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Graduate Archival Education in the United States; A Personal Reflection About Its Past and Future

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Introduction

From the perspective of 1980, just a blink of an eye ago, we have come a long way in the formation of more robust graduate archival education programs. That year is a good benchmark because it is around the time of Frank Burke's article about archival education (the need for theologians)[1] and of the establishment of the archives program at the University of British Columbia, a program with measurable impact on the profession in Canada, North America, and worldwide. This was also the time when professional associations were developing their first guidelines for archival education, and we were beginning to see the appearance of a professional literature that would ultimately morph into debates about the nature of archival knowledge, the role of archival theory and what that theory constitutes, and the contributions of practice to the depths of archival knowledge.[2]

It is also worth noting that in 1980, I was nearing the end of my first decade working as an archivist. It was a time when I was finally sorting out what it means to be an archivist, maybe a longer gestation period than what individuals experience today since I came into the field with a hodgepodge of courses, workshops, conference attendance, and solitary reading. Some of what I am discussing here is part of a memoir, a recognition of myself becoming everyday more of an archival source for the profession.[3] I have often stated that in my early design of the program at my university, I was striving to build something that would provide future archivists with the necessary, or at least a better, foundation for their careers. Now, perhaps, I am out of touch with the world of practice—at least, occasionally, a student suggests this in one of my teaching evaluations. But this opinion usually changes as students learn more and gain additional experience.

Archival Education as Apprenticeship, 1909–1977

While the modern archival profession commenced about a century ago, the American component emerged a little later in terms of its educational foundations. Archivists in the United States began to attend American Historical Association (AHA) and American Library Association meetings in the early twentieth century; formed the Conference of Archivists in 1909, meeting with the AHA; and finally formed an independent

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[1] Frank G. Burke, "The Future Course of Archival Theory in the United States," *American Archivist* 44 (Winter 1981): 40–46.
[2] Trevor Livelton, *Archival Theory, Records, and the Public* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 2004), is a convenient place to examine some of these early debates.
[3] Abigail Thomas, in her popular book about memoir writing, states, "Writing is the way I ground myself, and it's what keeps me sane. Writing is the way I try and make sense of my life." *Thinking about Memoir* (New York: AARP/Sterling, 2008), 8. Preparing this essay is part of my effort to do the same, as I near the end of my career.

professional association, the Society of American Archivists (SAA), in 1936. We have to go far back in order to understand what happened around 1980.[4] During these years, courses to prepare archivists were rare, usually appearing as single offerings in history departments and library schools. This experience created one of the longest ongoing debates about archival education, namely, what should be its ideal or necessary home in the university, history or library science, a discussion that heated up again in the 1970s and 1980s with the emergence of public history programs.[5]

Over the decades there have been some bright spots and promising efforts in archival education. The presence of the U.S. National Archives and the arrival of Ernst Posner as he fled Nazi Germany enabled an array of interesting courses to be taught at the American University in Washington, D.C., with some hoping that it could be the nucleus of a true national archives school.[6] But this did not happen. Instead, we witnessed the offering of many isolated courses or sometimes multiple courses in library schools and history departments around the country. The arrival of public history in the 1970s and 1980s generated some tensions about the nature, extent, and purpose of graduate courses in archival studies, deflecting, it seems, energy from pushing for separate degree programs. It would have been possible for such degrees to be established, given the more fluid nature of higher education in those days, but a lack of interest within SAA and a lack of individuals with the requisite advanced degrees, publishing records, and experience worked against this happening. The adoption by SAA of graduate education guidelines in 1977 reflected these professional weaknesses, constituting an endorsement of the typical three-course sequence—introductory course, advanced course, and practicum—that had gained traction in a number of history departments and library schools.[7]

The Quest for Archival Faculty, 1977–2001

[4] William Birdsall, "The American Archivists' Search for Professional Identity, 1909–1936," Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1973, remains the best account of the emergence of the profession up to the days of the Society of American Archivists.

[5] Francis X. Blouin, Jr., and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), provides insight into the relationship between history and archives, and the education of archivists, although it is a bit weak, in my estimation, about the public history movement. For a sense of the tense debates, see my "Archivists and Public Historians in the United States," *Public Historian* 8 (Summer 1986): 25–41.

[6] H. G. Jones, *Records of a Nation: Their Management, Preservation, and Use* (Boston: Athenaeum, 1969), discusses this. There really have not been any serious calls for such a national school since then, although the topic emerges from time to time in conversations about the education of archivists. The University of Maryland at College Park, with its archives program in the College of Information Studies, located just down the street from the new National Archives building, would seem to be the most likely place for this to happen. The National Archives, however, has not played a significant role in the education of archivists, with the exception of its Modern Archives Institute and its own internal training program, since the days of Ernst Posner.

[7] Fredric Miller, "The SAA as Sisyphus: Education since the 1980s," *American Archivist* 63 (Fall–Winter 2000): 224–236.

In the late 1970s through the 1980s, we began to see a number of developments concerning graduate archival education. Burke's call for archival faculty was accompanied by other such writings, all presented with a rather wistful hope that anything like the hiring of full-time, regular (tenure-stream or tenured) faculty would ever happen.[8] There were also debates about archival knowledge or theory appearing in both the *American Archivist* and *Archivaria*, mostly written by practitioners rather than faculty. SAA published its first Basic Manual Series, and a few monographs and collections of essays began to give some indication of new codifications of practice and testing of the limits of that practice.[9] If Burke's hope for archival theologians was an early blueprint for the archival academy, John Roberts's "Much Ado about Shelving" was a prescription for why some did not see the need for any formal education in the particulars of the field other than history and good apprenticeships.[10] Most notably, this was the era of the first practitioners' making transitions from practice into the university (individuals such as myself, David Gracy, Terry Eastwood, and Luciana Duranti), each hired under different circumstances and with different backgrounds.[11] Between 1970 and 2000, thirty new archival faculty joined library and information science programs and fifteen found their way to history departments.[12] This was an interesting movement to be part of and a heady time to be involved in the profession. To say that some of us were doing little more than feeling our way in the dark would be an understatement. In my early years as a faculty member, I was usually asked when I was going back into the real world of archives and archival work; of course, most of us never thought we had left that world.

The Emergence of Archival Faculty, 2001–Present

By the early twenty-first century, a number of history departments and library and information science schools had hired full-time faculty, and the number of doctoral students preparing for academic careers was increasing rapidly and significantly. What some had written about just two or three decades before in tones that expressed little hope had, in fact, transpired. Although the primary focus of this new generation of faculty was on building their own programs, sometimes with a lack of support from the profession

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[8] See, e.g., Paul Conway, "Archival Education and the Need for Full-Time Faculty," *American Archivist* 51 (Summer 1988): 254–265. See also Richard J. Cox, "The Masters of Archival Studies and American Education Standards: An Argument for the Continued Development of Graduate Archival Education in the United States," *Archivaria* 30 (1993): 221–231.

[9] I discussed these developments and others in my *American Archival Analysis: The Recent Development of the Archival Profession in the United States* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1990).

[10] John Roberts, "Much Ado about Shelving," *American Archivist* 50 (Winter 1987): 66–74. The sarcastic, negative tone of this essay has not been continued in debates about archival theory and education. The essay did generate some thoughtful responses, such as Terry Eastwood, "What Is Archival Theory and Why Is It Important?" *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994): 122–130 (a response to the continuing debate about archival theory in the Canadian journal).

[11] The movement for a new corps of archival faculty is documented by Richard J. Cox et al., "Archival Education in North American Library and Information Science Schools," *Library Quarterly* 71 (April 2001): 141–194.

[12] See Cox et al., "Archival Education," 151, 158, 165, 188–190, for various data about the growth of full-time faculty.

3

(often sending decidedly mixed signals about the importance of hiring individuals educated in these programs and the nature of what these programs should constitute), these new faculty and their doctoral students have grown the research literature and knowledge about the theoretical foundations of archival work in an unprecedented way. Some of the tensions of these years, including those up to the present, have been quite natural. Someone in a faculty position has to build a record of research and service, a very different reward and accountability environment than that in which most practitioners function. Faculty members also answer to their universities, not to professional associations or the practitioners laboring down the street. It is certainly possible to develop good mutual working relationships between academics and active professionals, and there have been a number of examples of such efforts. But the general level of strain seems not to abate.

A contributor to this problem has been the changing nature of the university in the last several decades. It is no secret that the university, as testified to by the large number of publications focusing on its problems, mission, and roles in society, has substantially transformed itself. Most universities, mine included, have adopted the corporate model where research, teaching, and its impact are measured primarily, but not exclusively, by the dollars generated.[13] Some of this has been present for a long time, some would say going back decades, if not centuries. I contend, however, that the problem is much different today. Students are customers being taught skills rather than learning so as to function as more knowledgeable citizens. The success of a program is often measured by the salaries that its graduates receive, and the impact of research and publications is measured mostly by the revenue they bring into their academic units. Students as customers must be satisfied, and teaching evaluations by these students have become more bitter and angry, and are often useless for helping anyone improve his or her teaching. The students demand skills for their careers and complain when they do not feel they are getting them, even when they have little knowledge of what skills they actually need. Everything is tightened up and reduced to short-term objectives. And a field such as archives, where grants are fewer and salaries lower, is endangered, diverting attention to new kinds of mission that are about Big Data or other glitzy buzzwords in order to appear more relevant or attractive for funders. Archives seem too much part of the softer cultural side or of the humanities.[14] What I am suggesting is that the future of graduate archival

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[13] A good place to start in this vast literature is Derek Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), and Gaye Tuchman, *Wannabe U: Inside the Corporate University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). I contributed a volume to this literature, *The Demise of the Library School: Personal Reflections on Professional Education in the Modern Corporate University* (Duluth, Minn.: Library Juice, 2010), a book that received almost no discussion in the field and none in my school.

[14] See Leon Wieseltier, "Among the Disrupted," *New York Times Book Review*, 16 January 2015, 1, 14–15, for a recent discussion of the negative influence of technology on our society: "Where wisdom once was, quantification will now be. Quantification is the most overwhelming influence upon the contemporary American understanding of, well, everything. It is enabled by the idolatry of data, which has itself been enabled by the almost unimaginable data-generating capabilities of the new technology" (1, 14). For a fuller analysis of such matters, see Andrew Keen, *The Internet Is Not the Answer* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2015).

education development may be in jeopardy, a view that has changed for me in the last half-dozen years.[15]

Indeed, the past decade has been most strange, with its parallel trends in the development of a new corps of faculty and research at the same time that online education has rapidly expanded. Starting in the late 1990s with SAA pre-conferences on education, and then a decade later, with funding support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, with the annual Archival Education Research Institutes (AERI; there have been six of these), the evidence seems strong that we are at a better place with the education of archivists.[16] Add to this the flourishing monographic publishing on archival matters both from within and outside the archival community, and we may seem inclined to think that all is well. We are nurturing a new generation of archival scholars as well as seeing archives and archival work being studied by scholars from multiple disciplines.[17] AERI, in particular, has given us an opportunity to spend a week each year hearing about new research, collaborating in new projects and approaches, discussing curricular and pedagogical issues, working with colleagues from around the world, and mentoring young faculty and doctoral students. Online education, despite all of its grandiose claims, seems to be pulling us in different directions. It puts a focus on technical training, and it minimizes the opportunities for faculty and students to work together. Distance education is a tool of the corporate university, an effort to generate tuition revenue and a force contributing to an overproduction of archives graduates during a time of already tight employment markets. While some programs hold the noble objective of reaching prospective students who might not otherwise be taken to study in our field, I do not believe that such reasons are driving many universities to adopt online education.[18] It is, more often than not, about money and perhaps control.

So, where are we now? We have more comprehensive curricular structures, more regular faculty, and more established doctoral programs turning out a new generation of faculty.[19] The array of monographs is truly staggering; more publishers, both professional

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[15] Not too long ago I was optimistic, for example, about the future of archival studies in the new iSchools, as presented in my essay with Ronald L. Larsen, "iSchools and Archival Studies," *Archival Science* 8 (2008): 307–326. Now, I am not so sure.

[16] Information about the AERI conferences can be found at http://aeri.gseis.ucla.edu/index.htm, accessed January 22, 2015. A volume of papers by doctoral students and faculty from the 2014 conference in Pittsburgh will be published later this year.

[17] For recent examples of how this literature has changed, see Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014), a study by a historian making some use of the archival literature, and Michelle Caswell, *Archiving the Unspeakable: Silence, Memory, and the Photographic Record in Cambodia* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), making extensive use of the archival literature. Caswell is now an assistant professor in the University of California, Los Angeles, archival studies program, and she was one of the first AERI fellowship students.

[18] For a recent critical examination of online education and the general use of technology in higher education, see Elizabeth Losh, *The War on Learning: Gaining Ground in the Digital University* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014). We need to remember that technology is not neutral, an issue addressed by Derek C. Schuurman, *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture, and Computer Technology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2013).

[19] I have had twenty-three such students, eighteen who finished and more than half holding faculty slots.

5

and academic, are willing to publish archival scholarship. There is a growing understanding by scholars outside of the archives field about archives, and an expanding sense of the archival mission to encompass notions of accountability, social justice, and transparency is evident. Things look good. But we still have many weaknesses and gaps to contend with: a lack of development of distinct masters' degrees; losing more faculty to retirement than we are producing, thus possibly experiencing net loss; an increasing number of new Ph.D.s lacking experience in the archival trenches and the loss of credibility with students; a widening gap between practitioners and educators in terms of attitudes and sense of mission (also a gap between educators, the theologians, and practitioners, the laity); the need to refine mission or vision to merge digital stewardship with archival studies; and, finally, the need for a greater presence in public scholarship literature.

Archival Education, or That of Digital Stewardship, 2015–2050

Rather than comment on these matters in detail, I want to speculate, instead, where we will be in the year 2050, a time equal to that from where I started in 1980. What I am presenting here are my observations based on what I see developing now. I state them in order to generate discussion. Here is what we will see in the next thirty-five years:

Archival education will transform into education for digital stewardship, as the transition from analog to digital will be complete.[20] There will continue to be individuals who are trained to work with old media (because the analog backlog of archival and related resources is so immense), just as today there are scholars equipped to work with ancient and medieval texts. Even those working on these older documents, however, will be focused on digital humanities and other approaches that we see emerging today. These programs, even when working with analog materials, will be emphasizing the digitization of these materials for accessibility and new kinds of research. This may lead to the shifting of the placement of education programs away from library and information science and iSchools back to history programs.[21] The programs that are established will be separate masters' degrees in digital stewardship, and most will be located in university academic units other than what we see in existence today. Our professional associations will fundamentally change as well, in both name and substance, to reflect this shift. Given the speed at which we are presently seeing the emergence of digital curation, this shift will most likely be complete long before the year 2050.

Every archival education offering will be delivered by distance education, except doctoral studies; the focus of on-campus educators will be on preparing new faculty and researchers, not practitioners, and such work will be offered by a small number of select universities. We are at present in the early stages of the expansion of distance education.

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[20] I am not at all convinced that the terms "stewardship" or "curation" will persist, but something closely approximate to these will entrench itself.

[21] See Jerome McGann, *A New Republic of Letters: Memory and Scholarship in the Age of Digital Reproduction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), for some possible clues about a development such as this.

6

The debates about its quality and utility will fade away. Technical training for archives technicians, masters' degree education for basic digital curators or the new archivists, and continuing education for working practitioners all will be delivered via distance education. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Battles recently wrote, "We've mastered the (largely metaphorical) operation of the library as a database; now, it's time to become a library of databases."[22] Likewise, we will eventually master all the technical details of distance education, and teach all aspects of recordkeeping from the perspective of the computer, meaning that the history of records and archives will be taught from present backward to the analog forms. Moreover, what we have been terming the convergence of libraries, museums, and archives will become final, and everything will be dealt with under the umbrella of some idea such as Big Data, which we are just seeing emerging as a new challenge today.[23]

The new masters' programs will draw a more diverse set of students in terms of disciplinary backgrounds, with less emphasis on humanistic matters and history; accountability will increase as an objective, memory will dominate as a subject. The debates about the nature and quality of undergraduate education will have ceased, and we will have seen a return to the older objectives of producing well-rounded educated individuals.[24] The new masters' programs will be more technical in orientation, requiring basic computer programming skills and other technical components. There will be more introductory undergraduate courses focusing on archives and digital curation, which will serve as a better entry into the field and graduate programs; archives, through the lens of digital stewardship, will be generally better known to the public. Individuals will no longer have to stumble onto the field, and graduate programs will have enrollment targets where they admit far fewer than the number who apply today. The existence of archives courses, and some full programs, in disciplines other than history and information science will also help to attract new students. Other professional schools, such as law, medicine, public policy and government, and business, will have their own archives programs specifically tailored to the needs of those professions. One of the big tasks in the mid-twenty-first century will be equipping individuals to assume specialized archives and digital curation faculty slots in these other academic units, and to pursue relevant research

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[22] Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Battles, *The Library beyond the Book* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), 79. They also state, "The oldest digital files currently preserved date back less than half a century: a drop in the bucket with respect to the human record, not to mention geological time or the history of the cosmos. Digital preservation is in its infancy and remains something of a craft" (57). By 2050, digital preservation will no longer be in its infancy.

[23] "Big Data" is not a new concern, except for its increasing scale and digital form. The problem with the term "data" is that it moves us away from other essential issues, such as evidence or knowledge. Most likely it is just a historical phase on the path into the digital era.

[24] Concerns such as "Education is more than the acquisition of marketable skills, and you are more than your ability to contribute to your employer's bottom line or the nation's GDP, no matter what the rhetoric of politicians or executives would have you think. To ask what college is for is to ask what life is for, what society is for—what people are for"—William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Free Press, 2014), 78—will have been resolved. The debates about the demise of the humanities, such as represented in Michael S. Roth, *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2014), will have passed, and we will see students from such fields but with much stronger technical backgrounds.

7

in these other fields. The growing interest we see today in accountability and transparency will have morphed into accountability studies as a field, with digital curation and archival studies as a major component.[25] As part of this, ethics will emerge as an extremely important part of the curriculum, and cybersecurity will become part of the toolkit for digital stewardship. Ethics will be more prominent in our teaching than digital tools, and cybersecurity makes sense to be included given the nature of the networked world and the increasing threats to these networks and the data they carry for economic, military, communications, and cultural purposes.

Much of the emphasis on education will be on equipping citizen archivists and digital curators, who will assume responsibility for the maintenance of their own digital personal and family records. This will be done by offering continuing education workshops and adult courses that will also serve to keep the public informed about the importance of archives and digital stewardship in society. Some faculty in some programs will focus on this effort and in writing about these topics in public policy and opinion journals and in authoring books published by trade publishers (we have these kinds of books today for libraries and museums, so why not archives?).[26] This will not be isolated to preparing individuals to be volunteers in archival and cultural repositories, as the term "citizen archivist" has sometimes been used, but will stress the maintenance of digitally born records that will most likely not come into established archives but instead into trusted digital or virtual repositories that may or may not be run by archivists or their descendants. Archives and archivists will fine-tune their missions to emphasize the selection of significant or noteworthy materials and also serve as a repository of last resort for certain endangered documentary materials meeting specific criteria for maintenance as archives.

Future digital stewards will wonder what all the fuss over archival education made by Richard Cox, Luciana Duranti, Terry Cook, Elizabeth Yakel, Tom Nesmith, and others was about, but their writings will be remembered as interesting archival artifacts and studied mostly for historical purposes. Improvements in the education of digital stewards and archivists will continue until it is commonly recognized that in order to function in the field, one must have gone through such educational preparation. Myself, and others, represent transitional figures, those moving from practice to the academy at a particular point in our professional history. Others, such as Amelia Acker, Alison Langmead, and Nora Mattern, much younger colleagues at my university, are not transitional figures, having purposefully prepared for educator careers. The former really were stuck in the middle between practice and teaching, while the latter readied themselves in much more systematic ways for teaching and research. While some might argue, and have, that the newer members of the academy may not have sufficient practice, they are truly the archival theologians that Frank Burke envisioned thirty-five years ago. They are better

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[25] Charles Lewis, *935 Lies: The Future of Truth and the Decline of America's Moral Integrity* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014), issues a call for a new academic field, "Accountability Studies" (236). There is strong reason to think, given the problems with government and corporate secrecy and misuses of information, that we will see something like this by 2050.

[26] For example, Matthew Battles, *Library: An Unquiet History* (New York: Norton, 2003).

educated and better prepared for academic careers than I was, and the future of the archival/digital stewardship mission rests with them, not with individuals like me.

Conclusion

"Stuck in the Middle" is what I originally titled this essay, because, as a sort of memoir, it describes my situation in the archival community. It is why I embarked some years ago on a study about Lester Cappon (1900–1981), who struggled for years with whether he was a historian, archivist, or documentary editor, making contributions to all three fields. Cappon finally settled on his identity as a documentary editor—and then died.[27] Cappon felt stuck in the middle, just like me, and reading his letters and diary entries were at times very moving. Sometimes I felt like I was channeling Cappon. I feel at peace being an archival educator, but it has been a struggle. What is particularly significant to me about Cappon is that despite being a president of the Society of American Archivists and the Association for Documentary Editing, and being active until the end, just a couple of decades after his death he was largely forgotten. Some documentary editors do not think he was very important, public historians do not think of him as one of their own (although he was an important pioneer, even if he never formally embraced the idea), and archivists, in an interesting twist on archival memory, have a tough time thinking about him and who he was—even though he was on one of those SAA trading cards published for the association's seventy-fifth anniversary a few years ago.

I worked on a project to recover Cappon's memory, all the while wondering whether I will be remembered very far down the road after my own retirement in the near future, or whether any of the other transitional archival faculty, pioneers who settled in the wilderness of academe, will survive in the memory of the profession. Just as individuals like Cappon prepared a gift for us to build upon, so I hope that future generations of archivists will recognize the gift we have given to them. Personally, I wish it could have been a better gift, a stronger foundation for the field, yet I firmly believe we are leaving the field in better shape than we found it. But that is a story only the next generation of archival educators will be able to tell.

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[27] I collected and edited a variety of Cappon's more important writings in *Lester J. Cappon and the Relationship of History, Archives, and Scholarship in the Golden Age of Archival Theory* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2004). I have continued writing about Cappon, including essays about him as a teacher, editor, and diarist in *Archavaria*, the *Journal of Scholarly Publishing*, and *Information and Society*.

9