

HOW LIBRARIANS NEED ARCHIVISTS

by

J.D. Hine

A session entitled "Place of archival training in library education" at the American Library Association Summer Conference at Chicago could hardly fail to tempt someone long concerned about (if not recently in) education for librarianship and archives in Australia. The meeting took place on the afternoon of 26th June 1972, had been arranged by the Society of American Archivists/ALA Joint Committee and was presided over by James B. Rhoads, Archivist of the United States.

Although I made fairly detailed notes I shan't attempt to reproduce them all. The proceedings of the Conference will no doubt be published in due course and an interim summary by me would fail to do justice to addresses that were packed with facts and telling instances. I'm more worried that the feeling of being there, in the cheerful and refreshing atmosphere of a coming together of two branches of the one profession, might also escape from what I've picked out to pass on to you. But I wanted to say something because I've been so long oppressed by recurrent ungenerous attitudes here and the danger that Australian archivists, in their efforts towards exclusiveness, will succeed in cutting themselves off from librarians in a way that would deprive the latter of much that they need to know in order to become better at their job.

The first speaker was J.C. Colson, Assistant Professor of Library Science, University of Maryland. His subject was "Library school curriculum modification", and he asked how library school education could be altered to give a better understanding of archives and archival interests. He emphasized that librarianship and "archivery" (a term new to me) were parts of the same profession. Library schools should widen their scope. The tendency had been to ask for courses on archives administration, but the question now was: "What do librarians need to know about archives?" Library schools had a long record of hospitality to anything new but, despite this, had been unable to design anything archivists considered adequate. This was because library school administrators did not know enough about archives.

Society had changed so much during the century and was now so complex that all of us had to rely on specialist interpreters. Reference was made to McLuhan's "global village"; in spite of the strong tradition of individualism, interdependence must replace independence. Records were being produced on all sides and there was a big increase in the number of people involved in record keeping and management. There was a multiplicity of organizations of an *ad hoc* nature still close to the people for whom they were formed, showing considerable diversity in influence, longevity, etc. Such groups, of immigrants, etc., existed in every city and their presence and activities were of great interest to educators, planners etc., who frequently lacked access to their records. Public librarians should have a mandate to collect these.

Hitherto, librarians had been too much oriented towards the collection and dissemination of books, and both librarians and archivists had been bemused by the

past. There had been exceptions, but the justification had been potential value to future historians, not the answering of present research needs. The common aim of both librarians and archivists was to facilitate communication, and this called for a better educational system for both. Various sorts of improvement in library school courses were considered. Courses on archives administration could be grafted on and, in fact, this had been tried over a long period with varied success though some such courses had considerable merit. More fruitful would be a fundamental re-organization of library school curricula to allow systematic specialization, particularly in business archives; such courses could be structured for librarians transferring from one part of the profession to another.

We didn't know what the "core" of such courses would be but it might be best to take what librarianship and archives work had in common, including their milieu: organizations, institutions and their records and access to them, the forms in which information is produced, publication and distribution, the organization of knowledge in libraries, the development and care of records, catalogues etc.

A further possibility was internships in archival institutions, in operational rather than laboratory situations; these should be contractual arrangements between the institutions and the schools, and the institutions accepting interns shouldn't regard the arrangement as a recruitment device. They should provide a *practical* experience. Books, records, tapes etc., were only forms; our real concern was with communication. There was an analogy with transport, where the object was to move people, by whatever means: train, ship, plane etc. Meanwhile, library school courses were too similar; we couldn't exploit the possibilities until there was a wider range of choice. There was room for regional specialization and variation.

The other speaker was Dr Frank D. Evans of the U.S. National Archives and Records Service whose subject was "Educational needs for work in archives and manuscript depositories". He said it was recognized that archivists and librarians had a common purpose and problems, but there was little evidence of understanding of what these were, particularly in training. It was of interest that manuscript librarians were increasingly referring to themselves as archivists. The separate histories of the two professions were relevant. The archives profession still lacked an adequate written history; it was one of the world's oldest but little was known about its individual practitioners.

Here, the pace of Dr Evans' talk became rather too fast and furious for coherent note-taking because, after leading in with a remark about archivists being highly paid among the Hittites, the generalization that archivists attempted to improve their status in much the same way as librarians and a brief glance at the concern about training in France following the Revolution, the speaker gave particulars of the various schools established in Europe during the nineteenth century.

At first the essential subjects were palaeography, sigillography and diplomatics but curricula then became (and still were) greatly enlarged and very demanding. There was a swing away from the serving of administrative purposes by archivists with legal training to graduates of history who pursued their own interests and were more preoccupied with the editing and publishing of lists and the preparation of

guides: the arsenals of law were turned into the arsenals of history. But then it came to be appreciated that a good knowledge of history, though essential, was not enough.

The United States, without Europe's mediaeval documents, had to find its own solutions. Here developments were influenced by the views of academic historians who thought of archives as serving their own ends. They were most active in the field, sponsoring the first conference of archivists. Those trained would have Ph.Ds in history and their courses would be grafted on to graduate history classes; apprenticeships would be served in Federal and State archives. There was no systematic attempt at training until 1939. Reference was made to the Bemis Report (1938), and the ideas and influence of Buck, Posner, Schellenberg and H.G. Jones were examined. The archives courses being offered by library schools were also described briefly.

Arguments were retraced about whether or not library schools were the proper place for archives training. The existing courses, however, had influenced very few librarians, being too discursive. It had been remarked that most of the institutions owning archives were libraries but this was challenged on the score that the amounts held were often very small (e.g. one cubic foot). The staff, of course, were not usually trained in archives work. Librarians should certainly be trained to handle manuscripts and archives, but the point at issue was whether they should be taught by archivists or librarians.

Historians were criticised for over-emphasizing history and neglecting techniques; but librarians were as bad if they applied their own techniques. Such things as cataloguing and classification could be employed as routines in libraries but archival work couldn't be determined by rules; on the other hand, librarians' attitudes towards service to the public, including their wish to make material freely accessible, were needed in archives work.

Meanwhile, things were changing: the archives profession needed specialists in disciplines other than history. It was easy to assume librarians were incapable of understanding the right techniques but for every librarian who arranged papers by subject, one could find an historian who took documents out of their original order to arrange them round his special interest.

Dr Evans then gave some figures about qualifications which drew attention to the importance of post-appointment on-the-job training: two years ago it was found that, among those holding the higher archives jobs, 14% had no academic degree, 35% had no advanced degree and 49% had no specialized training in archives. He agreed that only archivists should teach archives work but the library schools should help, advanced courses perhaps being associated with archives institutions.

Maybe nothing very conclusive came out of all this. As usual the "set up a committee" panacea emerged. In this case Martha Boaz, Dean of the School of Library Science, University of Southern California, commentator for the session, proposed that the Society of American Archivists should appoint a committee to sit down and think through the objectives and purpose of archives curricula in terms

of the type of training needed, then approach a university or other educational institution and ask it to put the committee's conclusions into practice. It impressed me that a country as experienced as the U.S.A. was wanting to go back to fundamentals after so many courses had been taught and so many words written. Nobody seems sure of anything any more.

It should be remembered, of course, that this session took place in the context of a library conference with the title "Media: Man, Material, Machine". I went to it partly as a refugee from "audio-visuals" of various kinds; the Machine wasn't to be avoided. Those of us who work in historical libraries have taken for granted such ramifications of communication as films and microfilms, gramophone records, tapes etc., ever since they emerged but they continue to seem characterless and dreary compared with the longer-established ancillaries to books like pictures, maps and discrete manuscripts – and archives. I hasten to acknowledge, naturally, that printed books are on occasion mere ancillaries to archives and the other media.