, similar to the one described, existed at least during 1953 and 1954, although it may perhaps have been even a little less formal. The first meeting as I remember was a luncheon to meet David S. Macmillan soon after his appointment as Archivist of the University of Sydney, and two or three other such functions at least were subsequently held I think. I left Sydney at the end of 1954 and am not aware whether or not the organisation survived. Perhaps others may be able to complete the story.

Yours faithfully,

H. J. Gibbney

Dear Sir,

I should like to make the following rejoinder to Mr Fischer's comments.

The proposal that the archives department (of a university) should be independent was advanced as a solution to overcome the pitfalls of the dichotomous view of university life, in that any such neutral department would be able to perform its function without the necessity of participating in university politics. It was not intended that such a department would be free of all forms of control, and it was implied by reference to developments at Melbourne University that a board of management could well be the best way to superintend the functions of the archives department. It is highly probable that the Librarian would be a member of such a board; and I am sure that the Board would benefit greatly from his advice.

I agree that the archivist has to solve problems in a personal and persuasive way, but believe that the final solution to problems relating to departmental records is to make such records subject to a University statute. If it is acceptable that a statute regulate the disposition of central records, it does not appear to be

unreasonable that a similar regulation be enforced with regard to departmental records. Furthermore, in the event of any progress being made in persuading departments to deposit their records with the archives, such advances should be consolidated if the archivist is not to be perpetually engaged in an endless round of diplomatic visits to departmental heads.

As to the value of departmental records, I think that exception may be taken to the suspicion that such records might “prove an arid and pale reflection of the central records”. By departmental records I refer to student records, statistics, minutes of departmental staff meetings, notes issued to students, etc. — in fact all of those papers which are not specifically the personal papers of any member of the department, but are considered the records of the department as such. This excludes personal staff papers, but could well include papers relating to various university committees on which staff members serve from time to time. The functions of the different departments will naturally reflect many different aspects of university life and activities, and as such complement rather than reflect the records of the central administration.

The university archivist, even with statutory standing, will always have plenty of scope for exercising his powers of persuasion in arranging the deposit of personal staff papers, student society records, etc. but it would appear to be an evasion of responsibility if a *laissez faire* policy is adopted when dealing with official university records.

Yours faithfully,

Margaret Littlejohn