

EDUCATION FOR ARCHIVISTS: HARD CHOICES AND HARD WORK

(A RESPONSE TO THE ARTICLE BY FRANK BOLES)

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ABSTRACT: In contrast with the view in the preceding article, a different description of the audience for continuing archival education is presented. Archival appointments include many part-time assignments, and many archivists will not take graduate programs. There is a large and varied audience for continuing education programs that do not presume pre-appointment education. The model for education offerings will include two main types of archivists—those with and those without extensive pre-appointment education. Scarce resources can and must be stretched to meet a wide variety of needs.

I welcome the opportunity to comment on Frank Boles' article, "Making Hard Choices: Continuing Education and the Archival Profession." I heard Frank give the paper on which this article is based—at the SAA meeting in Indianapolis in 1994—and at that time I commented on some of the points he made. Frank and I are in agreement on many aspects of the complex subject of archival education: we both rejoice to see the many excellent programs for graduate courses in archival administration, and we recognize the abilities and accomplishments of the people who become archivists after completing one of these programs. We also agree on the necessity of preserving the documentary record, and we see this as the ultimate goal of archival education. We agree—and this is not a new tenet for archivists—that resources are scarce and must be used wisely.

Neither Frank Boles nor any other reader of this commentary wants me to use much space listing my points of agreement with Frank. At the session in Indianapolis mentioned above I expressed some disagreement, but did not have time to list all of our differences or to explain the reasons for them. My principal difference with Frank can be seen from the first paragraph in his conclusion: he says that archivists must begin to plan for a gradual (over five to ten years) elimination of all educational programs for people who have archival jobs but have not had pre-appointment education in archives administration at the master's degree level; I say that we shall never have a

situation in which all archivists have had that level of education. As a profession, at every level—national, regional, state, local, and institutional—we must always provide continuing education for archivists who have never taken and will never take any graduate courses in archives.

The Nature of Archives Positions and Appointments

My view, which is very different from that of Frank Boles and many other archivists, is based on my perception of the present condition of archives and archivists. It is a fact that archival documents—materials essential for understanding our history, our culture, and our institutions—are created constantly by every organization and institution. Many of these institutions are so small that they will never employ a full-time archivist. Many institutions find someone interested in archives or knowledgeable about some of the records, or who just happens to be available when the decision is made “to do something about the old records.” Such persons usually add responsibility for archives to their other jobs and never become full-time archivists.

When people in the archival profession who are assessing educational needs and planning programs talk about “pre-appointment” and “post-appointment” education, they do not seem to be aware of the kind of “appointment” I have just described. Nevertheless, there are many such people, I think their numbers are steadily increasing, and I am certain that there will always be such appointments.

The Audience for Archives Continuing Education

I differ with Frank Boles on the nature of archival “appointments” and, therefore, I differ with him about the present and future audience for continuing education in archives administration.

Who are the people who receive these appointments? Some of them sign up for the “Introduction to Archives” workshop offered by the Society of American Archivists and for similar programs offered by regional and state archival organizations. I have been teaching introductory workshops—and other programs—since 1977, so I have met and talked with and taught and learned from several hundred people “who have archival responsibilities but little or no formal archival education” (as we say in the notice about the introductory workshop).

It is hard to describe these archivists, because they are a very diverse group. I can give some examples (each example is a composite):

- 1) A nun who has worked in her religious order for many years, as a teacher, secretary, librarian, or administrator. She knows her order thoroughly—its history, culture, and customs; she might have known the founder or other early leaders.
- 2) A librarian in a college who has noticed and become interested in the historical records. Like many librarians, he realizes that these documents are different from published materials and therefore must be organized and processed differently.
- 3) An expert in public relations for a company that is about twenty or thirty years old. The PR person has often used—or tried to find—reliable information about the company’s origins and operations; she realizes that the archives (she prob-

ably does not yet know that term) must be made easier to use. She suggests this to her boss—and finds that she has “volunteered” to be the company’s archivist, in addition to her other duties.

- 4) A recent college graduate who has found a job in a large, well established archives. He has much general and some specialized knowledge, and he has good analytical skills. His boss, the head of the archives, sends him to the introductory workshop for a quick overview of archival work.

Just as these archivists differ in their backgrounds and in their needs for continuing education, so also they differ in what they do after taking their first workshop. Virtually all of them pursue continuing archival education. The question asked most frequently by people who are just beginning their archival education is, “How can I get more education?” Some people who have begun working in an archives fairly late in their careers might not be expected to seek much more formal education, but a surprising number of them take a few or several more workshops. They also help other people in similar situations to start an archives, and they participate vigorously in their local, state, and regional professional organizations, as well as in SAA. Some of them give talks or demonstrations, and some even give workshops or at least arrange for various forms of continuing education.

Other beginners, especially those who have full-time, continuing (we hope) positions in an archives, use introductory and other basic workshops as a first step in their archival education: they attend more extensive programs, such as the Modern Archives Institute, and might take one or more graduate courses in archives administration. Some, of course, might pursue a master’s degree in archival studies or a degree with a large component of instruction in archives.

Some people who take introductory workshops already have a master’s degree in business, engineering, library science, education, or some other subject. This background shows they realize the necessity of education in special areas, but they will probably not pursue a full master’s degree program in archives, which is only one part of their job.

These people, and many more like them, comprise an audience for continuing education. They need basic, advanced, and specialized workshops. Many of them are not full-time archivists, and very few are well paid for their archival work, so they need inexpensive sessions and workshops provided near enough so they can minimize the costs of travel and lodging. At present, many archival organizations address this need. The SAA helps with this work, and all the professional archival organizations must continue to provide this kind of archival education.

How large is this audience? No one knows. Introductory and other basic workshops throughout the United States constantly attract good audiences. We might estimate the number by asking how many “places” there are that should have an archives. How many government agencies (municipal, county, state, regional, national)? How many religious institutions (churches, districts, congregations, regions, national offices, dioceses)? How many educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities, professional organizations, accrediting bodies)? How many businesses, of all sizes? How many libraries and historical societies? How many other whatevers? Roughly, I’d say the answer is tens and tens of thousands.

How many established archives are there now? Or how many places are there that have even a minimum of archival service? Probably only a few thousand, perhaps several thousand.

Let's do the math: tens and tens of thousands minus several thousand (to be optimistic) still leaves tens of thousands of places without archives. Because the proper understanding of our individual institutions and our entire civilization and everything between these two extremes requires that *all* archival material be preserved and made available for use, we as professional archivists must ensure that archival care is provided for all relevant materials. This is an enormous task. In the almost sixty years since the founding of the Society of American Archivists, with much help from other archival organizations in the past twenty-five years or so, we have worked hard and well and have accomplished much, but we have barely scratched the surface.

More Archives, More Archivists

Many of the institutions and organizations described above will never have a full-time position of professional archivist; they will never hire someone with a pre-appointment master's degree in archives or in any related field. Realizing how many such institutions there are, and how extensive and valuable their archives are, we can not and must not accept the strategy proposed by Frank Boles in his article: let them rot. We cannot say that we shall not lift a finger until each institution agrees to hire a fully qualified archivist, that is, someone with an appropriate master's degree.

Fortunately, we have proof that the present system works. By the present system I refer to one of the patterns in the archival profession: in various ways and for various reasons, when people in some institutions take on responsibility for "the old records" they seek help and find that there are archival organizations and archival education programs. They start taking such programs and progress to more education, learning to improve their programs. Because of their efforts, archival materials are identified, are preserved, are processed, and are made available for use. These archivists support institutional use of their archives and, in most cases, researches by outsiders. The system works well. The major failing is that we have been working on too small a scale. (Another pattern is very welcome: an increasing number of institutions are hiring increasingly well educated graduates of advanced archival educational programs.)

Frank Boles says that we must embark on a campaign of persuasion to convince every prospective employer to hire only fully qualified (pre-appointment master's degree) people as professional archivists, presumably in full-time, continuing positions. I agree that we should initiate and continue a campaign: where there is any possibility at all, we should push for that kind of appointment. There are, however, many thousands of institutions that will never hire full-time archivists. To address this situation we need another campaign: to approach, address, work with, inform, encourage, and enlighten people in all institutions and organizations to establish at least a minimum level of archival control. As soon as they have done so, we must continue the campaign in order to effect increases in the resources provided and the services available.

The key word here is *persuasion*: again, the present system works well. Somehow people in various organizations persuade their bosses—or are persuaded by them—to begin a records program. The appointee (volunteer) attends an archives workshop and begins to realize how much work is needed and how much expertise is required to run a proper program. That person then is able to persuade the resource allocators to provide more help, which results in better control and more services, and this upward cycle continues. Professional archivists and archival organizations can assist at every stage of this spiral, especially by providing continuing education.

A Model for Continuing Education

What will continuing education be like? Frank Boles described three models but rejected two of them. My view most closely resembles his second model, "...a system [which] permanently offers two different educational programs: a post-appointment education program for those needing basic archival education and a different program to serve the needs of those who attended 'archives school' prior to being employed as an archivist."

Continuing education for archivists should be as follows:

- 1) Graduate programs will continue and might eventually expand. Some will resemble the "Guidelines of the Development of a Curriculum for a Master of Archival Studies Degree" (SAA, 1994), while others will resemble the present system of offering archival studies in library schools or in history programs; dual master's degree programs should be encouraged.
- 2) Workshops will be offered on all topics at all levels. There is already much cooperation among our many professional archival organizations, and this must expand: sharing curricula, teaching techniques, demonstrations, illustrative materials, and evaluation systems will make the best use of scarce resources.
 - 2a) More educational resources are needed to address the need and enthusiasm for archival education. The "distance education" that Frank Boles describes can be very helpful in bringing many different kinds of instruction to all archivists. Graduate programs which have courses in archives available only to degree candidates must make some places available to others. In addition, we need more recordings and video tapes of archival speakers, panels, discussions, and demonstrations. Listservs on the Internet are already heavily used.
- 3) Numbers 1) and 2) address different audiences and produce archivists with different but complementary knowledge, skills, and abilities. The best archival programs will result from combining the theoretical knowledge of people with master's degrees with the institutional knowledge (an organization's history, culture, customs, operations) of people whose training is on the job and whose archival education is post-appointment. To ensure sharing between these groups, the intern component of graduate archival education can be very helpful; also, the present SAA program for mentors can be expanded, imitated, and adapted. Archivists with graduate degrees can serve formally or informally as consultants for a variety of small or nascent archives. It might be possible to have commer-

cial ventures that would make archival consulting as available as computer-related consulting is today, so the best knowledge and techniques can be used in all settings.

- 4) We must continue to provide publications for all varieties of archivists. Perhaps there can be better cooperation among archival organizations as well as between archivists and publishers in related fields. In 1977, when the SAA started its "Introduction to Archives" workshops, it provided the essential instruction manuals, that is, the *Basic Manual Series*. It has recently published another series equally helpful for workshops, the *Archival Fundamentals Series*. (Neither of these series is really suitable for graduate courses, except for the hands-on work of the internship and the usefulness of the bibliographies.)
- 5) Some workshops should be designed for people who have and will always have archival materials in their possession, such as librarians, workers in local historical societies, and town clerks. If individual archival institutions or local archival organizations can reach out to these people, we can improve the preservation and availability of archival and manuscript materials (similar to Frank Boles' comments in his article).

The Role of Archival Certification in Continuing Education

In his article on continuing education, Frank Boles does not mention certification for archivists. In my opinion, the Academy of Certified Archivists could be very helpful to archivists with no pre-appointment education, but it has recently indicated its intention to move away from this possibility. At present, someone with a bachelor's degree and other requirements may take the ACA examination; this provision is being phased out, and soon only people with master's degrees will be allowed to take the exam. This is a serious mistake: people with master's degrees in archival studies or with other graduate degrees that include a significant portion of archival work do not need to take an exam consisting of one hundred multiple-choice questions.

On the other hand, someone who has become an archivist part-time, and/or late in his or her career, could benefit from a program that would offer recognition of accomplishments in the work place and completion of archival workshops or courses, attendance at professional meetings, and the successful taking of a meaningful examination. Here again an extensive mentoring program could be useful. If the ACA does not provide this kind of entry into the profession for these archivists, then some other organization should establish guidelines, set realistic goals, and recognize accomplishments.

Conclusion

Archives—records of continuing value—are constantly being created everywhere. Fortunately, more and more institutions realize the need for professional archivists, and equally fortunately, our graduate programs have been providing well-qualified people. On the other hand, much archival material is in the control of people who have not completed graduate courses in archives administration. These archivists need ex-

tensive education, and the profession must provide it. Also, there are many institutions with as yet no control of their archives, and we must reach out to them to ensure the proper care for those materials.

Can we do all the things I have listed? Yes, though with great difficulty and much hard work. Because we shall continue to have both archivists with extensive pre-appointment education and archivists with little or none, we must continue to serve both. Also, because there are so many institutions with no archival programs, we must continue to reach out to them.

I am optimistic that we can do all this. We can continue our present multi-varied archival education programs and even expand them. We can increase the number of people completing graduate archival programs, and we can provide more and better educational programs for all archivists. My optimism is based on the optimism, enthusiasm, intelligence, and dedication of the archivists I have met and worked with in the past twenty-six years. Much of the enjoyment of archival work is the constant learning, the constant challenge to acquire some new skill or to study some new subject, in order to improve our work and to assist users. As life-long learners, we archivists will make every needed educational program available for ourselves and others.

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