

Archival Education

by EDWIN WELCH

The training of archivists and the establishment of a body of knowledge which can be dignified by the title of archival science has been considered seriously only in two countries, France and Germany. In Britain, for more than a quarter of a century, and in Australia during the last few years, library schools and history departments have given thirty weeks of practical archival training for graduates. In the United States several archives, universities and other institutions provide training for periods ranging from five days to fifteen weeks. In Canada, there is a six-week course sponsored by the Public Archives of Canada for practising archivists, and a number of options offered by various library schools to their graduates. In the past two years, even the records managers of North America have progressed further down the road toward appropriate professional standards by instituting their own examination procedures and then persuading various colleges to provide the necessary training. They are now far more successful than archivists in providing professional education.

Why are archivists unable to establish the professional standards that other bodies have achieved? One answer lies in the public confusion about the purpose of an archivist. Ten years ago, a senior British archivist discussed this problem:

More serious misconceptions tend to prevail, rather surprisingly, among those who might be supposed to know better—librarians who think archivists are just a specialized kind of librarian, administrators who see them as a superior species of filing clerk, university teachers who condescend to them as to an inferior class of historian.¹

In the same year, two distinguished American archivists said something very similar about the problems of training in their country:

This emphasis on training in history may lead to difficulties. The professor of history, responsible for placing graduate students, may look upon archival work as the ideal solution for misfits whom he cannot recommend for teaching positions. . . . More dangerous to the reputation of a manuscript library and to the archival profession at large is the appointment of a major staff member who possesses no research or scholarly interests at all. . . .²

A year earlier, the Archives Section of the Canadian Historical Association heard a paper entitled "What Training do Archivists Need?" from a

1 [Arthur Owen], "The Image of the Archivist," *Archives* 7 (October 1966): 169.

2 R.B. Bordin and R.M. Warner, *The Modern Manuscript Library* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1966), pp. 81-82.

well-known Canadian archivist.³ He too made the point that training as a librarian or historian is not sufficient to produce an archivist, but not so forcefully because he was concerned with the content of a training programme and with the need to stimulate the study of archival science.

The position has improved little during the past decade. A British librarian, who has presumably been exposed to one of the archival options available in library schools in that country, can still write:

1. Archivists believe that the care of the document comes before the public need. Local history librarians, as librarians, are trained to satisfy the public need if at all possible.
2. To an archivist the donor of a collection, and the keeping of the collection intact is vital. Local history librarians reserve the right to put like items with like items.⁴

In the United States, New York University can obtain large grants to establish "an inter-disciplinary M.A. in archival training" without the programme being mentioned to the Society of American Archivists or the State Archivist.⁵ The University's resources in the area are so small that it did not claim to have a university archives until recently and the supervisor for the new programme qualified himself by taking a two-week course at the American University. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that this university offers three courses in museology, two in historical research, one in archaeology and one in art history or five options in history for the training of new archivists.⁶ In Canada, the University of British Columbia has seriously proposed to train archivists by offering them six courses in history (providing knowledge which should have been obtained before training), six courses in library science (providing knowledge which they will never use), and six courses in archives to be taught by any archivist living near the university.⁷

But perhaps the biggest slap in the face of the archival profession has been administered by UNESCO itself, which increasingly professes to see no difference between an archivist and a librarian. UNESCO believes in NATIS (the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures), which is working toward "closer coordination of programmes directed to education and training of information manpower

3 A.D. Ridge, "What Training Do Archivists Need?" *Canadian Archivist* 1, no. 3 (1965): 3-12.

4 Dorothy McCulla, "Three Professions, One Task," *Library Association Record* 78 (October 1976): 473.

5 *The Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 3 December 1976. It has not been advertised in publications in the United States.

6 New York University, "Archival Management and Historical Editing," leaflet, 1976.

7 "Diploma in Archival Studies," Proposal of School of Librarianship, University of British Columbia, 1976.

carried on by international organizations and non-governmental organizations” and “the harmonization of curricula for documentalists, librarians and archivists.”⁸ In the absence of adequate training programmes for archivists, this means that they will get their expertise in one of a library school’s options. UNESCO has called a series of conferences on the subject to which it invited members of the International Federation for Documentation, the International Federation of Library Associations, and the International Council on Archives (ICA). It did not invite any members of the records management organizations, even though they might be held to have a considerable interest in the subject of information science and were actively establishing their own international organization. No complete list of those involved in these consultations has been published, but it is clear that the archival profession was seriously under-represented. In a published list of eighty-nine “consultants,” only twenty were archivists and nine of these were consulted only on the specific subject of planning archive services.⁹ Working Group III on “Planning Manpower for Documentation, Library and Archives Services” seems to have included no archivist in its deliberations—a detail perhaps reflected by the mediocre quality of its recommendations.¹⁰ The group could see no difference between the training and qualifications required by archivists and librarians. The working group recommended a common training programme for all three professions and even considered that librarians might be interchangeable with archivists. It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that the ICA has no education or training committee. In short, there is no group ready to speak out for the profession at an international level.

A turn from the advice of librarians, historians and others about the type of education which archivists need, to the debates of national professional associations of archivists on the same subject is a move from the surrealist atmosphere of a book by Kafka or Lewis Carroll to the practicalities of everyday life. Unfortunately, a more optimistic view of the future of archival training cannot be drawn from the discussions of our peers. In Australia, Britain, the United States and Canada, new efforts are being made to improve the quality of archival education and to cope with the problems of professionalism. In each country, archivists are seriously divided on what is required, thereby opening the door to “advice and help” from library schools and history departments which are desperate to acquire additional students to fill empty seats. In each country, the

8 Intergovernmental Conference on the Planning of National Documentation, Library and Archives Infrastructures, Paris, 1974, *National Information Systems (NATIS): Objectives for National and International Action* (UNESCO: Paris, 1975), p. 29.

9 Intergovernmental Conference, Paris, 1974, *NATIS: Working Document* (UNESCO: Paris, 1974), annex C. The actual numbers are slightly smaller because some names occur more than once in this list.

10 Intergovernmental Conference, Paris, 1974, *NATIS: Final Report* (UNESCO: Paris, 1975), pp. 11-13.

difficulties of achieving any improvement at all are so great that the third-rate programme seems to be the ultimate goal.

Much of the problem rests with archivists themselves. Most archivists are practical people and concerned principally with the difficulties of obtaining sufficient funds, staff, and space for their archives. They are seldom able to stand aside from the rush of day-do-day administration to consider the philosophy of archive-keeping or even the long term planning of their work. Some are too modest to claim that they have a right to be consulted as experts when archival and records management problems are being considered. These may be faults in the profession which can easily be forgiven. Modesty and a passion for hard work are still virtues in the twentieth century; unfortunately, they may also ruin the chances of proper archival education in some countries.

Australia, like Canada, has just established a separate professional association, the Australian Society of Archivists. Previously, Australian archivists belonged to the Archives Section of the Library Association of Australia. Archives were divisions of State Libraries and archivists worked under the direction of librarians. Archivists obtained their education by taking one elective option on the subject for a Diploma in Librarianship. One such option was given from 1971 to 1976 at the Canberra College of Advanced Education. A local archivist who lectured part-time at the course recently described the students:

They were all graduates from a variety of disciplines but none, if I remember correctly, had ever had occasion to use archival material. Provenance, *fonds*, group, series, original order, annual single number were confusing terms which probably bedevilled some of them to the very end. . . . The most difficult thing was to delineate the archives themselves, in a blank room to uncomprehending faces.¹¹

At one point the archives option was the responsibility of a law librarian without archives experience. The small sums of money required to bring in practising archivists to teach the subject are no longer available and the option has been dropped.

In 1973, the School of Librarianship of the University of New South Wales established a one-year Diploma in Archives Administration and appointed an archivist as full-time professor in the School. Three of the subjects taught are: Archives Theory and History (112 hours); Archives Administration (154 hours); and Information Environment for Archivists (42 hours). The other two subjects are drawn from library science and involve 56 hours of teaching.¹² It is difficult to see how 56 hours spent on some aspect of bibliography can compensate for the omission of records

¹¹ D. Wheeler, "Archival Training," *Archives and Manuscripts* 6 (1976): 275-6.

¹² University of New South Wales, School of Librarianship, *Calendar* (1975).

management, administrative history, computer applications, microphotography and machine readable archives. However, the actual training may be considerably better than appears from the syllabus judging from the full-time professor's article entitled "Some Basic Assumptions Underlying the Education and Training of Archivists."¹³

In Britain the professional association, the Society of Archivists (formerly the Society of Local Archivists), was established in 1947 without any preliminary period of tutelage to another body.¹⁴ At this time, two universities, London and Liverpool, had already established one-year training programmes: a postgraduate Diploma in Archives Administration and a Diploma in the Study of Records and Administration of Archives respectively. The London programme was attached to the School of Librarianship (now the School of Library, Archives and Information Studies) at University College and the Liverpool programme to the Department of Medieval History. Although neither university has ever

13 Peter Orlovich, "Some Basic Assumptions Underlying the Education and Training of Archivists," *Archives and Manuscripts* 6 (1976): 204-225. His ten basic assumptions underlying the professional education of archivists are: the course should aim to foster and inculcate a deep conviction that the primary and inescapable responsibility of the archivist is toward his archives; it should be based upon a substantial and thorough knowledge of the theoretical concepts and principles underlying the practice of the profession; it should foster a sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge of archival methods and techniques as will enable the archivist to apply or adapt the skills and techniques thus acquired in any archival environment; it should facilitate the study of basic theoretical concepts and principles underlying the methodology of archives work, closely and substantially integrated with practical training within archive institutions; it should foster an understanding and an appreciation of the continuity of the relationship between archives and records management, and of the indispensability of a close relationship between records management and the administration of modern archives; it should be based upon the assumption that the archivist—perhaps in consultation, but ultimately the archivist alone — is best qualified by his training and experience to be the arbiter in the selection of records for the future; it should, in taking account not only of the enormous increase in the quantity, but also of the variety of the records to be considered by the archivist, allow for the diversification or specialization which results from the new and varied content of the records with which we must, as a profession, be concerned; it should foster the broadest possible view of the archivist's role and reflect the fact that the archivist is no longer primarily a custodian — a caretaker — but that his role should also include the extension or projection of his archives to create a "public consciousness" of their existence and importance; it should reflect adequate recognition of the importance which deserves to be attached to "administrative history" as "a key to the arrangement and comprehension of archives"; and it should foster a deep conviction of the importance of the nature of the work archivists perform.

14 The organization to which it might have been attached, the British Records Association, which includes both archivists and users of records, refused to act as its parent body for constitutional reasons. The Society has rejected approaches from the Library Association.

employed an archivist full-time to teach, both have made extensive use of archivists to deliver courses and single lectures.

Since that time, Bangor University College (part of the federal University of Wales) has begun a similar programme with some emphasis placed on Welsh records. Very recently University College Dublin has followed a similar pattern: the emphasis is on Irish records and the one-year programme is closely linked to the College's Archives Department.¹⁵ British archival qualifications are in general post-graduate diplomas, but the School of Librarianship of Loughborough University has recently introduced a master's degree in Librarianship, Archives or Information Science. In each case, the university began the programme without any reference to the Society of Archivists—the professional body for Britain and Ireland. In addition, it is still possible to take archival options in librarianship, even though librarians rarely obtain posts as archivists. Until 1970, there was no coordination between any of these programmes, the in-service training offered by some Archives, or the Society of Archivists. In that year, a symposium at Churchill College, Cambridge, brought together all the interested parties as well as a large group of archivists to discuss problems of training.¹⁶ Since that time, they have met only once, in 1976, at a much smaller gathering to discuss common problems.

For the first twenty years or so, the London programme included substantial elements of library science and history.¹⁷ Perhaps the most damaging aspect to the archival training was the subsequent career of its graduates. Although the greater number of the part-time lecturers was drawn from the staff of the Public Record Office, not one student was recruited to that organization's staff for the first twenty years of the existence of the London programme. The Liverpool programme, which proclaimed its intention of training local archivists from the beginning, was much more closely related to the practicalities of an archivist's work.¹⁸ Unfortunately, in the last quarter-century, the syllabus has failed to reflect changes in this work. Sigillography and medieval palaeography still take precedence over records management, audio-visual archives and other subjects. London, on the other hand, completely revised its syllabus in 1970, eliminating most of the library science, and now has a series of options which include computers as well as Norman French.

¹⁵ Scotland, for the present, obtains its archivists by the simple method of offering larger salaries to English archivists.

¹⁶ M. Cook and F. Ranger, "The Training of Record Office Staff," *Journal of Society of Archivists* 4 (1971): 230-233.

¹⁷ About a quarter of the total teaching time was devoted to these two subjects (C. Kecskemeti, *La Formation professionnelle des archivistes* (Brussels: UNESCO, 1966), pp. 31-32.

¹⁸ *University of Liverpool, Diploma in the Study of Records and Administration of Archives*, leaflet, n.d.

The existence of at least three one-year programmes, together with some good in-service training, and the improvements which the Society of Archivists has been able to introduce have not solved the British training problem.¹⁹ After the first few years, the universities followed a voluntary policy of restricting entry to a level below the needs of the profession, and during the past decade the Ministry of Education has enforced the same policy. As a result, many young archivists have not received any formal training in professional matters. The Society of Archivists had always hoped that as older archivists retired, the number without a diploma would eventually disappear. This has not happened and the Society's Training Committee (appointed in 1971 as a result of the Cambridge Symposium) has recently begun to explore the possibility of a professional examination, correspondence courses and other ways of filling the gap in professional training.²⁰ Meanwhile, a number of library schools have decided, without consultation, that they are admirably suited to provide archival training.

Although the United States has the oldest professional association—the Society of American Archivists (SAA) was founded in 1936—it is probably the most backward in professional training. The SAA was preceded by the Public Archives Commission of the American Historical Association (established in 1899) which followed an uncertain course until the establishment of the National Archives in 1934 gave the impetus for a separate body.²¹ Both before and after 1936, the SAA's ideas on training have been dominated by historians. The Society's first Training Committee felt in 1938 that history was more important than library science, and emphasized training in "American History and Political Science."²² However, two years later the American Library Association (ALA) entered the picture by organizing a joint programme on archives and libraries. The ALA was told, in a paper by Dr. Solon J. Buck, that archivists needed a thorough training in history and a supplementary course on the archival aspects of the subject which he called "archival economy."²³ It is not recorded whether the librarians were convinced by his arguments, but the period after World War II saw the development of two types of programmes in the United States. The first historians' course was established at the American University and the first librarians' course at Denver. The division can still be seen clearly in the SAA's list of training programmes which include fourteen universities with "multi-course

19 Several archives, of which the Bodleian Library is the best known, provide one-year programmes.

20 F. Hull, "Qualification or ?," *Journal of Society of Archivists* 5 (1976): 369-72; Society of Archivists, *Qualification of Archivists*, Discussion paper (December 1976).

21 F.B. Evans, "Archival Training in the United States," *Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique* 46 (1975): 518-48.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 521.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 523.

offerings” ranging from a few hours to one semester.²⁴ Twelve of these are attached to history departments. The list also shows a large number of “single course offerings” attached to a wide variety of institutions, ten to library schools and only five to history departments. In the United States, there is not one programme providing for a year or more of full-time study and there is no professor concerned exclusively with archival training.

Although the SAA has had an education committee for most of its forty years, the impact on training programmes has been very limited. For at least ten years, the committee has been discussing inconclusively the twin problems of accreditation and certification. Six years ago, the education committee was urged by the Committee on the 70s “to develop a set of minimum standards,” but despite numerous meetings, it has not yet submitted a draft to the membership of the Society.²⁵ The education committee has apparently never been consulted about the establishment or content of any archival training programme. The members of the committee and of universities which provide such programmes meet only when someone from the university volunteers to serve on the committee. Nevertheless, the committee can claim some credit for bringing together a few teachers at a 1973 meeting in Ann Arbor when some guidelines for programmes were advanced.²⁶

The Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) emerged from the cocoon of the Archives Section of the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) in the spring of 1975 in circumstances different from those attending the formation of the SAA in 1936.²⁷ The Archives Section had for some time already been pursuing a more independent career because the historians of the CHA were inclined to leave the Section to archivists, and because of the considerable participation of the influential Public Archives of Canada. It is of no small consequence to the inter-disciplinary nature of archives that the profession meets at the annual conference of Learned Societies along with the CHA and other such organizations. Perhaps as a result of these various circumstances, no history department, with one short-lived exception, had ever organized training for Canadian archivists. On the other hand, at least five library schools included an archival option in their programmes, all of which relied on local archivists to teach the course part-time.²⁸

24 *Society of American Archivists Education Directory* (Chicago: SAA, 1976).

25 Philip P. Mason, “Report of the Committee for the 1970’s,” *American Archivist* 35, no. 2 (April 1972): 207.

26 *SAA Newsletter* (June 1973): 2-3.

27 In this article, I have concentrated on attempts to establish English-language programmes because the situation in Quebec is still very confused despite the strenuous efforts of the Association des archivistes du Québec.

28 The library school of the University of Western Ontario has recently decided, for financial reasons, that the archives option will be taught by a librarian rather than the archivist who established it.

The University of Ottawa has been the most persistent in its attempts to provide these optional courses. The Library School under its first Dean, Fr. Morrisset, recruited the Dominion Archivist to teach archives administration to library students as early as 1956, an arrangement which continued under various instructors until 1971.²⁹ In that year, a new Dean appointed the author of this article as the first and only full-time professor of archives in North America. Discussions about a one-year programme containing only archival subjects continued for almost four years and ended when the University disposed of all its teaching resources in this field. In 1975, within weeks of the dissolution of the Library School, the University began to discuss establishing one or more optional courses as part of some other programme. A year later, the History Department approached the ACA with a request for advice. During a period of twenty years, the University of Ottawa has not succeeded in training a single Canadian archivist.³⁰

Since 1959, the alternative to library school options in Canada has been the course on archival principles and administration sponsored by the PAC, which began at Carleton University under the direction of a former archivist and at the request of the Archives Section. After being held intermittently at the university, the course was transferred to the PAC in 1971 where it was built up into annual courses in both French and English by 1973. In 1976, the University of Ottawa was invited by the Public Archives of Canada to act as co-sponsors, an experiment which has now been abandoned.³¹ Although the course has been generally recognized as very useful to Canadian archivists, it suffers from two serious deficiencies: it is not available to those not employed as archivists and it is far too short for the amount of information which should be supplied.

One of the first goals of the ACA was to improve the quality of archival education in Canada. It was able to use a draft already prepared by two members of its Education Committee as a basis for its proposals.³² The revised draft has been accepted by the association, and the Education Committee now has the arduous task of convincing universities, provincial ministries of education and other interested bodies that it outlines the type of training and standards required for all archivists in the future. The association also faces the task of providing for practising archivists who

29 At one point, students were required as part of their training to abstract articles in the *American Archivist*.

30 A number of competent archivists have, however, taken archival courses in the University Library School after entering the profession.

31 W.I. Smith, "Archival Training in Canada," *Canadian Archivist* 1, no. 7 (1969): 39-49. See also *Canadian Archivist* 1, no. 3 (1965): 20.

32 Association of Canadian Archivists, "Guidelines Towards a Curriculum for Graduate Archival Training" (Ottawa, 1976).

wish to qualify under the same terms. The ACA is finding, as have professional associations in other countries, that it is not consulted about educational problems as a matter of course. Some bodies do not even expect it to have a policy for training.

It is clear that, in the English-speaking world at least, the archival profession has begun among either historians or librarians. Many of the pioneer archivists in the four countries considered here began as librarians or historians and developed their own skills in rescuing archives. But these were not the only fields from which the original archivists were drawn—lawyers, civil servants, bank managers, school teachers and accountants have all become good archivists in the past. This is quite common practice in any new profession not having a pool of expertise from which to draw. One of the earliest civil engineers was a millwright and one of the earliest mechanical engineers was a fireman, but this did not affect the future course of either profession. The fact that some early archivists were previously historians or librarians or lawyers should not influence anyone's thoughts on the future of the archival profession. There is no compelling reason why archivists should continue to be recruited exclusively from those trained in any other subject or profession.

It is equally clear that in discussions about archival training programmes the professional association is not usually consulted by the university concerned and that consultation with individual archivists is on a selective basis intended to elicit approval of the university's own proposal. Negotiations with the professional organization usually occur only when the existence of proposals becomes known to it accidentally and then only on the insistence of the association that it has a concern in the proper training of archivists. Not one of the four countries considered can be said to have an integrated educational system with considerable input by archivists themselves. Only in Britain do archivists have some influence on the content of some programmes and this has been achieved informally rather than by proper consultation. Yet even there, archivists are unable to change some of the features which are generally agreed to be undesirable. In all four countries, those who are not archivists have too great a voice in decisions about archival training.

There is dissatisfaction in each of the countries about the level of archival training. While the Canadian or the American archivist strives toward the elusive goal of thirty weeks full-time graduate training, the British and Australian archivists lament the inadequacy of such a programme and the difficulty of including all the necessary elements which a modern archivist requires. If a French archivist takes four years of professional training, an Austrian, Polish or German archivist three years, an Italian, Israeli, Portuguese, Spanish or Argentinian archivist two years, can we say that half a year is enough?

The justification for a single course in North America has always been the comparative simplicity of modern records, but as European archivists increasingly concern themselves with twentieth-century rather than medieval records, they request more training rather than less. Archivists have underestimated the skills which they need to acquire and have shown a pathetic eagerness to accept whatever training is offered to them by well-meaning non-archivists. The choice before Canadian archivists seems to be: to accept the American situation, and allow archivists to be trained by librarians, historians or any other academic looking for extra student fees; to strive for a one-year programme composed exclusively of archival subjects, as in Britain; or to aim at comprehensive education for archivists in the principles as well as the practice of archival science. The third possibility is obviously the most desirable, and seems to be the choice of the Association of Canadian Archivists. Popular misconceptions about the archivist and how he should be trained cannot be changed overnight, but at least among Canadian archivists it must be unequivocally accepted that they are a separate profession, that they are not misguided librarians, failed historians or superannuated file clerks, and that what they need to be taught is not a pabulum of existing courses but archival science.³³

33 I am indebted for information and discussion to Michael Cook, Alan Dibben, Paul Dumas, Frank Evans, Peter Yurkiw and Hazel Roberts, but this article does not necessarily represent their opinions.



The Provincial Archives of New Brunswick

This year observes the tenth anniversary of its founding. To mark the occasion the Archives has published its first general inventory, *A Guide to the Manuscript Collections in the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick*. This inventory is offered for sale at a cost of \$3.00.

Box 6000, Fredericton, New Brunswick E3B 5H1