

CHAPTER 2

Archival institutions

Adrian Cunningham

Nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear today than the word 'archive'.¹

There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution and its interpretation.²

Far from standing as enduring monuments to the past, archives instead appear somewhat fragile, eternally subject to the judgement of the society in which they exist. Neither atemporal nor absolute, the meaning they convey may be manipulated, misinterpreted or suppressed. ... the archives of the past are also the mutable creations of the present.³

One of the features that has characterized all human societies since time immemorial has been an instinct for collective cultural self-preservation. While culture is contestable and ever-evolving, human beings nevertheless like their cultures and cultural achievements and experiences to endure across generations. This cultural persistence is made possible through the preservation of stories, both orally and in writing and through dance, rituals, art, music and performance. The keeping of many of these valuable cultural 'records' is fostered and institutionalized in an 'archive(s)'. The forms, functions and mandates of archival programs and institutions have varied and continue to vary enormously depending on the nature of the society in which they exist and the objectives of those who own or have control of the archives.

This chapter provides an overview and comparative analysis of the varied manifestations and roles of archival institutions throughout the ages, across the world and, in particular, within Australia. One of the aims of the chapter is to illustrate by example just what mutable creations archival institutions really are and to argue for the recognition of this seemingly obvious fact in the face of any tendency that other authors may have to argue in favour of universal laws and immutable truths about the nature of the archival institution. While common themes, objectives and issues can be identified through such a comparative

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 90.

² *Ibid.*, p. 4, n. 1.

³ Judith M. Panitch, 'Liberty, Equality, Posterity?: Some Archival Lessons from the Case of the French Revolution', *American Archivist*, 59, Winter 1996, p. 47.

analysis, the main argument of this chapter is that there is no universal law governing the form and mission of archival institutions. All archival institutions fulfil their mission by, as a minimum, controlling and preserving the records that constitute the archive, but the nature of the mission served can and does vary from case to case. The ever-shifting, always-contested form and mission of the archive reflects the dynamic nature of human experience, aspiration and activity in all its infinitely rich variety.

The secondary aim of this chapter is to illustrate not only that all archival programs and institutions are the contingent products of their time and place, but also that they are active shapers of their time and place. In the words of Verne Harris, archives 'at once express and are instruments of prevailing relations of power'.⁴ Indeed, as we shall see, it is the nature of the prevailing power relations and the particular roles archives play as contested sites of power struggle that determine the forms and functions of archival programs – forms and functions that can and do change as the dynamics of societal power relations evolve and/or transform around them.

Archives and human impulses: The institutionalization and pluralization of the record

Records are made as a means of conducting and/or remembering activity. They are created for pragmatic or symbolic purposes – as enablers and evidence of experience and activity, as aids to memory and/or as artefacts. Some of these records are consciously retained for future reference as archives in order to transmit the activity and experience through time. As authors such as James O'Toole and Sue McKemmish have argued, human beings throughout the ages have demonstrated impulses to save and to bear witness.⁵ Human beings are the sum of their memories. The nature of their interaction with other humans, indeed their very identity, is determined by their memories. While all memory is cognitive, literate individuals learn to rely at least to some extent on the written word to document, express and supplement cognitive processes. In turn, these cognitive processes give meaning to the archives for, as Jacques Derrida says, the archive does not speak for itself – users inscribe their own interpretations into it.⁶

When these impulses move beyond the purely personal and take on a broader collective or societal purpose the archives so retained take on a more formal character. One manifestation of this phenomenon is that the records can become part of an archival program or institution. This institutionalization of the record, which Derrida calls

⁴ Verne Harris, 'The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa', *Archival Science*, 2, 2002, p. 63.

⁵ James M. O'Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts*, Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 1990, pp. 13-15; Sue McKemmish, 'Evidence of me...', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 24, no. 1, 1996, pp. 28-45.

⁶ Derrida, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

domiciliation or ‘house arrest’, marks the passage of information from the private to a collective domain.⁷

There are a wide variety of reasons why records may be institutionalized in this way:

- Organizations need to retain their archives in order to meet their legal obligations, to protect and advance their rights and entitlements, and to retain corporate memory of the decisions and activities of the collective over time to support future decision-making and organizational continuity;
- Communities, including entire nations, retain archives as a means of remembering and connecting with their pasts, their origins. There are many complex and subtle variations driving this kind of institutionalization of memory. Derrida labels the desire to possess the past as ‘archive fever’. Somewhat less cynically, Eric Ketelaar describes archives in this sense as ‘time machines’ – ‘a bridge to yesteryear’.⁸ Others describe the need to capture and retain ancestral voices or to listen to the whispers of the souls of long ago.⁹ In serving this role archival institutions have much in common with other cultural and memory institutions such as museums;
- Similarly, communities and nations often establish archives to inform, enlighten, educate and sometimes to entertain. Related to this is the collective need to support and control storytelling about the pasts and origins of the community. Often archives are retained as a means of expressing, asserting and preserving a unifying group consensus on the nature of its identity, as forged through a shared history – or alternatively to support competing articulations of group identity and plurality;
- Organizations and communities retain archives for their symbolic significance. Objects stored in the archives can themselves be invested with and convey enormous symbolic significance.¹⁰ The creation of a national archives can be symbolically significant as a form of solidification and memorialization in the context of nation building.¹¹ The heavy symbolism of the archives and its contents can in turn cause the archives to be a site of mythmaking and myth perpetuation.¹² Powerful rulers or administrators often

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸ Eric Ketelaar, ‘The Archive as a Time Machine’, *Proceedings of the DLM-Forum 2002. Access and preservation of electronic information: best practices and solutions*. Barcelona, 6-8 May 2002, *INSAR European Archives News*, Supplement VII (Luxembourg 2002) p.579.

⁹ Monica Wehner and Ewan Maidment, ‘Ancestral Voices: Aspects of Archival Administration in Oceania’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, 27, no. 1, 1999, pp. 22-31; Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001, p. 70.

¹⁰ James O’Toole, ‘The Symbolic Significance of Archives’, *American Archivist*, 56, Spring 1993, pp. 234-255; ‘Cortes’s Notary: The Symbolic Power of Records’, *Archival Science*, 2, 2002, pp. 45-61.

¹¹ Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1992, pp. 87-88.

¹² Roberto Echevarria, *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

establish archives as symbolic monuments to their own power and as a means of controlling and directing mythmaking activities concerning their achievements;¹³

- Powerful rulers create archives not only as symbolic monuments to their greatness, but also to legitimize, reinforce and perpetuate their power. The deeds, treaties and founding documents in such an archive can legitimize power in a legalistic and evidential sense, while the information on individual subjects and their relationships and activities in such an archive can provide the information such rulers need to control their dominions and perpetuate their power. Moreover, because archives exercise control over selective memory, they are a source of power that is of enormous utility to autocratic rulers. When endeavouring to control the past, deciding what should be forgotten is just as important as deciding what should be remembered. As Antoinette Burton says, ‘the history of the archive is a history of loss’;¹⁴ and
- Conversely, in democratic societies archives are meant to provide a means of democratic accountability as a means of empowering citizens against potential maladministration, corruption and autocracy. In addition to, or perhaps instead of, protecting the rights and entitlements of rulers and governments, such archives are meant to protect the rights and entitlements of the governed. In the words of John Fleckner, such archives are bastions of a just society where ‘individual rights are not time bound and past injustices are reversible’, where ‘the archival record serves all citizens as a check against a tyrannical government’.¹⁵

As will be seen, these reasons for the existence of archival institutions are not mutually exclusive. Most such institutions exist for a combination of these reasons. Indeed, many archival institutions struggle either consciously or subconsciously with the ambiguities, complementarities and contradictions associated with serving these multiple purposes, whether the purposes are served explicitly or implicitly. The ongoing crisis of identity of government archives in democratic countries is a major theme of this chapter. Are archives a part of government or a check on it? Do government archives exist to serve the legal and administrative needs of government and/or the people, or do they exist primarily as cultural and memory institutions? How do archival institutions balance the often-competing demands of public and private interests and the differing imperatives of public and private records and their uses? What is the interplay of symbolic roles with these other functions and mandates? Most importantly, what factors influence responses to these dilemmas in practice and what are the consequences of the different responses?

¹³ See for instance Verne Harris on the role of the South African Archives Service as ‘an important vehicle for Afrikaaner nationalist historiography, with the legitimation of white rule and the exclusion of oppositional voices being key objectives in the selection policy.’ Harris, *op. cit.*, 2002, p. 74.

¹⁴ Antoinette Burton, ‘Thinking Beyond the Boundaries: Empire, Feminism and the Domains of History’, *Social History*, 26, no. 1, 2001, p. 66.

¹⁵ John Fleckner, ‘“Dear Mary Jane”: Some Reflections on Being an Archivist’, *American Archivist*, 54, Winter 1991, p. 13.



Figure 2.1. For centuries, towers as archival repositories accorded security from attack and larceny as well as symbolic prominence. In the case of the Oxford University Archives, a tower has been in continuous use since the early seventeenth century.

Of course, being brought under the control of an archival institution is not the only form of institutionalization that can be experienced by records. Registrar-style arrangements in public administrations, identification by auditors, records commissions and/or documentation programs are all examples of alternative forms of institutionalization, some of which will be explored later in this chapter.

Institutional form and function since the dawn of time

Ernst Posner has argued that the first archives were created by the Sumerians in the middle of the fourth millennium B.C. These records took the form of clay tablets with cuneiform characters. The archives were used to support commercial activity and property ownership. Later ancient societies, such as the Hittites, Assyrians and Mesopotamians, all kept archives, although one can only speculate today on just how institutionalized these archives were and what form, if any, such institutions took. In at least some of these societies archives were kept in temples and courts for religious, legal, administrative, commercial and genealogical purposes.

During the second and third millennium B.C. the Egyptians developed an extensive system of archives to support their empire, as did the later Persian Empire. These archives existed primarily to serve the legal, administrative and military purposes of the rulers. An early indication of the perceived role of archives as tools of political oppression occurred in Egypt around 2200 B.C. when, during a revolt, an angry mob destroyed a records office 'as the custodians of hated property rights'.¹⁶ Persian archives often incorporated the captured archives of defeated governments to help establish control over the newly occupied territories. In an illustration of the importance of archives to Alexander the Great, it is interesting to note that when records were burnt in the tent of his chief of chancery, staff were ordered to reconstruct them by obtaining copies from provincial sources.¹⁷

Archives in China can be traced back almost as far as the Sumerians. These records were inscribed on bones and tortoise shells for religious, administrative and symbolic purposes. By 700 B.C. bamboo, silk and stone tablets were in use, with records of military value being stored in secure buildings. While the Egyptians used papyrus, the Chinese began using plant-fibre paper after 200 B.C. The Chinese also demonstrated an early interest in the use of archives to control the writing of history. In the first century A.D. the Han Dynasty established a Bureau of Historiography.

The Greek city-state of Athens began housing its archives in the Metroon, the temple of the mother of the gods next to the courthouse, by around 400 B.C. This archive contained laws, decrees, minutes, financial and diplomatic records, contracts, records of court proceedings, and manuscripts of plays by Sophocles, Euripides and others. In what was perhaps the first example of an archival institution fulfilling the function of public access to records and consistent with the democratic principles of Athenian government, private citizens could obtain copies of the records in the archives.

The power that resides in the archives is illustrated in the etymology of the word archives, which can be traced to this time. The Greek *archeion* referred to the office of the magistrate or *archon* and the records kept by that office. *Archons* wielded executive power, which in

¹⁶ Ernst Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press, 1972, pp. 71-85.

¹⁷ J.G. Bradsher and M.F. Pacifico, 'History of Archives Administration', in J.G. Bradsher, ed., *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*, London, Mansell, 1988, pp. 19-20.

large part was legitimized by the legal documents in the *archeion*. Similarly, the Greek *arkhe* meant to command or govern. The Latin *archivum* was likewise the residence of the magistrate and the place where records of official legal and administrative significance were kept.

Rome's first public archives was founded about 509 B.C. in the Aerarium, or treasury, of the temple of Saturn and housed laws, decrees, reports and financial records. Like the Metroon, the laws housed in this archives could be consulted by all citizens. When the Aerarium was destroyed by fire in 83 B.C. it was replaced by the Tabularium, a large stone building. In later imperial Rome the Tabularium adopted a narrower mission as the archives of the Senate. It was supplemented by imperial archives and a network of provincial, municipal, military and religious archives. Various emperors, most notably Justinian I, were keen advocates of archives. The Justinian Code of 529 A.D. was not only written with the assistance of archives, it also included a section on the role of archives and archivists. This code emphasized the importance of archives as a public place of deposit and as guarantors of the integrity and authenticity of the records housed therein.

Bureaucratically formalized recordkeeping systems and administrative archives were foundation characteristics of innovative Islamic military and economic empires during medieval times. State Chanceries or central 'register' offices called diwans were established in places such as Persia, Damascus, Baghdad and North Africa during the seventh and eighth centuries. Later, many mosques adopted archival functions in support of religious scholarship, particularly in cultural centres such as Damascus.¹⁸

Most medieval European archives were maintained in ecclesiastical settings, often in 'muniment rooms'. By the middle of the sixth century a papal archives had been established. In the eighth century the Venerable Bede was able to make use of archives to write his landmark history of the church in England. Following the collapse of the Roman Empire a number of municipal archives persisted in Italy and France until the ninth and tenth centuries. Venice and Florence established archives during the eleventh and thirteenth centuries respectively. It was common practice for royal archives in Europe to have no fixed location, but instead to travel with the King's household. Towards the end of the twelfth century, however, there were some moves towards the establishment of a central government archives in England. A century later Exchequer rolls began to be housed in the Tower of London.¹⁹ In time, this archives was expanded to include all of Britain's Chancery records. In 1323 the first inventory of English archives was completed and served as a model for similar initiatives elsewhere in western Europe. In 1346 the archives of the kingdom of Aragon were created.²⁰ Around this time paper began to come into more common usage in Europe.

¹⁸ Ernst Posner, 'Archives in Medieval Islam', *American Archivist*, 35, July/October 1972, pp. 291-315.

¹⁹ M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England 1066-1307*, 2nd ed., Oxford, Blackwell, 1993, p. 72.

²⁰ Michel Duchein, 'The History of European Archives and the Development of the Archival Profession in Europe', *American Archivist*, 55, Winter 1992, p. 15.

In 1524 the archives of the crown of Castille was established by Charles V at Simancas near Valladolid. The archive was greatly expanded by Philip II, who regarded archives as vital for controlling, administering and legitimizing an empire and who also viewed archives as symbols of power and prestige. The Simancas archive is now regarded as the classic prototype of a centralized 'national archives'. Two hundred years later the Archives of the Indies was established in Seville for the same reasons. When Cortes conquered the Americas, it was considered essential to not only burn the archives of the conquered Incas and Aztecs,²¹ but also ensure legitimate documentation of the occupation by a legally appointed Notary, whose records were eventually deposited in archives back in Spain.²² Between the sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries royal archives repositories were established in France, Sweden, Denmark, and China. The combined effect of the advent of the printing press and the emergence of the modern administrative state generated a significant growth in records creation and, as a consequence, archives holdings.

The creation, control and use of archives became increasingly important in the context of religious, legal and political power struggles such as the Reformation and parliamentary reform movements, when opposing factions used records to support their arguments. The Renaissance had created demand for access to information for the purpose of supporting scholarly enquiry as opposed to the more common political, financial, legal, administrative and symbolic purposes. Nevertheless, access to archives was strictly controlled by their owners, usually monarchs or churches, who very often kept them inaccessible to all except themselves and their functionaries.

The French Revolution and the nineteenth century

The French Revolution provides perhaps the clearest example of the mutable nature and purpose of archives and their tendency to inspire extremes in human emotion. Between 1789 and 1793, much of the archives of the *ancien régime* were attacked and destroyed by mobs or in state-sponsored bonfires and paper recycling campaigns, with the aim of obliterating what the revolutionaries regarded as symbols of their erstwhile oppression. While such actions might sometimes have had the practical benefit of destroying the evidence of feudal debts and obligations, by and large they were cathartic acts of retribution and ritual cleansing of the body politic.

In the midst of this destruction of old archives there co-existed a desire to create new archives, out of which emerged a new archival system for the new society. A legislative repository was provided for by the new Assembly just two weeks after the fall of the Bastille. In September 1790 a law was passed establishing a new National Archives that was to be open to the public and which was to report to the Assembly. By 1794 the desire

²¹ Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 26.

²² James O'Toole, 'Cortes's Notary: The Symbolic Power of Records', *Archival Science*, 2, 2002, pp. 45-61.

to destroy the documentary evidence of the *Ancien Régime* had been replaced by a desire to preserve and manage those records as nationalized public property, reinvented for the purpose of symbolically highlighting the glory of the new Republic in contrast to the sinful decadence and oppression of the old regime. A decree issued in June 1794 granted the National Archives jurisdiction over the records of government agencies, provinces, communes, churches, universities and noble families, thus creating the world's first centrally controlled national archival system. The same decree also proclaimed the right of public access to these records, thus establishing the first modern instance of archives fulfilling a legal role as protectors of the rights and entitlements of the people and as instruments of accountability and transparency in government. The creation of national archives as both symbols of nation building in the midst of turbulent change and ideological – indeed almost mythological – assertions of legitimacy by new orders is a pattern that has been repeated often since. The fate of the archives of the *Ancien Régime* testify to the fact that no archives can assume an eternal mandate – in the words of Judith Panitch, they are forever ‘subject to the judgement of the society in which they exist’.²³

Another aspect of the impact of the French Revolution on archives is worth exploring at this point. Luciana Duranti has argued that the 1794 decree created for the first time a dichotomy between administrative and historical archives – the distinction between the archives of the Republic and the archives of the *Ancien Régime*. Duranti considers this an unfortunate development in that it represents a usurpation of the administrative and legal functions of archives by social and cultural functions – a usurpation that has echoes in various places and times since the Revolution.²⁴ Other commentators, however, beg to differ. Judith Panitch, for instance, argues that in the 1790s the notion of French archives as sites of ‘historical or cultural scholarship had yet to take hold’. While they had acquired the new function of public access for the new purpose of accountability, their essential role as legal, administrative and symbolic institutions remained unaltered.²⁵

Nevertheless, Duranti is correct in highlighting the distinction between the administrative/legal and cultural/historical roles of archives – a source of contestation that shall be explored in more detail later – even if the cultural role of French archives did not become apparent until some decades after the Revolution. Duranti's portrayal of one role as being innately superior to another is, however, a position that is far more difficult to sustain, as we shall see. Nor, as we have already seen, is it true that the world had to wait until the late eighteenth century to witness an example of an archives that was established for cultural and historical purposes. While such phenomena were indeed unusual, they were not unprecedented – see for example the case of the Han Dynasty Bureau of Historiography referred to above.

The creation of a centralized national archives in France provided a model for archival development in a number of other countries such as Finland, Norway, the Netherlands and

²³ Panitch, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-122; Ernst Posner, ‘Some Aspects of Archival Development Since the French Revolution’, *American Archivist*, 3, July 1940, pp. 161-162.

²⁴ Luciana Duranti, ‘Archives as a Place’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, 24, no. 2, 1996, pp. 248-249.

²⁵ Panitch, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

Belgium during the nineteenth century. Similarly, in Sweden, Denmark and Prussia central archives evolved out of pre-existing royal or administrative repositories. Forty-eight years after the creation of the French national archives, the English followed suit, but for very different reasons and in much less dramatic circumstances. Between 1800 and 1837 a variety of committees and commissions of inquiry had highlighted the scattered and poorly controlled and preserved state of public records in that country. These efforts culminated in the passage of the Public Records Act in 1838 and the eventual establishment of the Public Record Office during the 1850s by a government that was concerned to ensure the proper care and preservation of records that guaranteed the legal rights and entitlements of English people. Lawmakers in Westminster were no doubt aware of the fact that their counterparts in Scotland had beaten not only themselves but also the French in establishing a national archives, when their principal collection of public records had been assembled in Edinburgh's General Register House as early as 1784.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the growth in historical scholarship based on the use of written sources was becoming an important factor in the evolution of European archival institutions. Selected series of historical documents were published, such as the 'Roll Series' and the 'Calendars of State Papers' in England. In 1869 the Historical Manuscripts Commission was established in the United Kingdom to identify, describe and promote the preservation and use of significant historical records that were not otherwise catered for under the Public Records Act. The Commission, which existed until April 2003 when it was amalgamated with the Public Record Office to form a rebranded National Archives, is probably the best example of a state-sponsored documentation program for the nationally distributed holdings of historically significant private records.

Archival institutions in twentieth-century post-colonial societies

Globalization, the spread of modern bureaucracies and the worldwide interest in history and cultural/national identity together provided the impetus for the emergence of archival systems around the world during the twentieth century. Soon after the Bolshevik revolution the Soviet Union established a highly centralized archival system as both a reflection and enabler of centralized state power. In contrast to democratic states, access to archives in totalitarian states was not a guaranteed right of the citizen.

In Asia, Latin America, Africa and the South Pacific, European colonial powers were responsible for the creation of administrative archives that in turn formed the basis for national archives once independence was achieved.²⁶ For instance, the National Archives of Malaysia was established in 1957 and was based on the model of the Public Record Office

²⁶ Philip Alexander and Elizabeth Pessek, 'Archives in Emerging Nations: The Anglophone Experience', *American Archivist*, 51, Winter/Spring 1988, pp. 121-129; and Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science*, 2, 2002, pp. 87-109.

in London.²⁷ In Vietnam the French colonial administrators established an Archives in 1917. This was eventually superseded by the State Archives Department in 1962, which in turn was consolidated by the 1982 Decree on the Protection of National Archives Documents. The scope of this decree is, however, limited to government records.²⁸ In many such territories archival development has also benefited from a strong pre-colonial archival tradition. Thailand, which was never colonized by a European power, inherited an impressive system of royal legal/administrative and cultural archives of palm leaf manuscripts and bark paper stretching back many hundreds of years. This system was overlaid with a more western approach, including the adoption of a registry system, during the late nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century records retention schedules were introduced and a National Archives was established in 1952 with responsibility for preserving the historical records of government administration.²⁹

A common feature of archival institutions in the post-colonial developing world is that institutions established with the best of intentions on a European model have often struggled to fulfil expectations in the harsh economic and political reality of independent governance. Just as these emerging nations have struggled to consolidate inherited democratic institutions, so too have inherited archival institutions often failed to establish themselves as robust organic components of the culture and governance of post-colonial societies.³⁰ Not only have administrators often been inclined to view archives as at best luxuries and at worst irrelevant western white elephants, but also citizens living in predominantly oral cultures have often been slow to develop attachments with institutions primarily associated with preservation of the written word for use by western academics.³¹ Indeed, an interesting variant on the traditional archival institutional model in non-Western territories has been the emergence of alternative forms of memory institutionalization such as so-called 'keeping places'³² and memory institutions that deal primarily with orality in preference to or because of the cultural irrelevance of written records.

²⁷ Zakiah Hunum Nor, 'The National Archives of Malaysia - its Growth and Development', in *Archives in the Tropics: Proceedings of the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, Townsville, 9-11 May 1994*, Canberra, ASA, 1994, pp. 94-98.

²⁸ Pham thi Bich Hai, 'Professional Identity of the Archivist in Vietnam', in M. Piggott and C. McEwen, eds, *Archivists - The Image and Future of the Profession: 1995 Conference Proceedings*, Canberra, Australian Society of Archivists, 1996, pp. 142-148.

²⁹ Somsuang Prudtikul, 'Records and Archives Management in Thailand', Paper presented at the Annual Congress of the International Federation of Library Associations, Bangkok, 1999; available at: http://www.tiac.or.th/thailib/ifla/ifla99_20.htm

³⁰ See for instance the summary of current issues and developments from the Proceedings of the 9th Conference of the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives, Palau, 2001, p. 12; and Sophie Papadopoulos, 'The Image and Identity of Africa's Archivists', in M. Piggott and C. McEwen, op. cit., pp. 149-156.

³¹ Monica Wehner and Ewan Maidment, 'Ancestral Voices: Aspects of Archives Administration in Oceania', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 27, no. 1, 1999, pp. 22-41.

³² Glenys McIver, Ysola Best and Fabian Hutchinson, 'Friends or Enemies?: Collecting Archives and the Management of Archival Materials Relating to Aboriginal Australians', in *Archives in the Tropics*, op. cit., pp. 135-140.

Archival institutions in these territories are having to develop flexible new conceptions of indigenous knowledge ownership, control and access in response to a rejection of the inappropriate aspects of Eurocentric archival theory, which support the systematic marginalization and dispossession of the indigenous by dominant global discourses. The more successful of these have been able to demonstrate the potential of archives to support the rediscovery of suppressed cultural identities and the redressing of past injustices.³³ Indeed, the often-tenuous place of archival institutions in oral societies tells us much about the mutable and contingent nature of such institutions. While many have endeavoured to increase their relevance by instituting oral history programs, others argue that such activities fail to comprehend the difficulties involved in converting fluid orality into fixed material custody without destroying the very thing that the archives is trying to capture. In the words of Verne Harris there exists 'A reluctance to engage indigenous conceptualizations of orality not as memory waiting to be archived, but as archive already.'³⁴

Archival institutions in North America

Contrary to the more usual pattern of legal/administrative archives gradually acquiring a cultural/historical role (or alternatively being supplemented by the establishment of separate cultural/historical records programs), in North America cultural/historical imperatives were the primary impetus for the creation of archival institutions. The Public Archives of Canada was established in 1872, only five years after confederation, following a petition to government by the Quebec Literary and Historical Society. Of particular concern to Canadian historians was the desire to have access to records of Canadian historical interest held in Britain and France. Driving the cultural/historical interest was a perceived need to build national unity and identity through the study of the origins of the Canadian people. Although the Public Archives of Canada lacked both proper facilities and a legislative mandate during its early decades, these shortcomings were rectified in 1906 with the construction of an archives building and in 1912 with the passage of archival legislation. This legislation was informed exclusively by the need to preserve records for historical rather than for legal/administrative purposes.

From its outset the Canadian archival endeavour encompassed both public and private records, a concept later articulated as 'total archives'.³⁵ The total archives concept reflects a long-standing social consensus that public funds should be used to preserve a wide range of Canadian documentary heritage, regardless of its origins and format, and that this

³³ See the 'Archives and Indigenous Peoples' theme issue of *Comma, International Journal on Archives*, 2003.

³⁴ Verne Harris, *Exploring Archives*, 2nd ed., Pretoria, National Archives of South Africa, 2000, pp. 92-93; Sello Hatang, 'Converting Orality to Material Custody: Is it a Noble Act of Liberation or is it and Act of Incarceration?', *ESARBICA Journal*, 19, 2000.

³⁵ Laura Millar, 'The Spirit of Total Archives: Seeking a Sustainable Archival System', *Archivaria*, 47, 1999, pp. 46-65; and 'Discharging Our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archive Concept in English Canada', *Archivaria*, 46, 1998, pp. 103-146.

preservation effort should be pursued via a planned national system. As a result Canada has not experienced the emergence of separate (and sometimes warring) archival tribes or traditions for public records and historical manuscripts, as has been the case in the United States and Australia. With Canadian national identity constantly at risk of being swamped by the more dominant identity of its southern neighbour, recognition of the need to take coordinated action to preserve something distinctly Canadian has compelled generations of Canadians to take a holistic approach to the preservation and management of their archival heritage. The National Archives of Canada (since 2002 the Library and Archives of Canada) has, at least in theory, always given equal priority to the preservation of records originating in private sector and to the preservation of records originating in the public sector. Nevertheless, it was not until the 1950s that the then Public Archives of Canada began to exert authority over public records and perform the legal/administrative role that provided the original basis for its counterpart institutions in Europe.³⁶

Like Canada, it was cultural/historical concerns that led to the creation of a national archives in the United States. Unlike Canada, which wasted little time in establishing a central archival program, the USA had to wait until 1934 – over 150 years after the Declaration of Independence – before its national archives was established. This represented the culmination of many decades of agitation by historians, most notably the American Historical Association. By that time the desire to rescue, preserve and provide access to historical records had manifested itself in the emergence of the so-called ‘historical manuscripts tradition’. This tradition, which dated back to the earliest years of the nation, had been shaped by an antiquarian collecting instinct and had become institutionalized in organizations such as state historical societies and the Library of Congress, where the main focus was the collecting, researching and publishing of the private papers of prominent individuals.

Why did the United States take so long to establish a national archives? In 1939 Ernst Posner argued that a major contributing factor was American ambivalence, if not hostility, towards state bureaucratic power. So, while manuscript collecting endeavours pursued for scholarly purposes were considered laudable, proposals to create an archival institution as an integral part of the state bureaucracy was something that was regarded, at least subconsciously, with suspicion.³⁷ Americans had to wait until the latter part of the twentieth century before there was a clear articulation of the role of archives as guarantors of the democratic rights of citizens and as means of holding public officials to account – a role that, while recognized as an ideal, is yet to be fully realized both in practice and in public perception.

Just as the Public Archives of Canada was established for historical purposes and had to wait until the 1950s to acquire an administrative/legal role, so too the US National Archives

³⁶ Ian Wilson, ‘A Noble Dream: The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada’, *Archivaria*, 15, 1982/83, pp. 16-35; Jay Atherton, ‘The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897-1956’, *Archivaria*, 8, 1979, p. 42.

³⁷ Ernst Posner, ‘Archival Administration in the United States’, in Ken Munsden, ed., *Archives & the Public Interest*, Washington DC, Public Affairs Press, 1967, pp. 114-130.

had to wait until 1950, with the passage of the Federal Records Act, before it acquired a role as a supporter and enabler of public administration. Public records archivists such as Margaret Cross Norton from Illinois pursued a campaign to articulate and assert an administrative and legal accountability role for archives in the face of the primacy of the historical/cultural role.³⁸ While Norton had very good reasons for pursuing these efforts, they had the unfortunate effect of creating a polarization of the American archival community – a polarization that persists to this day in a profession which seems unable to attain a comfortable and balanced view of the dual role of archival institutions.³⁹

The American experience highlights in sharp relief the tensions and contradictions that have emerged in the roles of archives worldwide since the nineteenth century and which represent contested ground everywhere. Arguably, the polarization is more pronounced in the United States because there is more at stake. Archives in Europe were initially established for legal and administrative purposes, thus conferring on them a valuable legitimacy in the eyes of government that has enabled them to acquire a cultural/historical role from a position of strength. In contrast, at the time of their establishment American archives had no such legal/administrative legitimacy and have had to struggle ever since to attain such a role and the government support and funding that it could attract. The addition of democratic accountability to the legal/administrative role by proponents such as Margaret Cross Norton merely helped the struggle to work against itself. So, while the general public may be suspicious of the legal/administrative role of archives and supportive of the accountability role, the reverse is very often the case from the perspective of those that control the corridors of power in government. Once again we see the mutable nature of archives and the fact that they are forever subject to the judgment of the societies in which they exist.

Public records institutions in Australia

The emergence of archival institutions in Australia mirrors in many respects the experience of the United States. As in the United States, the establishment of government archival authorities was the result of advocacy from historians, with a unique Australian contribution coming from leading librarians. In most jurisdictions the government archives programs started their lives as units within the government research libraries, which themselves inherited control of colonial-era records from heterogeneous administrative locations.⁴⁰

³⁸ Margaret Cross Norton, *Norton on Archives*, Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1975.

³⁹ Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1983; and Luke J. Gilliland-Swetland, 'The Provenance of a Profession: The Permanence of the Public Archives and Historical Manuscripts Traditions in American Archival History', *American Archivist*, 54, Spring 1991, pp. 160-175.

⁴⁰ Russell Doust, 'The Administration of Official Archives in New South Wales 1870-1960', Master of Librarianship Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1969; Ross Harrison Snow, 'The Developments That Led to the Establishment of the Public Record Office of Victoria', in Peter Crush,

The decision to establish a Commonwealth Government archives was made during World War II, forty years after Federation, and was informed primarily by the desire to 'ensure the availability of material for the preparation of a history of the war'.⁴¹ The Archives Division was initially located administratively within the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, later the National Library. Despite these cultural/historical origins, early Commonwealth archivists were heavily influenced by the legal/administrative tradition as embodied in the writing of English archivist Sir Hilary Jenkinson. While this was partly a reflection of the British origins of the Australian bureaucracy, it also reflects the simple fact that Jenkinson provided the only archival handbook in the English language to which neophyte archivists could turn for guidance.⁴²

Two North American visitors to Australia exerted a significant subsequent influence on archival development in Australia. T.R. Schellenberg from the US National Archives and W. Kaye Lamb from Canada were both firmly of the historical/cultural tradition. Schellenberg toured Australia in 1954 on a Fulbright Fellowship at the invitation of National Librarian Harold White.⁴³ Perhaps Schellenberg's most enduring legacy in the Australian profession was his philosophy regarding the appraisal of voluminous modern public records. While Schellenberg's cultural/historical message may have registered well with Harold White, the government archivists themselves were determined to stick to the Jenkinsonian path – a determination that manifested itself in a desire to break free from their cultural/historical roots and what they saw as the ill-informed control of librarians. Doubtless also by this time, the North American debates surrounding the campaign of Margaret Cross Norton were resonating in Australia. Despite their philosophical differences on the role of archival institutions, the local Jenkinsonians nevertheless also found in Schellenberg an ally in their arguments in favour of separation from the Library. A Committee of Inquiry recommended separation of the Archives Division from the Library, influenced partly by the differences between the two professional disciplines and partly by the view that the role of the Archives was to manage government records for the benefit of

ed., *Archives and Reform – Preparing for Tomorrow: Proceedings of the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, Adelaide, 25-26 July 1997*, Canberra, ASA, 1998, pp. 256-262.

⁴¹ Michael Piggott, 'Beginnings', in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds, *The Records Continuum*, Clayton, Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, 1994, p. 8. For a description of an earlier failed attempt to establish a Commonwealth Government archives see Ted Ling, 'The Commonwealth's First Archives Bill 1927', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 29, no. 1, 2001, pp. 98-109.

⁴² Ian Maclean, 'An Analysis of Jenkinson's "Manual of Archive Administration" in the Light of Australian Experience', in A.E.J. Hollaender, ed., *Essays in Memory of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, London, Society of Archivists, 1962, pp. 128-152; and Sir Paul Hasluck, 'A Narrow and Rigid View of Archives', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 9, no. 2, 1981, pp. 3-10.

⁴³ Michael Piggott, 'The Visit of Dr T.R. Schellenberg to Australia 1954: a Study of its Origins and Some Repercussions on Archival Development in Australia', Master of Archives Administration Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1989; available at: http://ourhistory.naa.gov.au/library/visit_schellenberg.html

the government and its departments – a very different role than that asserted by Harold White of building a systematic record of national life and development.⁴⁴

In 1961 the Commonwealth Archives Office separated from the National Library, much to the chagrin of Harold White. The newly independent Office then proceeded to bury itself deep into the Federal bureaucracy and largely turn away from any cultural/historical role – indeed from the rest of the profession in Australia, a situation that persisted into the 1990s and which in some ways still characterizes the work of the organization. The most positive aspect of this bureaucratic focus was, through the efforts of Ian Maclean and Peter Scott, the development of an innovative and enduring Australian school of thought on the management and intellectual control of current records.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, throughout the 1960s and 1970s the Australian Archives, as it became known in 1974, proved to be ambivalent about pursuing an active role in support of democratic accountability in the manner that opinion leaders such as Sir Paul Hasluck and Margaret Cross Norton had advocated. It appeared to define its role solely in terms of supporting the administrative and legal requirements of the Commonwealth Government.⁴⁶

At this time the Government was contemplating the need for legislation to govern the work of the national archives. Canadian Dominion Archivist Kaye Lamb was invited to investigate and recommend a way forward. Lamb's 1973 report was critical of the lack of support and assistance provided to researchers by the Archives and recommended legislation that gave the organization a broad cultural and administrative mandate and a leadership role at the centre of a national archival system.⁴⁷ Lamb's recommendations were eventually enacted in legislation with the passage of the Archives Act in 1983 – itself part of a suite of administrative law reform bills including a Freedom of Information Act. This law created the Archives as a quasi-independent entity with an appointed Advisory Council.

The national leadership and cultural/historical provisions of the legislation were, by some accounts, retained in the legislation despite the objections of senior staff in the Archives. While the advent of legislation gave the Archives a mandate to pursue a range of activities, during the 1980s only those activities relating to a narrowly defined administrative/legal role were pursued with any vigour. Although lack of resources and institutional inertia help

⁴⁴ Michael Piggott, "'An Important and Delicate Assignment': The Paton Inquiry, 1956-57", *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, 21, no. 4, 1990, pp. 213-223.

⁴⁵ Frank Upward, 'In Search of the Continuum: Ian Maclean's "Australian Experience" Essays on Recordkeeping', in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds, *The Records Continuum*, Clayton, Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, 1994, pp. 110-130; Peter J. Scott, 'The Record Group Concept: A Case for Abandonment', *American Archivist*, 29, no. 4, 1966; and Mark Wagland and Russell Kelly, 'The Series System - A Revolution in Archival Control', in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds, *The Records Continuum*, Clayton, Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, 1994, pp. 131-149.

⁴⁶ Hilary Golder, *Documenting a Nation*, Canberra, Australian Archives, 1994, p. 37; Colin Smith, 'A Hitchhiker's Guide to Australian Archival History', in S. McKemmish and F. Upward, eds, *Archival Documents, Providing Accountability Through Recordkeeping*, Melbourne, Ancora Press, 1993, pp. 197-210.

⁴⁷ Australia. Parliament, *Development of the National Archives*, Canberra, AGPS, 1975.

explain this situation, the changes initiated by George Nichols as Director-General during the 1990s that resulted in the Archives pursuing a vibrant and proactive role as both a cultural institution⁴⁸ and an agent of democratic accountability merely highlight the poverty of vision of some of his predecessors.

In State Government jurisdictions archival institutions have suffered from a variety of malaises including under-funding, lack of public visibility and control by the sometimes stifling hand of librarians. More recently, however, new public records legislation in a number of jurisdictions has given State and Territory archives greatly enhanced powers as cultural institutions and as semi-independent agents of democratic accountability. In many cases these positive developments have been assisted by spectacular examples of failed public administration, assisted at least in part by a lack of regulation regarding public recordkeeping.⁴⁹ Time will tell if the State and Territory Archives are given the resources and the true independence both to reinvent themselves organizationally and pursue their new mandates with the vigour that they deserve.

The collecting tradition in Australia

An Australian equivalent of the Historical Manuscripts Tradition, in the form of a network of State and Commonwealth Government research libraries, was the first to apply serious endeavour to the business of identifying, preserving and making available valuable archival materials. These efforts grew out of the antiquarian work of private collectors and historical societies and, until the 1940s were characterized by a desire to preserve documents relating to the origins of European settlement in Australia. The Mitchell Library, opened in Sydney in 1910, was founded on the bequest of the prodigious collector David Scott Mitchell. Similar, though less extensive, collections of personal papers preserved alongside other categories of historical source material were subsequently established in State Libraries in each of the other jurisdictions.⁵⁰

During the 1950s and 1960s there was an almost exponential expansion in the institutional collecting of private archives in Australia. At the forefront of this expansion was the National Library in Canberra,⁵¹ but also significant was the emergence of new collecting

⁴⁸ Gabrielle Hyslop, 'For Many Audiences: Developing Public Programs at the National Archives of Australia', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 30, no. 1, 2002, pp. 48-59.

⁴⁹ Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, 'Overview of archival legislation in Australia', in *Archives at Risk: Proceedings of the Australian Society of Archivists Annual Conference, Brisbane, 1999*, Canberra, Australian Society of Archivists, 2001, pp. 95-99; Ted Ling, 'Acts of Atonement: recent developments in Australian archival legislation', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 23, no. 2, 2002, pp. 209-221; and Chris Hurley, 'From Dust Bins to Disk-drives and Now to Dispersal: the State Records Act 1998 (New South Wales)', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 26, no. 2, 1998, pp. 390-409.

⁵⁰ Graeme Powell, 'The Collecting of Personal and Private Papers in Australia', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 24, no. 1, 1996, pp. 62-64.

⁵¹ John Thompson, "'Let Time and Chance Decide": Deliberation and Fate in the Collecting of Personal Papers', in Peter Cochrane, ed., *Remarkable Occurrences*, Canberra, National Library of Australia, 2001, pp. 105-122; and Graeme Powell, 'Modes of Acquisition: The Growth of the

programs such as the University of Melbourne Archives⁵² and the Australian National University's Archives of Business and Labour, which have specialized in collecting the records of Australia's leading businesses and trade union organizations.⁵³ In large part this expansion reflected a similar expansion in the study and teaching of Australian history in Australia's rapidly expanding university system. According to Stuart Macintyre, the number of full time professors and lecturers in history in Australian tertiary institutions expanded from fewer than 20 in 1939 to more than 700 in 1973.⁵⁴

The emergence of new collecting programs and the simultaneous expansion and shift in collecting emphasis by the existing programs stemmed from a desire to serve the needs of this expanding researcher clientele. Both phenomena reflected a more self-confident, nationalistic and prosperous Australia, a nation that was keen to apply the methods of scientific history to the task of understanding and articulating a national identity. There was also continuity between the old amateur collecting paradigm and the new professional, institution-building paradigm. Both types of collecting constituted, in the words of James Clifford, 'a form of western subjectivity' and a 'crucial process of Western identity formation'.⁵⁵ Human beings are storytelling creatures. Every society develops mechanisms for the formation and persistence of collective memory for storytelling purposes. Archives, when they pursue a cultural/historical role, provide one such mechanism that will very often secure and retain the support of the society in which they exist.

Just as the growth of social history, with its commitment to uncovering the lived experience of ordinary people, provided a major boost to the collection and preservation of textual archives, so too did it foster the growth of associated documentation and preservation programs such as oral history, film and sound archives and, more recently, computer data archives. The National Library commenced gathering and preserving sound recordings and transcripts of oral history interviews with prominent Australians during the 1950s as an adjunct to its manuscript collecting program. Initially based on the Columbia University model of an oral history program, the Library's efforts have since expanded to encompass thematic social history projects such as the history of the timber industry and documentation of the HIV/Aids epidemic. The Library's oral history holdings now include some 30,000 hours of original recordings. The program also incorporates a component of field recordings of folkloric tales and music, similar to that pioneered by the US Library of

Manuscript Collection of the National Library of Australia', in Peter Biskup and Margaret Henty, eds, 'Library for the Nation', *Australian Academic & Research Libraries special issue*, Canberra, 1991, pp. 74-80.

⁵² Leigh Swancott, 'Origins and Development of the University of Melbourne Archives', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 27, no. 2, 1999, pp. 40-47.

⁵³ Peter Moore and Ewan Maidment, 'The Archives of Business and Labour, 1954-1982', *Labour History*, 44, 1983, pp. 107-112.

⁵⁴ Stuart Macintyre, 'The Writing of Australian History', in D.H. Borchart and Victor Crittenden, eds, *Australians: A Guide to Sources*, Sydney, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987, p. 22.

⁵⁵ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1988, quoted in Tom Griffith, *Hunters and Collectors*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 25.

Congress.⁵⁶ Over 400 similar, though much smaller, oral history collections have been established in libraries and archives such as the Northern Territory Archives Service.⁵⁷

The National Library also pioneered the collecting of another category of Australia's documentary heritage in the form of films and sound recordings. As early as 1935 the Library established (as a result of a Cabinet decision) a 'National Historical Film and Speaking Record Library'. After some years of lobbying by the film and sound industry and others, the National Film Archive and Sound Recording Section were eventually separated from the Library in 1984 as a new institution called the National Film and Sound Archive, with its headquarters in Canberra. Although it lacks a legislative mandate and the kind of bureaucratic independence that is enjoyed by both the National Library and the National Archives, ScreenSound Australia, as it is now branded, enjoys a solid international reputation for professional excellence in the field of film and sound preservation and is an active participant in international professional forums such as the International Association of Sound Archives (IASA) and the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF). For the most part ScreenSound Australia restricts its collecting activity to the output of the Australian private sector media industries, with the various public records archives in each jurisdiction being responsible for the control and preservation of archival value audiovisual records produced in the public sector.⁵⁸ In the Commonwealth the picture is further complicated by the fact that custody of the audiovisual records of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which as Commonwealth records are all ultimately the responsibility of the National Archives, is shared between the ABC's own in-house archives and the various repositories of the National Archives.

Another strand in the collecting archives scene can be found in the area of data archives. The leading archive of this type in Australia, the Social Science Data Archives, was established at the Australian National University in 1981. Its brief is to collect, preserve and make available for use computer readable data and statistical sets emanating from social, political and economic research projects in the disciplines of the social sciences. The creators and depositors of these data sets include academics, government and private organizations and individuals. Such initiatives are consistent with an international tradition of data archiving in the sciences and social sciences, as represented by the activities of the International Federation of Data Organizations and institutions such as the UK Data Archive, based at the University of Essex. In recent years data archives have made great use

⁵⁶ Barry York, "'Impossible on Less Terms": The Oral History Collection', in Peter Cochrane, ed., *Remarkable Occurrences*, Canberra, National Library of Australia, 2001, pp. 183-197.

⁵⁷ National Library of Australia, *Australia's Oral History Collections*, available at: <http://www.nla.gov.au/ohdir/about.html>; and Francis Good, 'Technology and oral history at the Northern Territory Archives Service', in *Archives in the Tropics*, op. cit., pp. 60-66.

⁵⁸ Peter Cochrane, 'Rescuing "The Sentimental Bloke"', in Peter Cochrane, ed., *Remarkable Occurrences*, Canberra, National Library of Australia, 2001, pp. 78-80; Graham Shirley, 'Activism Towards a National Film Archive', *Cinema Papers*, July 1984; Ray Edmondson, 'Sacilege or Synthesis? An Exploration of the Philosophy of Audiovisual Archiving', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 23, no. 1, 1995, pp. 18-29; and Ray Edmondson, 'A Case of Mistaken Identity: Governance, Guardianship and the ScreenSound Saga', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 30, no. 1, 2002, pp. 30-46.

of the World Wide Web to help identify and disseminate qualitative and quantitative statistical data sets for secondary use research and learning.

Unlike their public records counterparts, collecting archives programs have been little troubled by existential dilemmas caused by the need to either combine or choose between the often conflicting roles of supporting a bureaucracy, enabling democratic accountability and supporting cultural/historical endeavour. The collecting archives' sole *raison d'être* is a cultural/historical one. In this, they have much in common with museums, which are themselves significant players in the collecting and preserving of archival materials in Australia.⁵⁹ For instance, one of the country's best-known museums, the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, also acts as a collecting archive and as a repository of Commonwealth records relating to Australia's various military endeavours.⁶⁰ The expansion in funding for archival collecting activities during the 1950s and 1960s provides ample evidence of the value Australian society placed on the pursuit of this role by means of collecting.⁶¹ Today the funding and relative fortunes of the collecting programs may not appear as impressive as they were during this earlier period of rapid growth. This is in part a reflection of declining support for academic history coupled with changes in historiographical philosophy, which nowadays places less emphasis on finding 'truth' in source documents. Certainly the quantity of holdings, in terms of items and shelf metres, in Australia's various collecting archives today is dwarfed by that of the public records institutions. Nevertheless, the collecting archives enterprise in Australia today remains impressively robust and continues to enjoy good public support and a reasonable, though sometimes uncertain, level of funding, including the provision of taxation incentives for donors in the form of the Commonwealth Government's Cultural Gifts Program. In the field of science and technology the work of collecting archives is also complemented by the long-standing contributions of the Australian Science and Technology Heritage Centre (first established as the Australian Science Archives Project in 1985), based at the University of Melbourne. This non-collecting archival documentation program locates, identifies, describes and publicizes significant archival material relating to scientific endeavour in Australia and, when necessary, arranges for the preservation of such records by a suitable collecting organization.⁶²

The distributed national collection of private records in Australia is, however, not without problems. Graeme Powell has highlighted the lopsided nature of these holdings – the fact that certain areas of activity such as politics and literature are very well represented, while other significant areas of human endeavour in Australia are grossly under-represented.⁶³

⁵⁹ Bruce Smith, 'Archives in Museums', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 23, no. 1, 1995, pp. 38-47.

⁶⁰ Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, 'The Australian War Memorial and Commonwealth Records, 1942-1952', in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds, *The Records Continuum*, Clayton, Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, 1994, pp. 18-34.

⁶¹ Suzanne Fairbanks, 'Social Warrants for Collective Memory: Case Studies of Australian Collecting Archives', Master of Arts (Archives and Records) Thesis, Monash University, 1999.

⁶² See the Centre's website at: <http://www.austehc.unimelb.edu.au/>

⁶³ Powell, op. cit.; and Marie-Louise Ayres, 'Evaluating the Archives: 20th Century Australian Literature', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 29, no. 2, 2001, pp. 32-47.

Doubtless a contributing factor to this is the ad hoc acquisitions policies of the various collecting programs, a problem accentuated by a lack of a centrally coordinated national archival system,⁶⁴ such as exists in many other countries. The fostering of such a system is in fact a legislatively mandated, but largely ignored, responsibility of the National Archives of Australia. This malaise has its roots in Australia's federal system of government and lingering colonial/states rights issues. Arguably, a contributing factor is the National Archives' apparent view that its core responsibilities begin and end with Commonwealth records, while lingering historical tension and competition between the National Archives and the National Library may also have been an important factor for many years.

Business archives in Australia

At the beginning of this chapter it was argued that many archives combine multiple roles. Good examples of this can be found in Australian business and university archives. Mention has already been made in our examination of collecting archives of the University of Melbourne Archives and the ANU's Archives of Business and Labour (now called the Noel Butlin Archives Centre). Both archives were established with the main aim of collecting the records of Australian businesses, primarily to serve the needs of economic historians. In ANU's case this occurred at the instigation of historian Noel Butlin, while in Melbourne the initiative came from one of the most interesting and significant groups ever to exert an influence on recordkeeping in Australia, the Business Archives Council of Australia (BACA).

BACA was established at the University of Sydney in 1954 and was modelled on the British Records Association. It brought together historians, archivists, librarians and businessmen with the aim of promoting awareness amongst the business community of the importance of and methods for preserving valuable business records in order to support the pursuit of business history. Initially the aim of BACA was to encourage good recordkeeping within companies, including the establishment of in-house archives. The collecting of business records by other organizations was very much an afterthought. A Victorian Branch of BACA was established in 1957 at the suggestion of the ubiquitous and indefatigable Harold White. White used his contacts with senior Melbourne librarians, history professors and captains of industry to assemble a formidable alliance of business archives advocates. Inevitably, White was attracted to this endeavour by the prospect of eventually enriching the National Library's collection with the records of some of Australia's leading businesses. This collecting aim was, however, a longer term objective. To achieve that objective White recognized that the collecting archives had to both establish a positive working relationship with the potential donors and also provide immediate assistance to businesses to ensure that the most valuable records were properly identified and managed by their creators in the short term. By emphasizing the business benefits of the latter to his corporate audience White hoped to also achieve the former – a

⁶⁴ Adrian Cunningham, 'From Here to Eternity: Collecting Archives and the Need for a National Documentation Strategy', *LASIE*, 29, no. 1, 1998, pp. 32-45.

positive working relationship that could lead to later donations of records from the corporate sector.⁶⁵

The Victorian Branch of BACA was based at the University of Melbourne, where historians like John La Nauze and Geoffrey Serle decided that Melbourne should emulate the collecting efforts that Noel Butlin was energetically pursuing in Canberra. Before long, Harold White found himself in collecting competition with not one, but two university archives. Eventually White agreed that the National Library would leave the collecting of business archives to the universities, but the concession was not granted without a bitter struggle. In the meantime White, Frank Strahan (inaugural University of Melbourne Archivist) and others had pursued a campaign under the auspices of BACA to educate businessmen in the fundamentals of professional records management, using the argument that good recordkeeping is good for business. This was a rare and relatively successful example of archivists with overriding cultural/historical objectives adopting and pursuing objectives associated with supporting the business needs of organizations.⁶⁶

The innovative adoption of a dual historical/administrative role by archivists operating in a private sector records environment proved to be quite successful, especially considering the relatively low level of total resources that constituted the combination of BACA and the two university archives. A survey of the state of Australian business archives conducted by Simon Ville and Grant Fleming in the late 1990s found a remarkably high retention rate of archives of Australia's top companies for the first sixty to seventy years of the twentieth century – preserved either by in-house archives such as the Archives of Westpac Bank or BHP Billiton or by collecting archives.⁶⁷ It is not unreasonable to attribute this success, at least in part, to the work of BACA and the major collecting archives. Sadly, they and others have noted an alarming decrease in the preservation of significant Australian business records dating from the early 1970s after BACA had effectively ceased to operate, a situation that may also reflect a decline in interest in economic history in the tertiary education sector.⁶⁸

Educational and religious archives in Australia

The significance of the role of two university-based collecting archives, the Noel Butlin Archives Centre and the University of Melbourne Archives, has already been discussed in some detail. Similar collecting programs have also been established at university archives in Wollongong and Newcastle and at the University of New England in Armidale and

⁶⁵ Fairbanks, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-67.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-85.

⁶⁷ Simon Ville and Grant Fleming, 'Locating Australian Corporate Memory', *Business History Review*, 73, 1999, pp. 256-64; and D. Terwiel, S.P. Ville and G.A. Fleming, *Australian Business Records*, Canberra, Department of Economic History, Australian National University, 1998.

⁶⁸ Kathryn Dan and Bruce Smith, 'Where Have all the [Business] Archives Gone?', in *Archives at Risk*, *op. cit.*; and Colleen Pritchard, 'Survey of business records', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 15, no. 2, 1987, pp. 139-148.

Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga, each of which adopt a regional emphasis in their collecting programs.⁶⁹ The University of Queensland's Fryer Library has for many years collected records associated with literary endeavour in Australia as, more recently, has the Australian Defence Force Academy's Library in Canberra. These university-based collecting archives are generally the product of the energies of enthusiastic and committed individuals responsible for the creation and continued existence of collections that relate to their research interests. In theory they exist primarily to support the research and teaching activities of the university concerned, although in practice their continued existence often relies on patronage and is, as a consequence, tenuous.

Equally precarious is the existence of in-house university archives responsible for the universities' own records. While most of Australia's thirty-eight publicly funded universities have records officers and/or records managers, they do not always have an in-house archives. Those in-house archives that do exist find themselves in a variety of structural reporting arrangements, with some reporting to the university librarian and others associated with the administrative/chancery arm of the university. In many cases the in-house archives that do exist are severely under-resourced. As a result of recent legislative changes in some State jurisdictions, university recordkeeping requirements are now more formally mandated, with the relevant State Archives exercising overall responsibility for setting recordkeeping standards and authorizing the destruction of university records.

Some university archives combine a collecting and an in-house function. Don Boadle has argued that this marriage is not always a successful one, with university administrators and in some cases the archivists themselves being unable to articulate a clear and compelling mission for a unified archival program. Indeed, in some cases it could be argued that the combined function has resulted in an identity crisis that suggests the worst of both worlds rather than the best of both worlds.⁷⁰ As with many of their State and Commonwealth Archives colleagues, these archivists have struggled to achieve consensus on the value of simultaneously pursuing legal, administrative, cultural and accountability roles, much less consensus on how such an integrated vision might actually be pursued and achieved in an environment where support from senior university administrators is often ambivalent at best. Moves towards a national or even State-based strategy in this area will, if past experience is any guide, struggle in the face of the tendency by universities to guard their independence and autonomy with jealousy and vigour.

⁶⁹ Don Boadle, 'Origins and Development of the New South Wales Regional Repositories System', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 23, no. 2, 1995, pp. 274-288; and 'Documenting 20th Century Rural and Regional Australia: Archival Acquisition and Collection Development in Regional University Archives and Special Collections', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 29, no. 2, 2001, pp. 64-81.

⁷⁰ Don Boadle, 'Australian University Archives and Their Prospects', *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, 30, no. 3, 1999, pp. 153-170; 'Australian University Archives and Their Management of the Records Continuum 1953-1997', in Peter Crush, ed., *Archives and Reform – Preparing for Tomorrow*, op. cit., pp. 247-255; and 'Archives at the Edge? Australian University Archives and the Challenge of the New Information Age', in *Place, Interface and Cyberspace: Archives at the Edge – Proceedings of the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, Fremantle, 6-8 August 1998*, Canberra, ASA, 1999, pp. 73-82.

Finally, to conclude this examination of the types of archival institutions in Australia, there exist a very large number of in-house archival programs in Australia's various independent (non-government) schools and religious organizations. These programs are often staffed by part-time and/or volunteer staff and struggle to attain resourcing commensurate with the scope of their operations.⁷¹ Church archives house records of dioceses, parishes and/or religious orders. In recent years their work has been thrust into the spotlight because of the role churches played in the now controversial and emotive issues of child migration and the Aboriginal 'stolen generations'. Access policies of these archives have been greatly tested in the context of the churches coming to terms with their role in these unfortunate episodes of Australian history and their relationships with aggrieved individuals who were separated from their families and often badly mistreated in the hands of church officials.⁷²

Archives as a place and virtual archives

Throughout the ages one of the regularly recurring functions of archival institutions is to provide a secure place for the safekeeping of valuable records to guarantee the ongoing legal authenticity of those records. This is especially common for archives that serve solely or primarily a legal/administrative role, where control and possession of the records is recognized as a source of power. Luciana Duranti has highlighted the importance of this function in archives stretching back to the days of the Justinian Code and the Tabularium in Ancient Rome, while Michel Duchein has identified the same issue as being important to archives in Flanders and Hungary. One of Sir Hilary Jenkinson's more influential contributions to the archival discourse is the related notion of the need to guarantee an uninterrupted transmission of custody from records creator to archival institution – the physical and moral defence of the record. Duranti has argued that when records 'cross the archival threshold' they are attested to be authentic and henceforth guaranteed to be preserved as such by an archives that is independent from the records creating office and for which the preservation of the authenticity of its holdings is its *raison d'être*.⁷³

While this is a common theme in the history of archival institutions, it is not a universal one. Duchein has argued that there are many countries in which the notion has never existed, including France 'where the fact of its being preserved in a public archival repository does not give a document any guarantee of authenticity'.⁷⁴ Similarly, while the preservation of authenticity is undoubtedly an objective of most collecting/historical

⁷¹ Jan Riley, 'Integrating Archival Programs into the Core Business of the Independent School', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 25, no. 1, 1997, pp. 50-61.

⁷² Australia. Parliament. Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee, *Healing: A Legacy of Generations, The Report of the Inquiry into the Federal Government's Implementation of the Recommendations Made by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission*, Canberra, 2000; Kirsten Thorpe, 'Indigenous Records: How Far Have We Come in Bringing the History Back Home?', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 29, no. 2, 2001, p. 28.

⁷³ Duranti, 1996, op. cit.; Duchein, 1992, op. cit., p. 15; Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1922.

⁷⁴ Duchein, 1992, op. cit., p. 15.

archives programs, it cannot be said to be their *raison d'être*. More recently, archivists who agree with Duranti and Jenkinson about the absolute importance of guaranteeing the authenticity of records, have disagreed with Duranti's argument that this can only be achieved by means of archival institutions taking physical custody of the records. To these critics adequate control of records to guarantee authenticity in the digital age can be achieved without the need for archives to provide a physical place of safekeeping. In the digital age the very physicality of records is superseded by a virtual concept or 'performance' where the idea of a record having a set physical location becomes meaningless. Records continuum theorists also object to the notion of records crossing an 'archival threshold' at some point in time after their creation. To these critics the 'archival bond' and subsequent guarantees of authenticity should commence at the point of records creation which, by definition, cannot be physically in the archives. If the archival bond is achieved and guaranteed at the point of records creation the decision when or whether to perform a physical act of custodial transfer to an archives becomes a minor administrative consideration, not a matter of central significance.⁷⁵



Figure 2.2. 'This temple of our history will appropriately be one of the most beautiful buildings in America, an expression of the American soul.' (Herbert Hoover, 20 February 1933 at the laying of the foundation stone of the National Archives building, Washington D.C.)

⁷⁵ Terry Cook, 'Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The revolution in information management and archives in the post-custodial and post-modernist era', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 22, no. 2, 1994, pp. 300-328; Frank Upward and Sue McKemmish, 'Somewhere Beyond Custody', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 22, no. 1, 1994, pp. 136-149; F. Gerald Ham, 'Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era', *American Archivist*, 44, Summer 1981, pp. 207-216; and Margaret Hedstrom, 'Archives as Repositories: A Commentary', in *Archival Management of Electronic Records, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report no. 13*, Pittsburgh, 1992.

Another strand to this topic is the architectural use of archival buildings to make symbolic statements about the role and significance of archives in society. Many archival buildings throughout the ages have architectural features suggestive of solidity, impenetrability, durability and authority. Indeed, such featurism is so common as to be almost a cliché – something which itself speaks volumes about perceptions of archival institutions. Recent, more imaginative architectural representations of the form and function of archives, such as the Gatineau Preservation Centre in Canada, have attempted to convey an image of archives as ‘the epitome of liberal-humanist and objective-scientific activity’, but perhaps unwittingly reflect instead the ultimately indeterminate and mutable nature of the archival pursuit.⁷⁶



Figure 2.3. The National Archives of Canada's Gatineau Preservation Centre, Quebec, opened in 1997.

One feature of the ‘archives as a place’ debate has been the perhaps naïve assertion by the post-custodialists that technological change has made it possible, indeed essential, for digital records to be archivally captured, described and controlled in such a way as to guarantee the authenticity and integrity of the records from the instant of creation onwards. Perhaps the closest archivists have yet come to achieving this vision is with the ‘VERS

⁷⁶ Lilly Koltun, ‘The Architecture of Archives: Whose Form, What Functions?’, *Archival Science*, 2, no. 3/4, 2002, pp. 239-261.

encapsulated objects' of the Victorian Electronic Records Strategy (VERS). The fact remains, however, that the assertion remains an unproven – though appealing – hypothesis.

Ultimately, different archives will make their own choices as to how important guarantees of authenticity are and, if they are considered vital, which strategies they feel will give them the best chance of achieving that objective. Certainly, the post-custodians argue for a more proactive and virtual 'archives without walls' as an antidote to the traditional passive custodial view, although there is no reason why a custodial approach could not also be combined with a more proactive role. Jeannette Bastian has recently argued that (distributed) custody and authenticity should not be ends in themselves as argued by Duranti and Jenkinson, but rather the means to a more important end – that of facilitating use of the archives by those who stand to benefit from such activity.⁷⁷ As Frank Upward has argued, 'the externalities of place are becoming less significant day-by-day ... the location of the resources and services will be of no concern to those using them'.⁷⁸ In the online world the development of virtual archives is not only desirable, but also essential for continued relevance and survival. Users will wish to be assured of authenticity, but will not care less about the existence of or necessity for places of custody. It may still be too early in the digital age to know which of the opposing sides in the post-custodial/archives-as-a-place debate is right, or if indeed the debate is even a relevant one. It will, however, be interesting to watch as archival institutions respond to new virtual access opportunities, learn from their experiences and confirm or modify their philosophies and strategies accordingly.

Conclusion

We have seen how archives in different times and in different places take different forms, pursue different strategies and different combinations of objectives. We have seen that these differences can be explained with reference to the political and cultural environment in which archives exist and the objectives of those who own, control or are responsible for the existence of the archives. We have seen that archives are not passive, objective and 'neutral repositories of facts', but rather active and subjective participants in and shapers of political and cultural power relations.⁷⁹ The power to decide which records constitute the archives and, conversely, which records do not, coupled with the power to determine who can have access to the archives are powers that can be used for good or for bad. Usually, they are used by those who control the archives to support and bolster their own political and economic position, views and mythologies. In democracies, however, there is at least the potential for archives to act as enablers of citizen empowerment and democratic accountability and transparency – a potential that unfortunately remains more latent than

⁷⁷ Jeannette A. Bastian, 'Taking Custody, Giving Access: A Postcustodial Role for a New Century', *Archivaria*, 53, 2002, pp. 76-93.

⁷⁸ Frank Upward, 'Structuring the Records Continuum Part One: Post-custodial principles and properties', *Archives and Manuscripts*, 24, no. 2, 1996, p. 282.

⁷⁹ Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook, 'Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory', *Archival Science*, 2, 2002, pp. 1-19.

actual in most cases. While public records archives in democratic nations should be substantially independent from the executive government of the day, so that they can play a proactive role in ensuring the accountability of that government, most such archives are in fact a part of executive government and enjoy only limited independence. This suggests that the main role of these archives is to serve the legal, administrative and culture constructing objectives of the government, rather than any truly democratic purpose. Even in democracies, governments do not surrender lightly the power of archival consignment.

We have also seen that the political and social purposes of archives are never eternal. These purposes are always being contested, reconsidered, reinvented and transformed, reflecting the judgments of and changing power relations in society. This was seen most dramatically as a result of the French Revolution, but there are other notable examples, such as the transformation of archives in post-Apartheid South Africa, in post-Communist Eastern Europe and in post-Colonial Asia and the Pacific. We have also seen that archives that were originally established to serve the narrow legal, economic and administrative purposes of a ruling elite can also be transformed and reinvented to serve broader cultural objectives of society – objectives that are themselves eternally subject to contestation and reinvention.⁸⁰

The consequences of these lessons depend on your values and perspectives. From this author's perspective the best archives are those that serve broad social, cultural and democratic accountability purposes. In reality, we have seen that such archives often struggle to emerge from or succeed within a governance environment that does not place high value on such purposes. In more tightly controlled and less democratic environments archives that serve the narrow political, legal, economic and symbolic objectives of the ruling elite will generally enjoy greater funding, support and patronage. As we have seen, however, circumstances can change. Any archives are better than no archives and those which today serve a narrow set of power interests may tomorrow be reinvented to serve broader social and democratic interests. The key is for archivists to understand the roles that they play and to remain ever alert and sensitive to the political and social dynamics in which their archives operates. Archivists should always be ready to take advantage of changing circumstances that may permit their archives to serve more pluralistic, socially inclusive and democratically empowering roles.

Discussion of the role of archives as enablers of democratic transparency and accountability cannot ignore the issue of archival accountability and transparency. If the archives should help to hold a government accountable, to whom is the archives accountable? The answer should be the wider community. Unfortunately, however, most archives have a long

⁸⁰ Verne Harris, 'The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa', *Archival Science*, 2, 2002, pp. 63-86; Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science*, 2, 2002, pp. 87-109; Friedrich P. Kahlenberg, 'Democracy and Federalism: Changes in the National Archival System in a United Germany', *American Archivist*, 55, Winter 1992, pp. 72-85; Imre Röss, 'The Effects of Democratization on Archival Administration and Use in Eastern Middle Europe', *American Archivist*, 55, Winter 1992, pp. 86-93; and Patricia Kennedy Grimstead, 'Beyond *Perestroika*: Soviet-Area Archives after the August Coup', *American Archivist*, 55, Winter 1992, pp. 94-124.

distance still to travel before they can claim to practise what they preach with regard to transparency and accountability for their own politically charged decisions and activities. Too often archives and archivists are guilty of making their decisions behind closed doors and justifying their actions with spurious claims of sacrosanct professionalism and scientific objectivity. The first steps for archives in a democracy to become truly effective enablers of transparency and accountability are for this role to be effectively communicated to and understood by the wider community and for the archives itself to become fully transparent and accountable for its own operations and decisions.

Depending on their social and political circumstances and on their own choices and actions, archives can pursue missions that can either hinder or assist society in being civil, pluralistic, open, just and democratic. To sum up the alternatives in the form of haiku, the question is should:

*Archives bolster and
perpetuate the power
of ruling elites*

or should

*Archivists help our
society to tell stories
about itself*

and

*Archives nurture and
sustain the soul and conscience
of human beings?*

Readings

- Ernst Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1972.
The definitive text on the development of archival institutions in the ancient world.
- Judith M. Panitch, 'Liberty, Equality, Posterity?: Some Archival Lessons from the Case of the French Revolution', *American Archivist*, 59, Winter 1996, pp. 30-47.
Using the pivotal example of the French Revolution, this article illustrates how archival institutions are the mutable and contestable products of their time.
- Luke J. Gilliland-Swetland, 'The Provenance of a Profession: The Permanence of the Public Archives and Historical Manuscripts Traditions in American Archival History', *American Archivist*, 54, Spring 1991, pp. 160-175.
Traces the origins and history of the split between public records institutions and those working in the so-called 'Historical Manuscripts Tradition' in the United States and considers the implications of the existence of these very different views of the role and functions of archival institutions.
- Michael Piggott, 'Beginnings', in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds, *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years*, Clayton, Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, 1994, pp. 1-17.
Surveys the activities that culminated in the establishment in the 1940s of the organization that is today called the National Archives of Australia.
- Suzanne Fairbanks, 'Social Warrants for Collective Memory: Case Studies of Australian Collecting Archives', Master of Arts (Archives and Records) Thesis, Monash University, 1999.
Examines the activities that informed the development of key collecting archives institutions in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s, exploring the warrants and mandates that gave impetus to these archival programs.