

# Archival Training in the United States and Canada

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THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS of the youthful American archival profession have gradually become more sharply outlined since the founding of the National Archives in 1934. Establishment of an archival institution responsible for the nation's records created a strong demand for professional archivists and made enlarged financial resources available for the emerging profession. In 1936 the first professional organization of archivists came into being with the founding of the Society of American Archivists, and two years later the Society undertook the task of creating a body of literature, establishing the *American Archivist* as its journal. Archival literature, still strongly influenced by the *American Archivist*, has now been supplemented by monographs and articles in library and historical journals and by the publications of individual archival agencies and manuscript libraries. To be sure, this literature is not as comprehensive, perhaps, or as high calibre as we would like; but it is often useful and occasionally outstanding.

The foundation of professional organizations and the creation of a substantive and substantial bibliography are unquestionably major components in the professionalization of archivists. However, a third element, formal training, is perhaps even more important. Waldo G. Leland in a seminal paper entitled "American Archival Problems," delivered in 1909, questioned the view that anyone from any background could become an archivist. He predicted that the archival profession would emerge along the lines of the library pro-

The author, Director of the Michigan Historical Collections, currently serves as SAA Secretary. He prepared this paper from the findings of the Society's Committee on Education and Training, which he chaired during its survey. He wishes to thank all respondents, most of whom were members of the committee, for supplying the data on which this survey is based. Respondents represented the following institutions: American University, Case Western Reserve University, Columbia University, McGill University, North Carolina State University, University of California at Los Angeles, Universities of Denver, Illinois, Maryland, New Brunswick, North Carolina, Toronto, and Wisconsin, and Washington University, and Wayne State University. Except for the University of New Brunswick, all of these institutions continue to offer archival education programs. See also the helpful recent survey by Wilfred I. Smith, "Archival Training in Canada," *Canadian Archivist*, vol. 1, no. 7:39-44 (1969).

fession, with archivists having special training of a legal and historical nature.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing the importance of archival education, the newly organized Society of American Archivists created a Committee on the Training of Archivists in 1936 under the chairmanship of the distinguished American diplomatic historian Samuel Flagg Bemis. The committee's first report, presented at the second annual meeting of the Society, stressed the great importance of historical training in the education of archivists. "It is the historical scholar," Bemis wrote for the committee, "equipped now with technical archival training, who dominates the staffs of the best European archives. We think it should be so here, with the emphasis on American history and political science." While admitting that a course in library science would be useful, the committee warned against the "distinct danger in turning over archives to librarians who are not at the same time erudite and critical historical scholars." Bemis suggested that graduate education for archivists could easily become a part of the graduate curriculum in American history "in any first class American university."<sup>2</sup>

Bemis foresaw two classes of archivists ultimately emerging from training courses and programs. One group he called archivists of the first class, characterized by their possessing the Ph.D. degree in American history. The second group consisted of those whose education was roughly equivalent to a master's degree in the social sciences, combined with special training in library techniques. The archivists of the first class, Bemis believed, would become the heads of major archival agencies in cities, States, and the National Archives. The second group would occupy lower level archival positions in public and private enterprise. For both groups he recommended apprenticeship training in such places as State archival agencies or the National Archives in Washington.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly enough, the archival profession has not consciously promoted division into first and second class archivists; however, much of what Bemis envisioned in 1937 has come to pass.<sup>4</sup>

Historian-archivist Solon J. Buck discussed archival training be-

<sup>1</sup> *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1909*, p. 348, cited in Ernst Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest*, Ken Munden, ed. (Washington, D.C., 1967), p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Flagg Bemis, "The Training of Archivists in the United States," *American Archivist*, 2:157 (July 1939).

<sup>3</sup> Bemis, "Training of Archivists," p. 158-161.

<sup>4</sup> For a profile of the archival profession today see Frank B. Evans and Robert M. Warner, "American Archivists and their Society: A Composite View," *American Archivist*, 30:157-172 (April 1971).

fore the American Library Association in 1940 and repeated his comments to the Society of American Archivists later that same year. He reinforced, for the most part, Professor Bemis's earlier conclusions, particularly on the importance of thorough historical background for persons entering the archival profession. "The archivist needs to understand the historical method," Buck stated, "if he is to function effectively."<sup>5</sup> Most of the essential archival training and the necessary background knowledge he saw available in "departments of history and the social sciences of our larger graduate schools." Buck noted that he himself had given the first course designed primarily for the training of archivists, at Columbia University in 1938–39, entitled "Archives and Historical Manuscripts."<sup>6</sup>

When he joined the staff of the National Archives, Professor Buck transferred his pioneering course with him to Washington. He expanded its scope by utilizing the resources of the National Archives and the American University. Particularly significant was his introduction of the study of records management techniques. Various programs, largely of an in-service nature, were offered at that time in Washington by Government agencies. A scattering of institutes and a few brief summer courses completed the archival training picture in the 1940's.<sup>7</sup>

By 1954 Ernst Posner, who had continued Solon J. Buck's work in archival education at the American University, could report that while the American University program remained the oldest and most comprehensive one, other courses elsewhere in the country had been developed. The American University itself had begun in 1945 an intensive summer institute, which became and remains a popular and influential program. Without doubt this institute is the most commonly shared educational experience for those giving archival training today. In his 1954 examination, Dr. Posner noted the existence of programs in North Carolina, Colorado, and Wisconsin.<sup>8</sup>

As the need has grown during the past two decades, numerous additional training courses have come into existence. In 1968–69, under the presidency of H. G. Jones, the Society of American Archivists called for another report on the state of education, one that would lead to major recommendations for the future. Unfortunately, grant funds to finance this ambitious study were not forthcoming, and the project had to be reduced to a volunteer effort

<sup>5</sup> Solon J. Buck, "The Training of American Archivists," *American Archivist*, 4:85 (April 1941).

<sup>6</sup> Buck, "Training of American Archivists," p. 87.

<sup>7</sup> Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest*, p. 65–66.

<sup>8</sup> Posner, *Archives and the Public Interest*, p. 71–76.

carried out by the chairman and members of the Education and Training Committee. The most important modification made by the SAA Council in commissioning this survey was that the committee should not rate programs nor offer specific recommendations for reshaping the existing structure of archival training. The committee's mission was principally a factfinding one to determine where courses were being offered and to gather data about their nature. As committee chairman for the survey, however, I have extended my instructions somewhat to include both recommendations for future study and suggestions of modest steps that could be taken now to improve archival education.

Several factors affect the findings. An absence of grant funds meant that the committee could not conduct any onsite surveys. The questionnaire, admittedly cumbersome at best, tended often to obscure essential information. Although some data was supplied by noncredit programs, such as the Ohio Historical Society Institute, the committee chose to tally only the responses from summer institutes that offer formal academic credit, in this instance those at the American University and the Universities of Denver and Illinois. A future study might examine both credit and noncredit programs and provide useful comparative information, especially about composition of the student bodies. Also omitted from this survey were directed research and reading courses, those informal learning programs tailored to individual student needs; and records management courses, an instructional field itself worthy of a survey. Finally, the inevitable reluctance of some course directors to provide the information we requested created a few gaps in the data. On the whole, however, the information furnished tells us much about archival training today. The following report considers administration, course content and procedures, student background, faculty background, conclusions, and recommendations.

#### ADMINISTRATION

Of the fifteen reporting programs, eight recruited their faculty from outside their own institutions. This recruiting usually meant an archivist or archival administrator from an institution in or near the city of the sponsoring university. Six institutions used their own faculty exclusively; three instructors were regular faculty members teaching library science courses, and four were heads of archival agencies within the institution itself. The University of Illinois, for example, used the head of its archives to teach the full-year course but hired outside faculty for the summer courses. Almost every course used outside guest lecturers as part of the instructional force.

Budget information was very limited, indicating a sensitive area. Of those who did supply information, one taught the course as a contribution of his department to the university and received no additional salary for it. Three persons offered the course as part of their regular faculty teaching load and received, quite naturally, no special funds for doing so. Six reported receiving salaries ranging from \$700 to \$2,250 for a one-semester, three-hour course. The average salary for this instructional service was \$1,533. No course offered specific scholarships, but students were eligible for general scholarship and student assistance provided by the institution. Tuition rates for archival courses did not differ from other courses of similar time period or credit. Except for two courses given every other year, all were offered at least once annually. The American University, and the Universities of Illinois, Denver, and Wisconsin held courses both during the year and in summer sessions. Students could audit nearly all the courses by payment of regular fees.

The youthfulness of educational courses in archives was one of the most interesting facts revealed in the survey. The oldest continuous one began at the American University in 1940. Those at Columbia University and the University of Wisconsin died out, only to be revived later. The second oldest is probably that given at the University of Denver beginning in 1950, while next came Wayne State University in 1961. The remaining twelve courses began since 1964, with one each starting in 1964, 1966, 1968, 1969, 1970, two in 1971, and five in 1967.

#### CONTENT AND PROCEDURES

Information on course content is obviously valuable in judging or evaluating any program; however, the survey failed to produce meaningful data on this subject. In part the construction of the questionnaire was at fault, and the type of response limited the results. Probably no effective data could have been achieved without on-the-spot interviewing of both the instructor and students in the classes themselves. Despite these shortcomings, however, available information pointed to general agreement on the subjects to be taught. Differences in content from course to course resulted primarily from the teacher's interest, personality, educational and professional background; from the institution and specific site where the course was presented; and from the course's being part of a sequence or standing by itself.

The questionnaire tried to elicit topics that might be included in an archival course. Suggested were such areas as history of archival administration, principles of archives, and a wide assortment

of techniques of administration of paper records that included accessioning, arranging, cataloging, and publishing. The respondents were asked to indicate which areas their course or courses covered, and, with few exceptions, they checked all these subjects and often added one or two more. A number of respondents provided copies of their course outlines and syllabuses. These were more revealing in most cases than the questionnaire, but they did not lend themselves to any sort of systematic generalized summary reporting.

The questionnaire revealed some general information about course orientation and procedures. Nearly all courses had no specific prerequisites, except when one was the second of a sequence. Two programs required a history, political science, or social science undergraduate major as prerequisites, while two others required library science credits. Seven courses were listed as part of the library school curriculum, three were part of the history department curriculum; four were cross-listed in both library science and history; one was cited as a part of the school of continuing education and one was offered under public administration. In the fifteen responses to the survey, seven programs consisted of a single course. Eight programs, however, offered more than one course. Of those offering more than a single course, all but one included laboratory work as a part of the course, and three required in-service training in addition to laboratory work. Of those programs offering single courses, only one included laboratory hours.

In presenting material in the single course programs, one instructor used the lecture method exclusively in conducting the class, four employed a combination of lecture and seminar, two used only seminar methods, and one method was "unknown." In those programs offering more than one course, the initial offering was generally a mixture of lecture and seminar. No second or third courses in a sequential program were in lecture format, but were presented as either seminar and laboratory combinations or laboratory courses emphasizing work experience.

Except for two (plus one "unknown"), all the single courses and the introductory surveys in sequential programs offered field trips as part of the courses. One of these courses required that the field trips be made on the students' own time rather than as part of the program itself. Seven of the programs required a text, while eight required none. Four of the seven used Theodore Schellenberg's *Management of Archives*, and other courses adapted Schellenberg in conjunction with Bordin and Warner, *The Modern Manuscript Library*; H.G. Jones, *The Records of a Nation*; Ernst Posner, *American State Archives*; and Muller, Feith, and Fruin, *Manual for the*

*Arrangement and Description of Archives.* One Canadian course used this last book alone. A course taught by a university archivist used *University Archives: Papers Presented at . . . the University of Illinois . . . 1964*, edited by Rolland E. Stevens. Except for one program, all respondents believed their libraries adequate for the teaching purposes of the course. Required outside reading was made a part of all courses being offered.

Information about courses reflected inevitable differences in emphasis from instructor to instructor. Administration of archives, however, the day-to-day functioning of a manuscripts library, remained, for the most part, the focus of the courses. This emphasis, it seems to me, indicates a significant shift from the concerns that motivated the founders of the National Archives. Archivists today seem to concentrate more on being the link between primary sources and the historian rather than on being scholars endeavoring to build comprehensive documentary collections that reflect particular themes in American history.

#### STUDENTS

Data about students were the most difficult to extract from the survey. Except for one instructor who furnished copies of evaluations prepared by students, no additional information on the student view of archival training was forthcoming. Also, since many of the courses were taught by nonresident faculty, access could not be provided even to general statistical data on the nature of the student population. In any future survey, analysis of the archival student and his opinions on his training should have high priority. If possible, written course evaluations by students should be supplemented by oral interviews with them and reported in a fashion similar to Walter Rundell's in his *In Pursuit of American History*.

Classes ranged in size from three to thirty-three, the average being twelve. Virtually all persons in the program were graduate students at the master's degree level, although there were a few Ph.D. candidates in the classes. Backgrounds of the 232 students for which we have available information indicate considerable diversity: 144 students were seeking an advanced degree in library science, 67 were seeking degrees in history and 21 were scattered among other disciplines. Only 20 of the students (10 in one program) taking courses were experienced archivists, indicating that even in programs which contained more than one course, most students were beginners. Forty-four of the students indicated that they planned to become archivists and thus elected to take the training as part of their professional preparation. By far the overwhelming

number of students, 144 (plus 24 "unknown"), were not sure whether they would become archivists at all.

This admission is extremely significant for those instructors presenting or planning archival training courses. It could be argued that a large percentage of students taking archival training courses will never become archivists. They may be, for example, librarians or library administrators who perhaps want some knowledge of the unique work that an archivist performs. Quite possibly, too, they are history students hedging their bets in a closing job market. Perhaps they are students who believe that their own research and preparation in historical methodology will be enhanced by archival training. In any event it is important to recognize that archival courses are heavily used by students from diverse academic backgrounds with varied career objectives.

#### FACULTY BACKGROUND

One of the most significant factors revealed about archival training programs was that they are basically one-man operations. Courses are arranged, organized, and taught by one individual who, for whatever reason—dedication to the profession, interest in teaching, financial advantage—is encouraged to organize a course. Except for the University of Toronto, which uses three people in its program, Denver University which uses more than one instructor although the program is primarily one person's responsibility, and the American University summer program that brings in many outside lecturers, archival programs are primarily the products of one person's efforts. The inescapable conclusion is that the scope of the archival profession is relatively limited. To date there simply is not so much that is unique about archival training to require more than a one-man faculty. Demand for this training at present apparently does not warrant development of specialists in various areas.

The individual faculty member teaching the program is, of course, crucial in determining its quality. If he is well educated, has broad experience in archives and manuscripts, is an articulate and forceful teacher, is involved in the profession, does research, and operates in an institutional framework that is academically solid and distinguished, then the quality of the program should be high. This survey provided no comprehensive coverage of faculty background, but it probably produced its most significant data in this area, because it showed that archival teachers have much in common. The ages of the fifteen replying faculty members ranged from 34 to 63 with the average being 47. All of the faculty members had a history or social studies major as undergraduates except one, who was an



English major. All held the minimum of a master's degree: eleven in history, one in library science, one in sociology, one in theology, and two double master's degrees in history and library science. Most of the institutions granting the master's degrees to these faculty members were major American universities with well-developed graduate programs.

Of the fifteen respondents, three had pursued graduate education beyond the master's degree but not to the Ph.D. level; one studied law but had not received a degree in that subject, a second is currently pursuing a doctorate in library science at the University of Chicago, and the third is studying for a doctorate in history at Syracuse University. Six of the faculty members held the Ph.D. degree. One of these had taken his degree in a combination program of library science and education at the University of Chicago, and the other five had taken their work in history, two at Duke University and one each at Pennsylvania State University, the University of Kentucky, and the University of Michigan. The conclusion is obvious. The background of the teaching faculty in archival education and training courses is overwhelmingly weighted toward the historical profession.

Questionnaire responses revealed wide variation in the amount of publishing done. All the faculty members had published articles, most frequently citing the *American Archivist* (nine published in this journal), but also mentioning State history periodicals and library journals. Seven respondents had published books. Not made clear by the survey, however, was the scope of the total publishing effort of these faculty members, its significance, importance, and scholarly value.

Faculty members were active in professional organizations. Only one belonged to no national professional organization; five belonged to one; one belonged to two; two belonged to three; and six belonged to four or more. Quite naturally the Society of American Archivists was the most commonly held professional membership with thirteen of the fifteen faculty members indicating their membership in this professional group. In addition, six held membership in the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association, five in the American Association for State and Local History, three in the American Library Association, and two in the Southern Historical Association. The Canadian Archival Association, the Canadian Historical Association, the Bibliographical Society of America, the Manuscript Society, and the Special Library Association each attracted a faculty member. Again, the heavy historical orientation of the faculty is apparent from their professional memberships.

Faculty members showed a very high leadership record in the archival profession. Eight of the fifteen instructors were Fellows of the Society of American Archivists, three had served as President of the Society, seven as Council members, and eleven as committee chairmen, a record quite above average for the archival profession. Reflecting the in-service training tradition of the craft, most faculty members had no formal archival instruction themselves. Only five reported such training, four having received it at the American University and one at an archival institute abroad.

Status is important in any professional group and titles significantly reflect this. Interestingly enough, four of the faculty respondents failed to give their academic titles, but of the eleven who did, three were professors, two were assistant professors, two were adjunct professors, one was visiting associate professor, and three were lecturers. Of the group, three were employed full-time as library science instructors, seven as archival administrators, four as practicing archivists, and for one information was not available. All had some teaching experience ranging from 2 to 26 years, with the average being 12.

In summary, it was clear that the faculty was heavily weighted toward a historical background and professional archival interest. Not half of those teaching archival courses had the Ph.D. degree, but all had master's degrees. It was a group generally active in the profession, assuming leadership roles and writing for publication.

#### CONCLUSION

Several trends are revealed by this report, some clearly and others not quite so distinctly.

1. Archival education and training courses have undergone a very rapid growth in the past decade.
2. This growth has taken place both in major universities with established graduate programs and in newer, less well-established institutions.
3. Increasingly, these courses are being established in library science schools rather than in history departments, although a number of schools today list the course in both areas. A contest between disciplines does not seem to exist, regardless of where the course is given.
4. There seems to be general agreement that the instructors must have historical background plus archival experience. They may have other intellectual equipment, including training in library science, but this background is apparently not an overriding consideration.

5. Archival courses fit into two broad categories. One might be termed general survey in archival administration, usually the equivalent of a one-semester, three-hour course that covers the major and some minor facets of an archives and/or manuscript library operation. The second type is more advanced and generally involves actual experience in handling archives and manuscripts.

6. There is apparently little cooperation or idea sharing among instructors teaching archival courses. This is probably due not to secretiveness on the part of the instructors, but to a lack of formal means for exchanging information.

7. Teachers of present-day archival courses seem to constitute a second generation of leaders in the archival profession. Their primary concern appears to be the refinement of techniques developed in the years following the founding of the National Archives and the consolidation of the gains made by the establishment of the Archives.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Society of American Archivists should sponsor a conference of teachers of archival courses. To be done effectively, this should probably be supported by a grant which would make possible the participation of everyone giving instruction in this area. The conference should be conducted at a prestigious institution and draw resource people from within SAA's own ranks, the profession at large, and allied professions.

2. Although official accrediting by the Society seems unfeasible at this time, the SAA should exercise far more responsibility in providing the archival profession and those that wish to join the profession with full information about available education and the training courses. The Society should assemble and keep up-to-date facts on all courses being offered in the United States and Canada and should systematically publish the data, perhaps once a year or at least once every two years. Among the items included in a public description should be a brief description of the course, its aim, its prerequisites, the availability and role of laboratory and/or in-service training, and the extent and qualifications of the faculty.

3. The Education and Training Committee of the Society should be upgraded in membership and responsibilities. It should include leaders in the fields of library science, history, and allied disciplines. What would be wrong, for example, with having as chairman of this committee the dean of a prestigious school of library science or the chairman of a major history department? Education and training are as important to these professional groups as to archivists, and they

should be actively encouraged to participate. The committee, if working effectively, could provide for an exchange of data among those engaged in archival training. It could promote special course offerings to various segments of the profession. For example, the committee might encourage a course similar to the University of Michigan summer institute in programming, statistics, and other tools useful in applying the vast body of data accumulated by the interuniversity consortium on political behavior. Similar institutes might be promoted on topics such as photographs and film archives, problems of urban archives, and informational retrieval developments helpful to archivists.

4. The Society should continue to seek sufficient funds to conduct much more intensive and thorough studies of existing archival training programs, records management education, and short-term institutes. The study should be based on the idea that at present the archival discipline is too narrow a base on which to build a comprehensive educational program. Active participation of professional organizations and leaders from other disciplines, particularly history and library science, should be encouraged and welcomed in making evaluations and drafting recommendations for the future of archival education.