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## Letters to the Editor

Linda M. Matthews  
*Emory University*

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LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Letters to the Editors which include pertinent and constructive comments or criticism of articles or reviews recently published in GEORGIA ARCHIVE are welcome. Ordinarily, such letters should not exceed three hundred words.

To the Editors:

We are writing to express disagreement with one of the main points of the article by David Mycue in the Fall 1979 issue ("The Archivist as Scholar: A Case for Research by Archivists"), pages 10-16.

While we favor scholarly research and publication by archivists, we realize that such work is not possible for many professional archivists. Mr. Mycue says that archival work by itself is of a "technical" rather than professional nature. On the contrary, the administration of archives is a professional occupation, requiring education, experience, and skills different from those required by other professions. There will always be research in some archives by archivists, but the principal work that archivists do can be done only by professional archivists.

We also question Mr. Mycue's interpretation of many of his sources, especially in the following footnotes:

- Note 1: Maynard Brichford's article does not "downplay" the research role of archivists, and Mr. Mycue does not cite other "leaders of the archival profession" to substantiate his statement.
- Note 9: Lester J. Cappon refers to the publication of indexes and descriptions of archival holdings, not to scholarly publications by archivists.
- Note 10: Mr. Mycue speaks of the archivist being "a scholar manqué," that is, a spoiled or failed scholar, but the two writers he cites do not make that statement and are not discussing the research activity of archivists; they refer to public historians.
- Note 14: Walter Rundell certainly is not writing about any obligation of archivists to do research, but about the advisability of foundation funding for such research.

Contrary to Mr. Mycue's statements, the archives profession is not in danger of being "classed as a clerical skill" by anyone who appreciates the value of an archivist's work as an archivist.

Trudy A. Dittmar  
David E. Horn  
DePauw University Archives

MR. MYCUE RESPONDS:

To the Editors:

To beg the question by assuming that an archivist is a special sort of professional, and by the further assumption that a professional does not work at a technical skill, hardly convinces. Those who have undergone a military basic training, to the shouts of sergeants declaring that they were building professional soldiers, know that the term "professional" is subject to loose usage. But if a professional is one who engages in an occupation that necessitates continuous study to keep abreast of a vast and expanding body of knowledge, one may doubt that the literature about archives elevates it to professional status. Nevertheless, should scholarly research into archival holdings be mandatory for effective archival operations, a true profession exists for those who endeavor to master not only the mechanics but the substance of their work.

The word "downplay" appeared without my knowledge. I had written "overlook" in noting that archivists pass over the values of personal research for fellow archivists while advising others to engage in the pursuit. That even those archivists who unintentionally leave this impression may actually favor archivists' research is clear from the final paragraphs of my article. Scholarly activities of archival leaders, such as Cappon, reveal that they do not advocate limiting archivists' research to writing inventories or other finding aids. Whether one advocates research underwritten by grant or institutional funding appears irrelevant. Many grants are awarded with the aim that projects will develop into ongoing programs. Although it is deplorable that so many of us rely upon unabridged dictionaries that fail to give the definition "unfulfilled scholars" for the French word, it is curious that an italicized word is considered a quotation. Articles in Public Historian certainly do lead to the conclusion that those with scholarly training, but working outside academia, are not regarded as equals by university teachers.

Sympathy is deserved for veteran archivists who worry that academic unemployment could result in the hiring of Ph.D.s as archivists who may prove uncommitted to the necessary routine tasks and whose credentials may impel employers to favor them on promotion lists. Emotional barriers will impede realignment of history and American archival practice owing to the widespread belief among archivists that

theirs is a unique enterprise, a belief partly generated by past con-  
descending attitudes of historians toward archivists and supercilious  
attitudes of librarians toward what they consider a narrow specialty.

David Mycue  
Illinois State Archives