

Letters to the Editor

Naming Archivaria

Archivaria's tenth anniversary offers a fitting occasion to reply to queries which have been made over the years into the origins and meaning of the journal's title. At the present editor's invitation, and with the help of Peter Bower, the first editor of *Archivaria* and now Provincial Archivist of Manitoba, I hope to clarify the record. On 21 May 1975, Peter, then Chief of the British Archives Section in the Manuscript Division of the Public Archives of Canada, met with me for a christening ritual. The body about to be named was the journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists, an organization that was to come into being in June of that year.

There was much sentiment in favour of continuing the name of the existing journal, *The Canadian Archivist*, but Peter felt it to be somewhat parochial. The messages, studies, discussions, and other information that the new journal was to disseminate to archivists and their clientele were, it was hoped, to expand the horizons of our profession.

Peter's perception of the mission of the new journal was amply justifiable. Canadian archivists, both from the PAC and other repositories, had already established world-wide reputations, and their advice and expertise was in constant demand, particularly by archivists from emergent nations. The Canadian archival community shares its knowledge and experience with enthusiasm and dedication and welcomes visitors from distant repositories. Our colleagues from Canada travel to other countries counselling, lecturing, and demonstrating the theory and practice of archivology that we developed, tested, and implemented in our archives.

Peter and I agreed that this outreach mission should be reflected in the new title of the journal. If there was to be a new phoenix arising from the moribund *Canadian Archivist*, its flights should not stop at the borders of Canada. Its messages should reach the lands of other archivists, not necessarily as missions of our home-grown wisdom, but as our contribution to the universality of the archival profession. The painful surgery that was performed on the word "Canadian" in *Canadian Archivist*, was therefore inevitable.

The duality of the archival profession in Canada, acknowledged in the creation of separate professional bodies — the ACA and the Association des archivistes du Québec — was played down by Peter and myself. We wanted the new journal to become the medium of expression

of archivists of both linguistic groups. It was only natural, therefore, that a unilingual title in either English or French would be inappropriate. So, we decided to have a single title, neither French nor English, but in that universal language, Latin.

Unfortunately, all good Latin titles had already been pre-empted by other archival journals of similar ambition. Hellenic terminology, particularly the derivatives of *archeion* and *archon*, were examined but none found suitable. Aramaic, Hebraic, and Sanscrit archival terms were found to be even less appropriate. Acronyms, albeit popular, are not very attractive, and we wasted little time in dismissing this choice. So, we decided to go back to Latin.

The early Latin archival terms included such words as *tabularium* (state archives), *tabularius* (archivist of chief magistrate), *tablinum* (house archives), *commentarii* (records), *aerarium* (archives of treasury records), *quaestor* (keeper of records), *librarius* (copyist), *scrinium* (container for records), *cartofiliacium* (records repository), *archivium*, *archivum* (archives), *varium*, *varia* (usually referred to a script or speech composed of different elements).¹ Sifting through these and many other Latin archival terms produced no *eureka*. Still, the combination of *archivum* and *varia* appealed to us particularly when we invoked poetic license to make it into *archivaria*. The term was good, indeed quite exciting, but the meaning was less than satisfactory. In its derivative form, *archivaria* refers to holdings of an archives. Important as they are, archival holdings are inanimate objects. It is difficult to rationalize the mission of the ACA journal as the voice of *commentarii mutae* (silent records). We had already agreed that the journal should be the voice of archivists and their kin, the historians, and this humanist objective was to be reflected in the title.

A voice from the distant past of my studies in the classics continued to nag me about the Latin term *archivarius*. A search of classical Latin dictionaries was unproductive as the term was unknown in the days of Cicero. But an image of a quarto-size printed medieval Latin monograph, *Archivarius*, which I had spotted on the shelves of a Parisian library, kept haunting me. It was not until I consulted Brockhaus Wahrig that the answer began to emerge. *Archivarius* was a late medieval Latin term for archivist which gained popularity in continental European archives throughout the Middle Ages. It was probably derived from the contemporary medieval word *archivare* (to place records in an archives).² By the advent of the Renaissance, *archivarius* came into general use in the countries of continental Europe, first in ecclesiastical establishments, then, more commonly, in state archives and educational institutions. The term archivist traces its origins to the medieval *archivarius* and beyond it to the Hellenic *archeion*.³

By sheer coincidence, the *archivaria* (combination of *archivum* and *varia*, denoting archival records) and the plural form of *archivarius* (stressing the voice of archivists)

1 These terms were used at various periods of Roman history with different meanings. For example, the *commentarii* were known as: chronicles, daybooks, minutes, accounts, reports, and, in some Roman archives, as records in general.

2 The term *archivare* appears in Albert Blaise's *Lexicon Latinitatis Medii* (Turnholt, 1975); *archivarius* appears in Brockhaus Wahrig's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1980).

3 Modern derivatives of *archivarius* are: *archivaris* (Dutch), *archyvaras* (Latvian), *archivarius* (Russian), *archivarie* (Swedish), *archivar* (Romanian, Danish, Norwegian, German, and Bulgarian), *archiwariusz* (Polish), *archivista* (Italian), *archivist* (English, Albanian), *archiviste* (French).

coalesced into one. There may have been some "inspiration" in the choice of *Archivaria* as Gordon Dodds suggests,⁴ but forging the title was a laborious exercise in onomastics.

Robert S. Gordon
Manuscript Division
Public Archives of Canada

I hear you, Chris

I read Chris Hives's comments in *Archivaria* 19 on George Bolotenko, ACA '84, and history with a sense of recognition. Chris does not want his future and his career confined to the study of the past. He does not want the study of history to be seen as the only door to professional archival training. Naturally anyone starting out on a career or job wants all the options open and we all recognize that feeling. But using history does not have to cut down your options. Chris says he sees the archival field opening and developing in the corporate area, whether public or private, with today's management and tomorrow's communications. Then why, he asks, should he be interested at ACA '84 in listening to papers on topics such as the development of the Dominion Power and Transmission Company in 1910? The answer is not for a narrative history of a particular company, but to see its history as a case study of corporate change, the kind of change an archivist could be caught up in during his career as corporate archivist. Alternatively, if you as archivist are establishing the programme for a company, such studies illustrate the type of development to look for in appraising the company's vital records. A background of archival experience would make a case study seem more relevant. A corporate archivist will be custodian of records created in 1910 and 1985. To fulfil this duty, he will have to understand both types of records.

An archivist stands on a continuum of past and present. How can you understand one without the other? What Chris sees as a split in the archival profession between dealing with the past and present can surely also be seen as a spectrum. More than one career path is valid. If some archivists choose the challenges of the corporate office, others will choose to work in institutions whose mandate is to preserve the nation's heritage. And these institutions are not backward. Did you hear the presentation at ACA '84 on the automated office by John McDonald *of the PAC*?

And who can predict the future? At a recent ARMA conference I heard Ira Penn (who likes to be the iconoclast) declare that the paperless office would never be achieved; it was just a mirage. If archivists know and understand the records that are our archival responsibility, then we can declare, as Terry Cook did on the last day of the conference after Richard Kesner's dazzling look at the future, that we know we've mastered technological change before and we can do it again.

4 Gordon Dodds, "Canadian Archival Literature: A Bird's-Eye View," *Archivaria* 17, (Winter 1983-84), p. 26.