

THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX: RE-IMAGINING ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION
WITH THE "SERIES" SYSTEM

BY

DAN DAVIES

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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**THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX: RE-IMAGINING ARCHIVAL DESCRIPTION
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ABSTRACT

The massive amount of information in archives has long presented archivists with the challenge of representing it in a way that both enhances its value as evidence and facilitates research. Over the last two centuries, archivists have responded to this by adopting various means of collective description of records. They have moved away from attempting to replicate the information in individual records and toward general descriptions of the context of the creation of groups of records related by a common provenance. By the 1980s in Canada this approach found expression in widespread adoption of the fonds as the focal point of archival description. The fonds approach, however, has been criticized for not being flexible enough to account for the varied creators or multiple provenance of a given body of records. By contrast, another approach, the “series” system, first developed in Australia in the 1960s, has enjoyed increasing popularity because it depicts the complex multiple provenance many records have. The series system has recently been adopted at the Archives of Ontario and Archives of Manitoba. This thesis examines the history and strengths and weaknesses of the fonds and series systems, and argues that a significant enhancement of the latter, based on postmodern insights into the mediated character of communications and knowledge, offers a preferred approach to archival description. Among other advantages, archival descriptive systems would then show the influence that the archival process itself has on archival records as a feature of their creation or provenance. In this way Canadian archivists would confront, with more sophistication, the longstanding historical challenge of representing information in archives.

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Chapter One: The History of Archival Description: From Content to Context

Knowledge of archival history is important in contemporary archival work because archivists literally inherit the work of their predecessors. Understanding the evolution of archival work and the historical context in which previous archivists worked enables archivists to provide better service today with records shaped by past practices and concepts and a basis for critiquing past methods. This thesis will explore the representation of records by archivists in the function of archival description. These representations have a history shaped by the archival and societal mentalities and needs of particular times and by the types of records encountered at these times.

When representations are perceived to be inappropriate to their archival and societal contexts archival theory about representing the records is altered (and, by implication, the practice of archival description changes too). Consequently, the products of archival description, the representations of the records, undergo changes intended to better reflect the evolving understanding of that endeavour, or its assumptions and responsibilities. This chapter attempts to shed some light on the origins of 'modern' Western archival theory and practice in regard to representations of records, through a brief comparative analysis of efforts in Europe, the United States, and Canada.

In a brief essay entitled, "Origin and Development of the Concept of Archival Description" Canadian archival educator Luciana Duranti traces the origins and evolution of the idea of archival description. Duranti consults international archival

literature to identify types of descriptive records created over the centuries, their archival, legal, and historical contexts, and descriptive methods utilized by archivists over time. Duranti suggests that archival description has been influenced by two main concerns: describing the relationship between archival records and creators; and recognizing the needs of the various types of users of archival records. "These elements," she says, "have influenced the purpose of description, its process and products and its relationship with other archival activities."¹

The history of the archival endeavour must begin with the notion of archives as place – their role as 'houses of memory'. Archives as institutions had their origins in the ancient world as agents for legitimizing power and marginalizing those without power. According to Duranti, the most ancient known remains of archival description is a collection of clay tablets found in Assyria and dated 1500 B.C. Stores of information were compiled by ancient civilizations in order to preserve documents for the administrative use of their creators. They were preserved by their creators and retrieved on the basis of their physical arrangement, primarily by subject and year. The reason for compiling these collections was to take stock of the content of archives and remove the need for direct consultation of documents.² In ancient Greece and Rome, description was characterized by the copying of documents. The copies were created for external consultation and retrieved on the basis of the physical arrangement and form of the records. The copying of documents had an authentication purpose.³

Medieval European archives were collected and later often weeded and reconstructed in order to keep evidence of legal and business transactions. Archives also served explicit historical and symbolic purposes, but only for individuals and events deemed worthy of celebrating, or memorializing within the context of their time.⁴ The idea that description was about more than copying records gained ground as a result of issues such as the rise of municipal autonomy in the twelfth century. Description increasingly became a matter of formulating statements which represented the records in some way (rather than just copied them) due to the growing necessity to study precedents, document rights, and defend the interests of municipal authorities. For example, between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries inventories or lists of individual records were compiled in Italian city-states for the primary purpose of providing evidence of the existence of public documents.⁵ A secondary purpose was to provide future custodians of these records an item by item listing of documents and their individual locations, cabinet by cabinet. The descriptive activity of listing records served the mainly administrative purposes of the archives principal users – the records' creators.

During the period of absolute monarchies the concept of description expanded to include the creation of indexes and cross-referencing tools. These descriptive instruments were devised to facilitate the administrative control over holdings and improve the "retrieval of documents need to carry out business."⁶ These archives were the first "archives of concentration" and comprised records created and preserved since the early Middle Ages by predecessor and contemporary offices of the

sovereign. There was an acute need for administrative and physical control of these archives (often secret and inaccessible to all but a privileged few) - using location lists, based on the physical arrangement of documents - and designed to serve the function of 'perpetual memory'.⁷

In medieval Europe, state archives existed, to serve the state, as part of the state's structure and organizational culture.⁸ These descriptive activities of the state illustrate that a 'modern' concept of archival description was not yet part of the archival work. Instead, archival activities were focused on the physical arrangement of records, documenting their physical locations through basic lists of individual records or items. In the second half of the eighteenth century, two factors emerged to influence the nature of state archival records administration: Enlightenment ideas and the increasing recognition of the cultural purposes of archives.

The increasing importance of the cultural or historical role of archival records is illustrated by the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. The history of revolutionary France is marked by the public destruction of archival documents of the old regime (such as tax records and land titles). These events serve as useful examples of the symbolic role of archival records - in this case as signs of oppression and privilege.⁹ The growing cultural role of archives was spurred by the French Revolution as records which did survive were seen as having historical value, rather than much administrative value in the new age.¹⁰ In this way archival repositories housing such 'closed' records began to acquire a primary cultural function. The physical arrangement of archives evolved into a system of control based on the subject

and chronology of the records. The purpose was to facilitate an increasing demand for historical research which had been on the rise since the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.¹¹ Subject-based arrangement reflected the Enlightenment's 'classificatory' mindset.

Across the nineteenth century, the formative years of the modern European archival profession, methods of direct access to individual documents and their specific subject matter held sway in most archives, with indirect contextual methods in a subordinate position. In the nineteenth century, the creation of detailed calendars describing the content of individual documents was the common archival practice. These often published volumes were a popular descriptive tool used to summarize documents. Many calendars were created as basic lists of file titles and documents. And still many more were created as subject-content abstracts or indexes of records held by a repository. These activities, like many similar subject content oriented descriptions before them, attempted to provide direct access to individual records and their subject matter, as identified by archivists. Calendaring represents the high point of this conventional approach to archival description.

The creation of calendars was an arduous descriptive exercise for the purpose of capturing the information content of records. Documents were described one by one, and the most important or interesting were abstracted. Descriptions became surrogates for the documents themselves. The calendars were often reflective of archival materials assembled together by form (such as diplomas, correspondence) or subject. To produce such products meant the information content of records had to be

consulted, an activity to which archivists devoted increasing amounts of time. However, the increasing volume of records generated by the state which had to be analyzed and described in this manner overwhelmed the resources and capabilities of archivists by the early twentieth century. The descriptive work of calendaring reflected widespread indifference among archivists to the records' administrative and documentary context. However, during the latter half of the nineteenth century there was a gradual shift from such efforts to provide direct access to approaches which offered indirect access to records. This shift was driven in archival circles in the nineteenth century by an important intellectual development, the European discovery of the contextual approach to archival administration.¹²

The reaction to past emphasis on direct access was first stated in some European archives in the early nineteenth century with the formulation of the principle of provenance, expressed as a commitment to 'respect des fonds' and maintaining the original order of records. Some European archivists began to articulate the concept that archival documents could only be understood in relation to their provenance or origin or context of creation and in relation to other documents of similar origin. Respect des fonds (respect the fonds) maintains that all of the records created by a given creator (its fonds) should not be misidentified as or physically intermixed with those of other creators. In this way, their administrative provenance or context of creation could be better protected and understood. This thinking was a direct challenge to the previous practice of considering documents largely as self-

contained independent items to be rearranged in archives according to subject, chronological, or geographic categories.¹³

The new concept of provenance was applied in efforts by some European archivists to perform retrospective description. Attempts were made to rearrange intellectually records that had been previously physically separated and even broken apart and then classified by subjects, unrelated to their provenance. Archivists tried to reconstruct original archival groupings of the dismantled documents by first describing them according to their order (or disorder) and then rearranging them by provenance intellectually on paper. The elements of context such as the jurisdictional and administrative activities of creators were included in the retro-descriptions in order to show “the vicissitudes of their active life.”¹⁴

This development of the pivotal concept of provenance across the nineteenth century in many places in Europe was most prominently codified and advanced in 1898 in the so-called “Dutch Manual,” written by three Dutch archivists (Muller, Feith, and Fruin). Their Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives¹⁵ (hereafter referred to as the Manual) is a key milestone in the evolution of modern archival theory and its relationship to the provenance-based contextual approach to archival description. European approaches to description of archival records changed with the introduction of the concept of provenance. The Manual reflected this change and articulated the emerging view of description rooted in knowledge of the complex administrative and documentary histories of records. The Manual focused on arrangement and description of archival records.

The publication of the Manual also reflects the emergence of the distinctive archival profession, based on archival science – with all the positivist assumptions that entailed. Like so many other sciences, archival science emerged in the nineteenth century as a product of Enlightenment thinking and Western modernism.¹⁶ The Manual represents the first widely accepted articulation of the new archival science's fundamental concepts. For Duranti, the Dutch Manual is the first attempt at a scientific archival treatise. In her view, it reflects an effort to articulate systematically the concepts and methods that “find their validity in archival theoretical ideas with internal logic and consistency, rather than in their historical, legal, or cultural context.”¹⁷

The Manual outlined one hundred rules, which contain elaborate examples of the practical application of archival principles. It reflects the authors' exposure, during the late nineteenth century, to French archival theoretical influence as well as the introduction of German concepts of provenance into Dutch archival practices.¹⁸ The tenets of the Manual were applied only to government records. Private and individual archives were not addressed, as they were the traditional responsibility of libraries or private persons and families. The Dutch Manual was also intended as a guide to be consulted with flexibility and adaptability by archivists when unanticipated problems and challenges required solutions.

The principle of provenance, expressed as respect des fonds and original order, was employed by archivists who used the Manual to unravel the original organization of a body of archival records and understand the functions, structures, and original

filing systems of the administrative bodies that created them. A collective description of the entire body of records (or fonds) of a given creator of it would be based on this type of information. By respecting the original arrangement of recordkeeping systems, the administrative context would be revealed and elucidated by archivists through their descriptions. The 'fonds d'archive' became the conceptual element on which intellectual arrangement and description was to be based. The fonds-based approach to description was effectively demonstrated and promoted by the Manual.

The Manual was reflective of assumptions of the time. It was written within the context of the standardizing thrust of nineteenth-century culture and the tendency to quantify or codify human activity.¹⁹ The inspiration for such an archival handbook was the culmination of discussions, debates, and consensus arrived at through the work of a committee representing the Dutch Association of Archivists, the State Archives of the Netherlands, and the Interior Ministry in 1890. This reflected archivists' emerging self-consciousness about their role within a professional and scientific endeavor.²⁰

The Manual was also reflective of the type of records encountered by the Dutch authors and other European archivists. Dutch archivists described what they encountered in records, recordkeeping systems, and administrative structures. They worked with a limited number of medieval documents (by comparison with the overwhelming body of twentieth-century records) and the records of fairly stable government agencies (by comparison with the variety and fluidity of twentieth-century agencies). The records were usually created by small, stable administrative

structures in well-organized registries or recordkeeping systems. The Dutch authors' archival tenets were based on the assumption that the description of the archives of the originating institutions would reflect the organization of the administration that created the records. The relationship of the records to their creators, and their recordkeeping practices, was assumed to be stable. The Dutch authors' contribution to archival literature reflected their assumption that records have one intellectual and physical location in the fonds to which they belong and that, once that fonds is located, the related description of it would capture once and for all the records' full provenance.

The ideas in the Manual resonated across the twentieth century as the theoretical principles it articulated influenced European and North American archival practices ever since.²¹ The Manual was to be the pillar on which the European concept of archival science came to rest.²² The publication of the Manual and its translation into several languages, including English, influenced English-speaking archivists as well. In Britain, for example, archival theory and practice were profoundly affected by it. For much of the nineteenth century, the principal British government archives, the Public Records Office (PRO), exercised intellectual control over archival records much like many other European archival repositories of the time. It employed rather arbitrary subject categories to arrange, manage, and retrieve archival records, according to their subject matter. At the PRO, archivists rearranged records, combining those of different provenance and placing emphasis in their descriptive work on the form and content of records, rather than their origins.²³

In the years following the publication of the Manual, and in keeping with the broader European accommodation of provenance, the concept of respect des fonds took hold at the PRO. Hilary Jenkinson, a prominent English archivist at the PRO, was among the prime instigators of this change. He promoted the development of provenance-based description and arrangement practices at the PRO by advancing the concept of the Archive Group. In 1922, Jenkinson produced the first major archival manual in English. His *A Manual of Archive Administration*,²⁴ in part influenced by the Dutch, espoused the British contextual approach. In it he argued that the increasing volume of records being created made the past conventional practice of publishing calendars pointless for meaningful information retrieval.²⁵ Like the Dutch, Jenkinson maintained that descriptive work ought to focus on general descriptions of collectivities of records with a common institutional provenance, such as a large government department. These collectivities he called "Archive Groups". Jenkinson argued that the Archive Group should be comprised of all the records of an autonomous administrative entity. He interpreted the creator of a fonds (or Archive Group) to be "an administration which was an organic whole, complete in itself, capable of dealing independently, without any added or external authority, with every side of any business which could normally be presented to it. This, it may be said, is to make the Archive Group a division much wider, much less strictly defined than the fonds."²⁶

Jenkinson felt the concept of a record creator required clearer articulation in order to protect better the integrity of the records as evidence of the actions of their

creator.²⁷ Thus he defined the entity with the most powerful impact on the creation of the records as their overall creator. This meant that the most senior, powerful, and thus often largest entities or ministries in the bureaucratic hierarchy were deemed to be the provenance of the Archive Group. (Whether any government agency actually conforms to Jenkinson's definition above of the originator of an Archives Group is, of course, another matter.) The role of the archivist was to provide information pertaining to the provenance of the records. Jenkinson argued provenance was to be found in the 'one best place' in the event of recent transfers of modern records.²⁸ Jenkinson suggested provenance would be attributed to the creator that did the 'most' creation of the group of records. This approach characterized British archival practice at the PRO across the first half of the twentieth century with records received from government offices. In their descriptive work, archivists identified Archive Groups and then described their administrative histories (or structures and functions).²⁹ Like the Dutch, Jenkinson's approach to archival theory and practice was informed by his experiences with the records he encountered. He too was confronted primarily with accumulations of still limited amounts of past records, often from long defunct institutions which thus provided a comparatively stable object of analysis.

The European provenance approach, articulated by the Dutch trio and later by Jenkinson, was not fully embraced by American archivists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. American archival activities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were devoted to collecting by libraries, wealthy private persons, and historical societies of selected historical manuscripts of private and government

documents, with little regard for their provenance or contextual relationships, whether intellectual or physical. Americans, bent on strengthening their sense of nationhood, went out in search of their history. Little systematic attention was given to the archival records of governments until the early twentieth century when the dramatic increase in the records of expanding bureaucracies of government required it. American administrators, however, created and accumulated records without much concern for procedures and systems for orderly records management until the situation became unmanageable.³⁰

During the early twentieth century, the European concept of public and national archives as a 'place' influenced archival developments in the United States. Americans were also exposed to European archival theory and practice. Americans influenced by European archival theory helped establish a range of new state archives and the first federal archival institution, the National Archives, which opened in 1934.³¹ American archivists faced a mounting crisis of contemporary records at the new state and National Archives. The National Archives was created as an independent federal agency with a mandate to receive the immense backlog of government documents dating from the eighteenth century. It was confronted with approximately one million linear metres of federal records, with an annual growth rate of more than sixty thousand metres of active records generated by contemporary agencies of the US government. This rate increased to six hundred thousand metres annually by 1943, a direct consequence of state expansion and increased record creation associated with the Great Depression and World War II.

Two significant results emerged from this records avalanche. The first was the creation of the records management profession to assist with more orderly management of current records still in government offices. The second was “a fundamental reorientation of the archival profession in North America.”³² The American reorientation was articulated in 1944. Due to the increasing volume of modern records the federal repository was no longer able to preserve all the records it received. Consequently, the emphasis in archival work “shifted from preservation of records to selection of records for preservation.”³³ When American archivists turned to methods of representing records in description for access to them, the National Archives was influenced by both European ideas and the American manuscript tradition, which favoured direct subject access. The National Archives espoused a compromise position by promoting the “Record Group” as the focus of descriptive activity for institutional records. The National Archives defined a Record Group in 1941 as “a major archival unit established somewhat arbitrarily with due regard to the principle of provenance and to the desirability of making the unit of convenient size and character for the work of arrangement and description and for the publication of inventories.”³⁴

The British Archive Group was deemed too unwieldy to implement in complex mid-twentieth century bureaucracies, which generated ever increasing volumes of records. For the Americans, a modern senior government agency, as the provenance of Jenkinson’s Archive Group, would create such an overwhelming amount of records that their collective description, and thus access to information, would be very

difficult. Record Groups were thus established for the bodies of records created by smaller units of large government agencies and for smaller government agencies. Provenance was thereby respected in this pragmatic, limited way, rather than by attempting to link a given record to the fullest possible understanding of its provenance. That would have meant linking it to all the predecessor and successor and subordinate and superior administrative units a smaller unit was connected to and which shared in the creation of the records. Furthermore, once this limited even preliminary provenance information was captured, American archivists devoted more time to dealing with direct access to information through descriptive and other activities driven by a subject content focus.³⁵ This is the nature of the pragmatic compromise between European provenance-based theory and American manuscript collecting research traditions that the Record Group reflects. The Record Group concept reflected a somewhat arbitrary and practical compromise to deal with the vast quantity of records by applying provenance to the records of government units of convenient size for their management and research use.

Theodore Schellenberg, a leading archivist at the new National Archives, championed the Record Group concept in his highly influential mid-twentieth century publications.³⁶ Schellenberg had a tremendous influence on archival practices, especially in North America. Schellenberg was part of the American political culture of Roosevelt's 'New Deal statism' where the emphasis was on management technocracy and government efficiency.³⁷ The Record Group concept was adopted by state archives and in many archival repositories in North America and elsewhere. The

adoption of the Record Group in Canada was also done by making the arbitrary compromises that tended to obscure the provenance of government records.³⁸ These compromises would eventually be critiqued by archival scholars in the 1960s and after, as this thesis will discuss.³⁹

Archival description of records gradually evolved in Europe and North America from an almost exclusive emphasis on the records information content to documenting provenancial and contextual relationships of the records bearing this information.⁴⁰ The evolution of the purposes and products of description reflects conceptions about archives held by records creators and archivists, and by implication, society at a given time. Description has origins in ancient efforts to create brief surrogates for documents mainly in order to provide evidence of the existence of records to serve society's perpetual memory. Description from medieval Europe to the late nineteenth century focused on outlining the most useful arrangement of records by subject matter to guide users of them through the "intellectual order of physically disordered or meaninglessly ordered material."⁴¹

In the twentieth century, description has been characterized by the identification of contextual relationships between records creators and their records, or research into the history of records. The products of description have evolved from surrogate lists to subject and content based calendars and indexes to more recent contextual or provenance-based descriptive systems based on standardized schemes.⁴² Reflection on the evolution of archival description provides evidence of various interpretations of how archival theory relates to practice. It also points to the primacy

in archival theory and practice of provenance-based approaches to description by the mid-twentieth century. However, discussion of the appropriate link of theory and practice did not subside with the widespread acceptance of provenance, as different approaches to the application of provenance existed in Europe and North America, and as archivists reflected further on them in the late twentieth century. Chapter two will examine the important Australian contribution to this ongoing review of descriptive theory and practice.

Endnotes

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1. Luciana Duranti, "Origin and Development of the Concept of Archival Description," Archivaria 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 47-54. Rosalind Thomas, "Literacy, Written Record and Oral Communication," in Rosalind Thomas, (ed.) Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Denise Schmandt-Besserat, "From Accounting to Written Language. The Role of Abstract Counting in the Invention of Writing," in Bennett Rafoth and Donald Rubin, (eds.) The Social Construction of Written Communication. (Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishers, 1988), pp. 119-130.
 2. Duranti, "Origin and Development of...Description," p. 48.
 3. Ibid., p. 48. Jacques Derrida, Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression. (The University of Chicago Press: London, 1995), pg 2. Archons were those who held power and the rights and privilege to "interpret the archives". Carolyn Steedman, Dust. The Archive and Cultural History. (Rutgers University Press, New Jersey, 2002), pp. 1-2.
 4. Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift," Archivaria, no. 43 (Spring 1997), p. 18.
 5. Duranti, "Origin and Development of...Description," p. 49. See James O'Toole, "Cortes's Notary: The Symbolic Power of Records," Archival Science 2, nos. 1 and 2 (2002), pp. 45-61, for an exploration of the symbolic power of inscribed records utilized as evidence of public 'expressions' of political and social power in the sixteenth century. See also Richard Brown, "Death of a Renaissance Record-Keeper: The Murder of Tomasso da Tortona in Ferrara, 1385," Archivaria 44 (Fall 1997), pp. 1-43 for another example of the perceived symbolic power of records and records custodians.
 6. Duranti, "Origin and Development of...Description," p. 49.

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7. *Ibid.*, p. 49. Perpetual memory was a juridical concept based on the assumption documents preserved in an archives were authentic and permanent evidence of past activities and decisions. The juridical concept of perpetual memory governed archival endeavor into the 18th century and invested documents with powerful symbolic qualities.
 8. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," p. 44.
 9. Judith Panitch, "Liberty, Equality, Posterity: Some Archival Lessons from the Case of the French Revolution," The American Archivist (Winter 1990), pp. 46-47. "The true significance of any 'lieu de memoire', archives included, is societally determined. They are above all 'spectacular symbols; and so must possess all the malleability of any sign. Their significance may consequently alter, increase or vanish altogether as the society which invests them with meaning itself evolves."
 10. Luciana Duranti, "The Odyssey of Records Managers," in Tom Nesmith, (ed.) Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993), pp. 50-51.
 11. Duranti, "Origin and Development of...Description," p. 49. Duranti's research suggests between the late 15th and early 16th centuries, the use of archives for historical research was increasingly evident in citations of archival documents in works of that period as well as the existence of archival records in the form of attendance registers documenting research visits to a particular archival repository.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 50. According to Duranti, the idea of the organic, administrative unity of records had always been an element of preservation and administration of archives, but was never expressed explicitly.
 13. Luciana Duranti, "Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science," Archivaria 28 (Summer 1989), pp. 7-27.
 14. Duranti, "Origin and Development of...Description," p. 50.
 15. Samuel Muller, Johan Adriann Feith, Robert Fruin, Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives, 1898 (translation of 2nd ed.). New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1968. New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1968.
 16. Wendy Duff and Verne Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings," Archival Science 2, nos. 3 and 4 (2002) p. 263.
 17. Preben Mortensen, "The Place of Theory in Archival Practice," Archivaria 47 (Spring 1999), p. 2.
 18. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," p. 21.
 19. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21. Joan Schwartz, "Records of Simple Truth and Precision": Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control," Archivaria 50 (Fall 2000), pp. 1-40. Ian Hacking, The Taming of Chance. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990). Hacking focuses an enquiry into the 19th century development of thought related to statistical patterns as something 'natural' and explanatory in themselves - randomness and chance were legitimated through statistical analysis in order to bring order to chaos. This thinking has led to a style of scientific reasoning that exists in contemporary society. It manifests itself in the belief that more control and intervention in our lives (and by implication, less freedom) is necessary in order to cope with indeterminate events - like crime waves, terrorist acts, etc.

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20. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 20-21. Michel Duchein, "The History of European Archives and the Development of the European Archival Profession," The American Archivist, 55 (Winter 1992), pp. 14-24. It was at the First International Congress of Archivists when the principles of provenance were ratified as fundamental to archival theory and practice.
 21. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 20-22. The influence of the Manual is attributable to the fact that it provided a common vocabulary and process in many languages as it was translated into French, German, English, Italian, Portuguese and Chinese.
 22. Mortensen, "The Place of Theory," p. 2.
 23. Michael Roper, "The Development of the Principles of Provenance and Respect for Original Order in the Public Record Office," in Barbara Craig (ed.) The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 134-49.
 24. Hilary Jenkinson, A Manual of Archive Administration. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922.
 25. Tom Nesmith, "Introduction: Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada and the North American Rediscovery of Provenance," in Nesmith, (ed.), Canadian Archival Studies, pp. 2-3.
 26. Jenkinson, A Manual of Archive Administration, p. 84.
 27. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 22-26. One of the major themes of the British treatise on archival theory and practice was informed by assumptions about the role of the archivist as impartial guardian of the evidence contained in archival records. Records were the natural by-products of administrative activities. There were untainted evidence of acts and transactions. Any interference such as severing records from their organic whole destroyed their innocence and integrity as evidence. Therefore, the role of the archivist was to receive and keep archives, not select them.
 28. Eric Ketelaar, "Archival Theory and the Dutch Manual," Archivaria 41 (Spring 1996).
 29. Roper, "The Development of the Principles of Provenance," pp. 134-153. Duranti, "The Odyssey of Records Managers," p. 53.
 30. Duranti, "The Odyssey of Records Managers," p. 53.
 31. Tim Walch, Guardian of Heritage: Essays on the History of the National Archives, (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1985). The construction of the National Archives repository in Washington D.C. is a compelling story of the cultural quality of archival 'space' and 'place'. The historical evolution of what is now known as the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) illustrates the powerful lobbying activities of professional historians and historical organizations. In fact, calls for the construction of a national archival repository had been heard as early as the 1890s. There had been a struggle between competing conceptions of the purpose of an archival repository. Some supported the role of the archive as a repository for functioning records while others advocated more a museum-oriented facility, such as a 'hall of records'. The National Archives illustrates the powerful symbolic quality of a site of cultural memory. It was indicative of the reverence with which the National Archives as an institution was treated. Also the symbolic quality of documents within the repository was significant as it became the shrine for the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. The evolving mandate of the National Archives reflected an emerging consciousness of the power of new

technologies as motion picture film and sound recordings were to be stored within its walls. The evolution of the National Archives illustrated the political context of archives and struggles over autonomy, procedures, practices, control, and custody of records.

32. Duranti, "The Odyssey of Records Managers," pp. 52-53.

33. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," p. 26.

34. Richard Berner, Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), p. 27. Walch, Guardian of Heritage. NARA adopted a 'functional approach' to their practices and activities within the repository. That translated into a division of labour according to certain specifications or specialization. What resulted was a distinct separation where one group of staff performed appraisals, another did arrangement, a third did descriptions and a final group performed reference services.

35. Nesmith, "Introduction: Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada," pp. 2-4.

36. Theodore Schellenberg, Modern Archives. Principles and Techniques. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 1956.

37. Nesmith, "Introduction: Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada," pp. 2-4, Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 26-28. The archivists of the United States were to become members of the corporate and cultural management team charged with giving order to the chaos of information explosion. Theodore Porter, Trust in Numbers. The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995). Porter investigates the historical and continuing appeal of quantification in the 'modern' world and its relationship to the development of cultural meanings of objectivity over two centuries - the social meaning of numbers. He tries to understand the power and prestige of quantitative methods and models and challenges the notion that quantitative rigour is somehow inherent or 'natural' in the activity of science. He argues instead that quantification developed from attempts to construct objective, impersonal, seemingly neutral, strategies within disciplines (such as accounting and engineering for example) in response to political and social pressures outside the disciplines.

38. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," p. 29. Cook identifies one of Schellenberg's more detrimental compromises and its impact on subsequent description activities. The concept of use-based archives developed as archivists after Schellenberg embraced his informational values and tried to anticipate current and future use of archives by scholars and academic historians. This emphasis on 'use' evolved into a method for determining records of archival value. The concept of use-based archives influenced subsequent appraisal activities. Use-based approaches came to permeate all archival activities. The fundamental problem of use-based approach to archives is it removes records from their organic context related to creation activities. Also, it imposes appraisal and description activities that are external to the record and its provenance. Finally, it raised questions over how were archivists to anticipate the needs of future users.

39. Ibid., pp. 26-29.

40. Duranti, "Origin and Development of...Description," pp. 51-52. This was indicative of the evolution of the integral role the history of records began to play in European archival practice of the twentieth century. The creation of inventories and finding aids

included historical introductions in internal documents that remained unpublished and were consulted by archivists who had to conduct research for scholars.

41. Ibid., p. 53.

42. Ibid., pp. 52-53. Beginning in the 1930s in Europe, description evolved into a means for facilitating user independence by compiling instruments of research for users, not the archivist. What resulted was the crafting of non-evaluative (more standard) products that "in order to be useful for every kind of research, had to serve none in particular." This signaled the beginning of concepts of standardized archival descriptions.

Chapter Two: Australian Archival Description: The Shift from Static to Dynamic Contexts

The Dutch trio articulated an archival model for description based on fonds. This approach was adapted by Jenkinson in the Archive Group and later at the US National Archives in the Record Group to suit their circumstances. The various applications of provenance in the concepts of fonds, Archive Group, and Record Group assumed that the administrative provenance or context of record creation was one primary creator or organizational unit. Descriptive instruments were designed on this basis. By the 1960s archival theory and practice in the United States, Canada, and Australia were based on the most recent model, the American Record Group. At that time, however, archivists in Australia began to question the Record Group and look for alternative approaches to description. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the origins and evolution of Australian descriptive theory and practice since the 1960s in order to highlight the impact of prominent theorists on major developments.

In 1964 the Commonwealth Archives Office of Australia (currently the National Archives of Australia), a small and fairly new government institution, initiated a fundamental change in the description of archival government records. These changes were considered something of a revolutionary development and came in the form of the Commonwealth Records Series system (hereafter referred to as CRS). The hero behind the revolution (or villain depending on one's perspective) was Peter Scott, a twenty-seven year old linguist with barely three years experience of archival work.¹ Scott argued that contemporary descriptive practices at the Archives Office based on

the Record Group reflected the traditional assumption that the provenance of a body of institutional records was one specific organizational unit. On the basis of his research into descriptive practices of archivists since the early 1950s, Scott was able to demonstrate this assumption was no longer appropriate.² He showed that recordkeeping systems or government records series were created in a much more complex records creation process than the traditional assumptions about provenance allowed. Scott developed the 'series' system as a means for describing the multiple creators a record series could have.³

Before the advent of the CRS system, the Commonwealth Archives Office (and its predecessors) since the 1940s used a control system known as the Accession System. As a means of physical control of records, the Accession system was based on the accession – a body of records, transferred together by an agency (not necessarily the creator) and usually consisting of records from one or more series. Cross references were used in system documentation to link parts of related series that inevitably ended up across a number of different accessions.⁴ In the 1950s and 1960s Australian descriptive practices were based on the use of the Record Group as the primary system of relating series to their administrative creator in archival descriptions. Intellectual control based on Record Groups became widely used after seminars delivered by Schellenberg in Australia in 1954. But problems with the Record Group approach to describing government records surfaced soon after it became part of official institutional practice.⁵ A Record Group supposedly grouped all records created by that agency in one description of that grouping. It was increasingly

apparent, however, to archivists such as Scott that the Record Group method broke down as they realized that increasing numbers of government records were created by a succession of agencies, not just one.⁶

The period following the adoption of the Record Group concept was characterized by a search for an intellectual control system that could implement this view of the more complex, dynamic provenance of government records. The prospect of a 'series-based' rather than Record Group system emerged as Australian archivists struggled to reconcile the Accession System with the Record Group approach. Creating Record Groups posed significant challenges as archivists were confronted with records that originated with one agency, were transferred to one or more other agencies in the course of administrative change and then may have been transferred to archival custody by another agency – one that may actually have had little or no role in their creation. Records created within this dynamic context did not fit easily into Record Groups because that approach dictated that records, and consequently descriptions, had to reflect their association with only one agency or creator. Archivists were compelled to distort the records' history in order to describe them in this manner. Forcing government records into one record group often obscured the origins (provenance) of the records. This was therefore at odds with by then long established archival principle. In the context of Australian government records description, perpetuating such an approach began to seem unsustainable.⁷

As a consequence, new processes were experimented with. These processes were aimed initially at documenting contextual information about the records at the

accession stage. This was done in order to keep track of provenance for the subsequent creation of a descriptive record. These new processes proved to be the building blocks on which Scott would later construct his model of the 'series' system.⁸ Efforts then focused on attempting to make the Record Group approach more reflective of the multiple provenances of many records. Dual systems of physical control of the records (on the basis of which agencies had 'transitional' and 'final' control of them) and intellectual representation using 'transitional' and 'provisional' provenance were tried and eventually abandoned. However, valuable insights and experience were gained as conceptual developments relating to context emerged out of the new processes. These developments would eventually become the basis of the CRS system.⁹

By 1960 various approaches had been devised to attribute records to Record Groups on the basis of a more focused presentation of contextual information. However, these efforts to insert more flexible means of intellectual control (or description) with the Record Group system made its weaknesses more evident. Change was in the air as conclusions reached by Australian archivists suggested past practices related to description had undermined key archival principles. The ground had been prepared for a break with archival tradition. The increasing appreciation of the virtues of control based on series had been conceptualized. It took Scott's sustained focus on arrangement and description to demonstrate the weakness of the Record Group as a means of representing the provenance of records created by dynamic organizations. Scott noted that in the rapidly changing bureaucracies of

modern governments recordkeeping systems (or 'series') often had more than one creator over space and time. He concluded that the Record Group approach did not reflect the archival principle of provenance as fully as was possible. Series were created by a succession of agencies. Series were started and ended. Parts of the same series were often divided and transferred to archival custody from a number of agencies. Departments and agencies were established and dissolved. Functions, mandates, and reporting relationships were often modified and such changes did not always coincide. These changes reflected the general characteristics of records of government departments and agencies in Australia since its federation in 1901.¹⁰

Therefore, questions about where to assign the provenance of government records (for archival management and subsequent description) became difficult to answer and represent.¹¹ Scott's radical solution was the abandonment of the Record Group as the primary category of classification. As an alternative, he championed the utilization of record series as an independent element of physical arrangement and as the basis of description as a means of documenting better the context of the creation of government records. An experiment with Scott's approach was undertaken in the Commonwealth Archives Office in 1964. It provided a flexible approach to the physical and intellectual control of archives.¹²

The approach Scott recommended separated descriptions of agencies that generated records from descriptions of records. This gave the new scheme two basic features: information about the histories of agencies and information about the records series they create. A series control number would be assigned to a record

series and a description of the series recorded in a Register of Recorded Series. Links between series (records control) and administrative entities (context control) were identified and recorded. Links between series with previous and successor series, controlling series (indexes, registers), and when possible, files or single documents within series, could be identified and recorded. Links were made between each series and all the agencies which had created them. All agencies were linked to a least one other level of the hierarchy of their organization. This was usually the highest level of the hierarchy to which an agency was connected, rather than the intermediary levels. All series were linked to at least one agency. All record items (such as files) were linked to a series.

Integral to the structure of the series system is the separation of descriptions of context (provenance as record creators and agency history) and records (as series). This separation allowed for administrative change to be tracked and more clearly represented in description. It also facilitated the presentation of a more accurate 'picture' of context. Scott's series approach supported fundamental archival principles. The approach facilitated the improvement of information retrieval.¹³ It provided a more precise indirect approach to information content in the records based on more specific information about the provenance of the records. The new approach was adopted despite being more labour intensive to implement. The application of the series approach required a more rigorous historical analysis of records.¹⁴

When the CRS system was introduced it worked alongside the Accession and Record Group systems before replacing them. The Commonwealth Archives Office

was the first national archival institution to abandon the widespread international practice of assigning records to fonds or Record Groups. That said, it can be argued that the series system actually comes closer to achieving the goal of the fonds concept than its conventional European application because only through linking all of the various series and parts of series to the agency involved in their creation, can the traditional purpose of the fonds (identification of all of the records of a given records creator) be realized. Scott's accomplishments represented a revolutionary change in Australian archival description and thought. Through his insights and work, Scott did more than simply tinker with the Record Group. He devised a conceptual breakthrough that would reshape archival description. He proposed alterations in archival description that would enable a descriptive system to document more fully the provenance of the dynamic contextual relationships of archival records. This represented a truly significant departure from the past and has informed the archival enterprise ever since.¹⁵

The overall structure of the 'series' system today looks very much like it did when first conceived in the 1960s. The system is predicated on agreed definitions of the various key elements such as what constitutes a series, an agency, and an organization. A series is defined as "a group of records that are recorded or maintained by the same agency (or agencies) and that are in the same numerical, alphabetical, chronological or other identifiable sequence or that result from the same accumulations or filing process and are of similar function, format, or information content." The definition of an agency is "an administrative unit that is a recognizable

entity generates records and has its own independent general record-keeping system." An organization is defined as "A whole government, learned society, church or company that is independent (or broadly autonomous) and controls agencies...." The government of the Commonwealth of Australia is an example of the principal organization identified in the series system at the National Archives of Australia.¹⁶ The series system endeavours to treat each contextual entity equally and to represent multiple links. Recordkeeping context is fixed to the series. Administrative context is fixed to creators.¹⁷ The series concept is applied to all records "irrespective of their value and custody and whether or not they are still in current use."¹⁸ The series system represents a major contribution to archival description discourse.

Since its adoption in Australia in 1964, the CRS system has become an integral component of archival control at some Australian and New Zealand government archives.¹⁹ The system represents a thriving reality even after forty years. This testifies to its lasting relevance. The CRS system is based on descriptive representations that document a record series and its relationships with contextual entities. The entities are depicted on the basis of their hierarchical, functional, and chronological relationship to each other. As a result, users can take a number of retrieval paths in their search for information contained in records.²⁰ In one unified system of intellectual control users can move from information about agencies or persons to information about records. The series system was developed by Australian archivists as a logical and comprehensive solution to the challenges of archival control. The series approach was reflective of the Australians' philosophy of archives.

They had a long standing commitment to “integrated records management,” whereby records at all stages in their existence would be managed with contemporary and archival perspectives in view. The series system was a crucial building block for an integrated records management approach because it encompasses control of current, semi-active, and archival records. The development of the series system can be viewed as a progression towards full integration.²¹

There is thus a misconception about the Australian series system. Some observers see the system as just a more modest version of the European fonds d’archives, British Archive Group, or North American Record Group.²² But, advocates of the series system argue that it is something more than just another way of describing records. The Australian system represents a philosophy of archives. Central to the Australian philosophy is the belief that description must be capable of representing records at any point in what Australians perceive as a ‘records continuum.’²³ Advocates of the Records Continuum²⁴ concept see that records have common characteristics at any point in their history. They are situated along a continuum wherein their current uses and long-term archival value as evidence of their creators’ actions must be appreciated and protected. They ought not to be seen as existing in separate or distinct current and archival segments which are thus to be managed entirely separately by very different methods and highly distinct records management and archival professions.²⁵ Whether as records or archives, documents provide evidence of activities related to records creation regardless of where the records are located or their status. The Records Continuum theory rejects the notion

that records and archives move through separate, distinct life cycles. This is a direct challenge to the American Life Cycle²⁶ model that makes distinctions between 'active' or young, current records, which are mainly the responsibility of records managers, and old, 'inactive' archival records, which are the exclusive realm of archivists. Instead, the continuum model assumes that records are both current and historical at the moment of creation.

The Records Continuum model is reflective of the historical context in which Australian archives developed. Since World War II, when the contemporary archival profession took shape in Australia, archivists have been intimately involved in the management of records at the current, intermediate, and archival stages. In its formative years, the Commonwealth Archives Office worked mainly with records from active records systems. Australian archivist Chris Hurley comments: "There simply were no archives in the old-fashioned sense (a stable, finite, physical body of records held outside the continuum) to be described."²⁷ Therefore, the views of Australian archivists were heavily influenced by the need to manage records from modern recordkeeping systems. This would find formal expression in the Records Continuum model.

The longstanding commitment to the continuum approach was reinforced in the 1980s by major public scandals in which important records were lost or intentionally destroyed by their creators. To many Australian archivists, it seemed that only the continuum concept's insistence on full control over all records at all times could enable records and archives to be the essential tools of institutional

accountability in a society. Archival description became a central element of the Australian commitment to integrated archives and records management.

The Australians devised a system of description that was required to represent records at any stage of the records continuum, not just an archival remnant. In order to preserve the continuity of intellectual control over recorded information within a continuum, archivists needed to be involved in the ongoing management of records and devise appropriate models of representation.²⁸ The Records Continuum model represents the second major Australian contribution to archival discourse. Like the series system, the Records Continuum concept enhances provenance-based theories and practices related to the context and nature of archives.

Since the series system's adoption, Australian archivists have been exploring descriptive models that will identify the far greater web of contextual relationships that exists between creators and records than even the series system as devised by Scott formalized. Australians have been joined in this by many archivists in several countries in Europe as well as Canada, the United States, South Africa, and New Zealand. Together they have engaged in what has been called a "rediscovery" or "reinterpretation" of provenance.²⁹ This effort has involved a reassertion of the centrality of provenance or contextual information in archival work and research into its largely hitherto neglected features.

In the 1990s, Australian archivists, influenced by this broader effort and continuum thinking, continued to play a major role in the elaboration of the key characteristics of contextual information. One of the most notable contributors to the

Australian and international discourse on description is Chris Hurley, an Australian who has held senior positions in archives in his home country and at the Archives of New Zealand. His compelling conceptual proposals make him one of the more outspoken (and certainly most entertaining) archival theorists.

Hurley has written extensively about describing archives in context. He maintains that archivists “are still thinking through (and in many ways only just beginning to realize) how much further ideas about context and provenance must go beyond mere records creation.”³⁰ Hurley notes that the thinking about contextual information that launched the series system has been evolving through forty years of experience to the point where he believes the series system has developed into a broader ‘Australian system’ of description. While series based, this system strives to depict more complex contextual relationships associated with records. This is evident in efforts to develop description models that attempt to represent more accurately the nature of contexts of creation of records and records themselves, whether as a series or something else.³¹

Hurley notes that the series system as initially developed and applied rightly identified the multiple successive administrative units that were the most immediate creators of the series in question. He argues, however, that a fuller representation of context enables better understanding and retrieval of records within the general framework of the series system. Hurley contends that the ‘series’ system and its initial perspective on records and records creation have provided fertile ground for the germination of more complex representations of context. His own research over the

years suggests that there are many different kinds of contextual elements worth documenting.³²

Hurley adds contextual building blocks to the existing 'series' base of construction.³³ He suggests that archivists must create a meaningful body of knowledge from archival data derived from their observations and historical research into the contextual history of records. The data should then be organized and documented in contextual control models or mechanisms. One element of contextual control is provenance. Provenance is a relationship between a body of records and their creator and/or controller such as a person, family, or corporation (public or private). Hurley suggests, however, that 'ambience' is another element of context worth depicting. Ambience, in Hurley's model, is a contextual entity related to the records provenance, or most immediate creator in the administrative hierarchy. For Hurley, provenance is the immediate context of records creation while ambience is the wider context of provenance. Hurley proposes that ambience is once removed from provenance. For example, a repository has custody of the archival records created by a particular organizational unit. This unit is their provenance. Their ambient context of creation is the other administrative units to which this one is directly related in the delivery of the function which prompted the creation of the records. The series system usually linked the provenance entity to a very high level ambient entity, typically the Commonwealth of Australia government. Hurley argued for fleshing out the intermediary administrative entities composing the broader ambience of record creation and control.³⁴

Hurley has explored description models that, in general, could identify a multitude of relationships in a multitude of ways. In particular, he has looked more closely at nuances of provenance. Hurley suggests that description must permit provenance to be attributable to more than just immediate agents of creation. Thus statements about provenance related to records and creators must be allowed to represent *simultaneous attribution* to more than one creator.³⁵ This challenges the one-to-one 'identical boundaries' that have become the conventional method linking creators and records. Hurley is critical of description that dictates creators and records must share an identity with, rather than a relationship to each other. This fixes each entity to the other but prevents other relationships that exist at the same time from being depicted. Australians have shown that it is desirable to indicate that records can have successive multiple creators but Hurley insists that even Australians have "adhered to the idea that there can only be a single records-creating agent at any **given point in time.**"³⁶

In a further exploration of provenance Hurley suggests that description should not only document multiple successive relationships but only simultaneous provenance information that is relevant to records and their creator. This he suggests can be accomplished through a synchronatic approach - describing a subject as it exists at one point in time wherever appropriate.³⁷ Separating the records and provenance entities is advantageous for information management and retrieval. But, that is not enough so long as ideas (and consequently descriptive representations)

about records creation are still bound up conceptually in the separate descriptive entities (records information) being identified.

Hurley's insights are indicative of his observations that archival descriptions in Australia (and elsewhere) have failed to depict clearly and with appropriate sophistication crucial contextual entities related to provenance. In addition, he has analyzed another aspect of ambient context not fully explored by Scott -- the functions performed by records creators. Hurley has pondered potential enhancements to the Australian approach through his focus on functions.³⁸ Functions have a history and a context of their own and can tell a lot about the information content of records. Functions often represent the exclusive domain, responsibility or legal mandate of a creator, and so can help to distinguish the kind of information in its recordkeeping systems from that of other creators and thus provide a key means of locating and retrieving it. This information enhances knowledge about provenance.

Within Hurley's model, ambient functions also address less formal recordkeeping contexts in which private individuals inscribe their records. In this way ambient functions performed by a person in private life (as a type of worker, a community association volunteer, or as a spouse or parent, or in having a particular pastime) also act as the counterpart to more formal business functions of corporations and government.³⁹ The identification of functions as contextual elements, often already embedded in descriptive instruments, would be a valuable means of archival information retrieval. Functions would be identified through the archivist's research into contextual knowledge about records creators.⁴⁰ Therefore, functions are often

unique to records creators. Knowledge of the functions a given record creator performs will allow reasonable inferences to be made about the subject matter of the information in the records created by a certain function. Hurley argues that focusing on such function-based contextual data is more appropriate for retrieval of archival records than the far more elusive subject-based indexing methods.⁴¹

Hurley's discussion of ambient functions represents his belief that there are many relationships embedded in archival records. Relationships existing between contextual entities must be shown in both space and time. This could be accomplished by documenting each phase of the evolution of a relationship. This would require archivists to investigate each contextual entity on the basis of how and when it shares a relationship with other entities. Relationships have outcomes; archival records are the result. Hurley proposes a conceptual framework to depict those outcomes. This approach would allow complex knots of contextual relationships, implicitly bound up in archival records, to be understood and untangled. The outcomes here will facilitate rich and detailed archival narratives about recordkeeping contexts to be constructed. This will recreate a more accurate and valuable web of relationships for researchers. By documenting relationships, users (both archivists and others) can understand better the outcomes of relationships – the recordkeeping systems and the records themselves.

Ultimately, Hurley argues that only a well-conceived conceptual model based on sound methodology and appropriate definitions is worth pursuing. He shares the view of others that archivists must acknowledge that context around records is

complex, diverse, and voluminous.⁴² Any attempts to create representations through description must recognize the nature of the challenge. Conceding this reality, however, should not be the justification for refusing or putting off the creation of the more complex descriptive instruments that bring together all the contextual data a user requires in a single integrated statement.⁴³ The critical observations articulated by Hurley challenge directly a number of well-established (but not necessarily well-grounded in his opinion) archival descriptive practices in Australia and indeed around the world. He contends that Australian archivists have focused too much on the most immediate or literal aspect of provenance data about records creation. He says, "Unless you squint and take a narrow, limited, parochial view, all archives belong to a complex, rich, and dense contextual background – personal, social, organisational, national, and (ultimately) global – which most archival programs (including those of Australia) have not yet begun to document more than superficially."⁴⁴

Hurley also provokes archivists into reflecting - at the risk of evoking 'professional conceit'⁴⁵ - on the purposes for creating descriptive representations. Hurley objects to the seldom discussed assumption that the principle purpose of description is to create tools to facilitate retrieval for research use. Archivists need to take a wider view of the function of description.⁴⁶ He maintains that "... most (if not all) of the contextual and recordkeeping entities we end up employing may be developed primarily for information retrieval purposes. But the information need for good provenance data must not be confused with the need for subject retrieval. From

an archival point of view, the primary purpose of a provenance statement is to provide an externally verifiable context for documented recordkeeping activity."⁴⁷ This stress on the primary evidential aims of archival description reflects a strong stand in the Australian recordkeeping continuum tradition. The strength of the overall approach to description that Hurley espouses, however, is that it serves both evidential and informational needs equally well. After all, it goes far to meeting the goal of most researchers -- access to as much information in context as possible.

In Hurley's view, archivists charged with description should devote their energy to discussing theoretical concepts related to models, systems and/or descriptive architectures that will depict a multitude of contextual relationships, in a multitude of ways, over time.⁴⁸ The overall aim of any descriptive system should be the re-creation of almost any conceivable combination of contextual data.⁴⁹ Hurley believes his more complex conceptual model in which contextual relationships and attributes are documented will meet more effectively the information demands that will be exerted on such a system. This would require the creation of descriptive models that begin the identification and depiction of contextual elements from a broader perspective. It appears that Hurley's observations and critical assessments of contemporary practices in this regard have not been ignored.

Hurley's ideas and those of other leading archival contextualists in the United States (such as David Bearman) and in Canada (such as Terry Cook) helped prompt a major Australian study of recordkeeping contextual information (or metadata) in the late 1990s. The SPIRT Recordkeeping Metadata Research Project produced the

Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Scheme (RKMS) in July 1999. This collaborative project was undertaken by a wide range of archival, government, and academic partners in Australia and elsewhere. The Project took the series system as its springboard and sought to expand on the contextual information it emphasized by drawing, in particular, upon Hurley's views on context and functions and on Bearman's suggestions for the kinds of metadata to accompany individual documents, especially electronic documents. The Project's interests cannot be understood without appreciation of the rising concern among archivists worldwide in the 1990s about improving the management of electronic communications. Thus the Project proposed metadata for better control of elusive, volatile individual electronic records, as well as for enhancing contextual information to address the more familiar problem of understanding the broad range of functions and institutional metadata beyond that conceived to structure individual documents.⁵⁰

The Project lays out four broad areas or "schema" of metadata information. These areas are: "Business," "Business Recordkeeping," "Agents," and "Records." The Project outlines for each category the types of metadata information required to manage institutional records over time across the recordkeeping continuum. In general, these schema contain information in the "Business" area about various institutional functions from ambient ones to more specific transactions, metadata for describing the organizational units and persons and their mandates and functions that create and control records in the "Agents" area, metadata for tracking recordkeeping functions in "Business Recordkeeping" (which includes information on the activities

of appraisal for archival retention, description, preservation, access, and retrieval performed with these systems), and metadata for creation and control of recordkeeping systems and individual documents in the “Records” category.⁵¹ The metadata schema are intended to continue the series system aim of linking particular bodies of records (or series) with all of the creators of these records and particular creators of records with all series that they have created. The Project, however, “extends this tradition, enabling relationships to be set up between Business, Agent, and Record entities at any layer of aggregation and through time. Business to Business, Business Recordkeeping to Business Recordkeeping, Agent to Agent, and Record to Record relationships can also be depicted in and through time. Any single Agent, Business, Business Recordkeeping or Records entity may have relationships with like or unlike entities that extend through layers of aggregation in ways which establish a rich envelope of contextual metadata.”⁵² The principle assumption informing this approach is that contextual relationships are not fixed one-to-one links as they have usually been represented in typical archival descriptions. Instead contextual relationships exist as many-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many linkages.⁵³ The RKMS Project illustrates that Scott’s insights continue to inform the collective efforts of Australian archivists.

The RKMS Project’s recommendations, though widely supported in Australia, remain a work in progress at this time, rather than an implemented program at a particular archives.⁵⁴ The most recent Australian statement on descriptive practice reflects the confidence Australians have in the series system and their openness to its

refinement. In 2003 the Australian Society of Archivists' Committee on Descriptive Standards released "Describing Archives in Context: A Guide to Australian Practice." This draft of a proposed guide to performing archival description was offered for comment. Within the series system framework, the guide articulates a flexible approach to the depiction of richer context when describing archives. It welcomes enhancements to the system (such as information on functions) that archivists such as Chris Hurley have advocated. And without specifically adopting the breadth of contextual information recommended by the RKMS Project, it adopts an expansive view of context: "The series system's relationships structures allow multiple levels or layers of context to be represented and a variety of meanings to be interpreted. The flexibility of these relationship structures allows particular interpretations of a records context in time to be nested and interpreted according to different perspectives." This document illustrates a sustained focus on fundamental elements of the Australian philosophy of archiving in general and description in particular. The guide is applicable to records description at any time in the records continuum. It describes a model that can be utilized for all sectors of records creation, in either a public or private context. Further, the approach being articulated is intended to be scalable to the local circumstances of the archivists using the guide. Therefore, it recognizes the necessity for archivists to discern relevant contextual entities to document and their extent based on historical research.⁵⁵

The model being proposed should go some way to addressing Hurley and other archivists' lament that many descriptive models (and, even to some extent, the

early version of the series system) have focused on minimal layers of contextual information and on standardizing data content rather than exploring in the first place the nature of the contextual information to be standardized. These approaches have tended to place archival description in static models of context where archival records have been represented on the basis of their relation to a single creator or still limited context. Hurley's critical insights into Australian archival theory lie behind the guide. Hurley's criticisms and solutions are informed by his belief that it is "only by accurately and faithfully" depicting relationships between context and records across the continuum of the records history that archivists can fulfil their mandate to preserve evidence and make it available to society. In order to do so, archivists need to unravel the complexities of context through sustained scholarly historical and contemporary research.⁵⁶ The initial series system of description, the evolution of the Records Continuum concept, and Hurley's provocative reflections are enduring elements of the Australian perspective on the archival endeavour. They represent insights into context and the character of archives that can be characterized, as Terry Cook has said, as a powerful (re)interpretation of provenance. The vision of Australian archivists fostered an exchange of archival ideas between the northern and southern hemispheres. Now, many archivists in several countries are thinking anew about concepts of context and provenance. Their interest in unravelling context for the purposes of representing the history of records has shaped archival discourse in North America.⁵⁷ Chapter three examines one major Canadian archives (the Archives of Ontario) where this discussion (heavily influenced by the Australian series system)

has recently brought about a major review of traditional descriptive models. The results are promising for the future of description at Canadian and other archives.

Endnotes

1. Mark Wagland and Russell Kelly, "The Series System – A Revolution in Archival Control," in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggot, (eds.), The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years. (Clayton, 1994), pp. 131-149. Peter Scott, "The Record Group Concept: A Case for Abandonment," The American Archivist 29 (October 1966), pp. 493-497.
2. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 38-39.
3. Chris Hurley, "The Australian ('Series') System: An Exposition," in McKemmish and Piggot, (eds.), The Records Continuum, p. 150.
4. Wagland and Kelly, "The Series System," p. 135.
5. Ibid., p. 133.
6. Australian Society of Archivists Committee on Descriptive Standards, "Describing Archives in Context: A Guide to Australian Practice," consultation draft, August 2003, p. 7, available at www.archivists.org.au/cds
7. Scott, "The Record Group Concept," p. 493.
8. Wagland and Kelly, "The Series System," pp. 133-134; Hurley, "The Australian ('Series') System," pp. 150-172.
9. Wagland and Kelly "The Series System," pp. 134-135. Some of the major developments were identifying and defining the distinctions between transferring agencies and recording agencies. This became part of new accession procedures in 1953. A series identification sheet was instituted in 1953 which was utilized to record and register series as the records were acquired. This marked an emerging emphasis on the series as a control entity within the accession system. Through 1955 and 1956, intellectual control information about government structures, both historical and contemporary, was captured in a Structure of Government System. This represented initial efforts to identify creators across time. In 1960, more context about the history of records was instituted with the 'series history sheet' which made references to previous and subsequent series.
10. Clive Smith, "The Australian Series System," Archivaria 39 (Spring 1995), pp. 86-93.
11. Scott, "The Record Group Concept," pp. 495-96.
12. Ibid., pp. 497-98. Wagland and Kelly, "The Series System," p. 135.
13. Australian Society of Archivists Committee on Descriptive Standards, "Describing Archives in Context," p.8.
14. Wagland and Kelly, "The Series System," p. 136.
15. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," p. 39.
16. Wagland and Kelly, "The Series System," p. 140.
17. Smith, "The Australian Series System," p. 89.
18. Wagland and Kelly, "The Series System," p. 133.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
20. See the Web sites of the National Archives of Australia at <http://www.naa.gov.au/>, the Public Record Office of Victoria, Australia at <http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/archivesvictoria/t1tbmain.asp>, and the City of Sydney, Australia Archives at http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/hs_a_records.asp for evidence of how the series approach to description has been applied online to facilitate Web-based access and research.
21. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 39-40. Glenda Acland, "Managing the Record Rather than the Relic," *Archives and Manuscripts* 20 (May, 1992), pp. 57-63.
22. Terry Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds: Theory, Description, and Provenance in the Post-Custodial Era," in Terry Eastwood, (ed.), *The Archival Fonds: From Theory to Practice* (Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1992), pp. 54-57.
23. Hurley, "The Australian ('Series') System," p. 151.
24. A graphic representation and textual description of the Records Continuum Model, developed by the Records Continuum Research Group, is available on their Web site at <http://rcrg.dstc.edu.au/>.
25. The Records Continuum Research Group at <http://rcrg.dstc.edu.au/>.
26. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 39-40. See also, Charles Dollar, "Archivists and Records Managers in the Information Age," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 37-52.
27. Hurley, "The Australian ('Series') System," p. 151. As Hurley notes here, this situation was characterized by former Canadian Dominion Archivist W. Kaye Lamb as a number of record centres (storage areas for records with semi-active or inactive status) "in search of an archives."
28. Hurley, "The Australian ('Series') System," p. 151.
29. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," p. 35-39. Nesmith, "Introduction: Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada," in Nesmith, (ed.), *Canadian Archival Studies*, pp. 2-4.
30. Hurley, "The Australian ('Series') System," p. 153.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 153-155.
33. See the Web site of the Public Record Office of Victoria, Australia at <http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/>
34. Hurley, "The Australian ('Series') System," pp. 155-58.
35. Chris Hurley, "Problems with Provenance," (Records Continuum Research Group, Monash University, 1998), p.3 at <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au>. Hurley says that a provenance "statement indeed can and should be confused (I would say clarified) by permitting simultaneous attribution to more than one creator."
36. *Ibid.*, p. 4. (Emphasis original.)
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.
38. Chris Hurley "Ambient Functions - Abandoned Children to Zoos," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), p. 30. David Bearman, "Record-Keeping Systems," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 18-19.
39. Bearman, "Record-Keeping Systems," pp. 20-21.
40. Hurley "Ambient Functions," p. 34.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-26. Archivists at the National Archives of Australia have acted on this idea through the compilation of a thesaurus that permits users to search their collections on the basis of 'functions' access points to the series system. See the RecordSearch web

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- page of the National Archives of Australia at <http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/ResearcherScreen.asp>. A similar development is in evidence at the Public Record Office of Victoria, Australia. See the PROV's Archival Control Guide No. 66 at <http://www.prov.vic.gov.au/access/guides/guide66.pdf>. As well, the City of Sydney Archives facilitates a structured search that includes functions at <http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/investigator/>.
42. Tom Nesmith, "Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate: Some Thoughts on the 'Ghosts' of Archival Theory," *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999), p. 140.
 43. Hurley, "The Australian ('Series') System," pp. 163-167.
 44. *Ibid.*, pp. 164-65.
 45. ARCAN-L listserv - ARCAN-L@majordomo.srv.ualberta.ca, Monday, March 24, 2003 5:16 PM. This quote is from Terry Cook's reposting of remarks by Hurley (made Thursday, March 20, 2003 10:54 PM) on Australian archival listserv (aus-archivists@asap.unimelb.edu.au) relating to a discussion about archival software for describing and controlling archives (Tabularium) and its implications for archival description.
 46. Chris Hurley, "The Making and the Keeping of Records: (1) What Are Finding Aids For?" (Records Continuum Research Group, Monash University, 1998), pp. 1-16 at <http://www.sims.monash.edu.au>.
 47. Hurley, "Problems with Provenance," *Archives and Manuscripts* 23, no. 2 (November 1995), p. 257.
 48. Hurley, "Problems with Provenance," p. 3.
 49. Hurley, "The Australian ('Series') System," p. 165.
 50. For an overview of the project by its principal researchers, see Sue McKemmish, Glenda Acland, Nigel Ward, and Barbara Reed, "Describing Records in Context in the Continuum: The Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Schema," *Archivaria* 48 (Fall 1999), pp. 3-43. See also, Sue McKemmish, "Placing Records Continuum Theory and Practice," *Archival Science* 1 no. 4 (2001), pp. 353-54.
 51. McKemmish et al., "Describing Records in Context," pp. 38-43.
 52. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
 53. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," p. 38.
 54. McKemmish et al., "Describing Records in Context," pp. 30-32.
 55. Australian Society of Archivists Committee on Descriptive Standards, "Describing Archives in Context," pp. 8 and 10-13.
 56. Hurley, "The Australian ('Series') System," p. 167.
 57. David Bearman, "Archival Methods," *Archival and Museum Informatics Technical Report*, vol. 3, no. 1, (Spring 1989); Gerald Ham, "Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era," *The American Archivist* 44 (Summer 1981), pp. 207-16; Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds," in Eastwood, (ed.), *The Archival Fonds*, pp. 31-85; and David Bearman, "Documenting Documentation," *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), p. 34. Bearman insists archivists must capture data about the relationships between the activity behind record creation and the records created or received in the course of that activity if records are to serve as evidence of it.

Chapter Three:

The Archives of Ontario: A Fresh Take on Archival Tradition

By the 1980s, many North American archivists had accepted the Australian critique of conventional descriptive practice. Still, although the merits of the Australian series system had been by then widely acknowledged for over a decade, only recently have efforts been made to apply the system outside Australia. The Archives of Ontario (hereafter referred to as AO) is perhaps the most prominent example of such an effort. This chapter will describe this development and its impact on archival theory and practice in Canada. In the 1990s, the AO decided to abandon the practice of fonds-level description of its holdings of Ontario government records in favour of an approach modelled on the Australian series system. This development challenged the existing Canadian descriptive paradigm built on the fonds concept, as archivists at the AO created a hybrid system wherein elements from both fonds and series approaches were brought together to create a new institutional descriptive system.

The earliest Canadian archives were state funded. Canadian archival theory and practice developed in these archives in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries largely outside the influence of the European archival tradition of commitment to provenance. These archives also emerged at a time when museum and library institutions were less well developed and their mandates (as well as archival

mandates) were less clear than they became. Canadian archives, such as the federal government's Archives Branch of the Department of Agriculture (established in 1872 and the forerunner of the National Archives of Canada) thus tended to seek out a wide variety of records, artefacts, and publications of public and private origin which in this case were intended to fulfil the Archives' "noble dream" of documenting Canadian history.¹ By the mid-twentieth century, the growth of museums and libraries meant that archives devoted much less attention to publications and artifacts. The commitment of most Canadian public archives to acquisition of a wide range of documents of public and private origin became known by the 1970s as the "total archives" concept.² As a result of this pattern of development, Canadian archivists worked into the late twentieth century with a strong commitment to general historical knowledge of Canada and/or its regions as the basis of their professional expertise, rather than European notions of archival theory and the practices which flowed from that theory. Canadian archivists focused their attention far more on the subject matter content of the records. But, as the volume and variety of archival records in Canadian archives and uses of these archives expanded dramatically after the mid-twentieth century, and Canadian archives consequently grew in complexity, archivists in Canada began to seek assistance in the more formal approaches to archival work that their colleagues in Europe and the United States had developed. Canadian archival theory and practice borrowed most heavily from American experience in adapting the European tradition to modern twentieth-century archives.

Among other things, Canadian state archives such as the Public Archives of Canada borrowed the American concept of the Record Group for the work of arrangement and description. The Archives of Ontario did likewise. Consequently, government records at the AO were assigned to Record Groups. These creators were often defined as government departments, although some smaller agencies without department status were assigned Record Groups. Like other institutions, the AO ran into problems with the application of the Record Group system. The application of the Record Group was often arbitrary or pragmatic. The creation of Record Groups was often haphazard and inconsistent as it was not based on standard criteria. Some government agencies were deemed to create a distinct Record Group and others were not, thus the latter's records were attached to another agency's Record Group. And, as in the Australian experience, administrative change among records creating agencies over time made it difficult to know to which Record Group certain records should be assigned.³ This was the approach to archival description at the AO when the Canadian profession's "rediscovery of provenance" began to prompt a profound rethinking of archival work.

Like their American counterparts, and although many Canadian archives had adopted provenance as applied in the Record Group, they still emphasized subject-based content information analysis as the basis of their expertise, not the study of administrative or personal histories in order to establish the broad context of the creation of records.⁴ Despite commitment to Record Groups, there were both

conscious and unintentional efforts to downplay provenance and contextual knowledge.⁵ Increasingly, however, Canadian archivists began to appreciate the value of provenance in their work as a means of better protecting the status of the records as evidence of the actions of their creators. These archivists realized that this enhanced the records' usefulness by adding to their meanings and assisted information retrieval in archives which were choking with information whose subject content no human being could possibly master for the ever widening range of subjects that users of archives brought to them. As a consequence, Canadian archivists renewed their commitment to provenance and reinterpreted it as a broad understanding of the complex context of the creation of the records.⁶ The solution to these archival problems was a renewed appreciation for the 'power of provenance'.⁷

This resulted in general discussion in the Canadian archival community (and in many countries) of the characteristics and benefits of provenance and context.⁸ Canadian archivists began to chart a new contextual approach to archival work. Some reconceived the place of historical knowledge in archival theory and practice. They emphasized the application of historical knowledge about records and records creators and historical research methodologies to unravelling the 'evidential context' of records (or the history of records, records creators and recordkeeping systems) as a way of obtaining provenance information. Others emphasized the application of provenance information without as much commitment to historical research methods or breadth of historical context. Many advocates of provenance of either type were

eager to shake their Canadian colleagues out of what they saw as their intellectual slumber. These advocates embraced and articulated the new emphasis on provenance as a renaissance of the archival profession and of archival theory and practice in Canada. For some, this fostered passionate debate.⁹

In response to this emerging priority, a number of archivists contributed articles on the nature and application of provenance and on richer, more contextualized histories of records.¹⁰ Archivists also explored conceptual alternatives to conventions such as the Record Group. The latter, combined with emerging computer technology, gave impetus to the development of archival descriptive standards in Canada.¹¹ One direct outcome in the mid 1980s of the rediscovery of provenance is the “Rules for Archival Description” (hereafter referred to as RAD), a major Canada-wide system of descriptive standards. The RAD system of standardized description is based on provenance, expressed as the fonds concept (or respect des fonds). The RAD definition of the fonds is “The whole of the records, regardless of form or medium, automatically and organically created and/or accumulated and used by a particular individual, family, or corporate body in the course of that creator’s activities and functions.”¹²

RAD made the fonds the centrepiece of standardized description. RAD provides a set of rules for describing in a standard way the key features of a fonds, starting at the highest level of aggregation of the records with the fonds as a whole, down through a “multilevel description” of the various primary internal features of a fonds – the series, file, and item levels. Multilevel fonds descriptions must indicate all

of the types of media in the fonds and illustrate the hierarchical relationships for all the record levels within a single fonds. The RAD system, once codified, was eagerly embraced by many Canadian repositories in both the public and private sectors. Canadian archivists developed RAD using the fonds as the theoretical foundation on which to build their descriptive systems, despite its early critics.¹³ The RAD standard replaced the Record Group in repositories where the latter was being used, and provided those institutions without standards a provenance-centred approach which drew heavily upon the long ignored European archival tradition.¹⁴ By the late 1990s, it resulted in a national system of bilingual descriptive standards. During the early 1980s, archivists at the AO worked within an archival context where traditional practices and theory were being questioned in light of novel ideas about context and descriptive standards. Theoretical issues informed by the concept of provenance and the implications of emerging computer technologies represented significant intellectual and technical challenges on the Canadian archival horizon. The AO was not immune to the international and national archival dialogue on descriptive standards. Advocates of standardization stressed the potential benefits of being able to share with researchers standard computerized descriptions of archives in (ultimately) a national network with institutions such as libraries and museums.¹⁵

The AO was one of the first major Canadian archival institutions to adopt the new RAD standard. The implementation of descriptive standards began at the AO in 1986 as staff began to reflect on past practices. A Task Force on Intellectual Controls was established by the AO in 1987 which coordinated the review and revision of past

practices. An institutional manual of policy and procedures was introduced in 1990 which outlined the role of descriptive standards within the broader framework of all archival practices at the AO. The Task Force introduced a new description programme that incorporated RAD, determined the format of standardized inventories (records descriptions) and controlled the application of consistent access points, or the provenance and subject authority control elements used to direct users to standardized inventories of archival records.¹⁶

The fonds-based approach of RAD was introduced alongside the existing Record Group system with a view to replacing it for the description of all records, both private and government. The use of RAD for private records description tended to run more smoothly as the distinctive and stable provenance of private personal and small corporate records lent themselves more readily to the fonds concept. There were still challenges associated with phasing out old systems of control and management, rolling out new approaches to harmonize intellectual and physical control and identifying where it was necessary to maintain a bridge (or many connections) between both.¹⁷ Government records were arranged and described according to the RAD standard. Series descriptions for multi-provenance series were placed into more than one inventory. In practice though, this was done infrequently as there was no clear emphasis or guidance on this in a system designed to link series to *the* one fonds to which they belonged. By the middle of the 1990s, the AO, like many other Canadian archival programs, used the RAD fonds concept as the basis of archival description. The merit of the system lies in its effort to protect provenance through

linking to one fonds (and to the fonds' creator) related records of common origin. But, while RAD was being implemented its limitations were coming under greater scrutiny. And as the AO studied more closely the Australian series system, these limitations become more pronounced.¹⁸

In the late 1990s, the AO abandoned the fonds concept for the description of Ontario government records. The AO devised an approach modelled on the Australian series system in use at the National Archives of Australia in order to fill the void left by jettisoning what had become a popular and near orthodox Canadian method of archival description. After a significant degree of institutional introspection on past practices based on fonds description and some experimentation, archivists at the AO deemed the fonds concept for describing government records was no longer appropriate. Past experiences in attempting to describe government records by fonds had uncovered significant problems. New solutions were required and would necessitate the creation of a new model.¹⁹

The rationale behind the AO's transition from fonds-based orthodoxy to the series model is portrayed in a seminal article crafted by the institution's Descriptive Standards Officer at the time, Bob Krawczyk. The purpose of the fonds concept is to make available to researchers as the central element of archival description an understanding of the context of a record's creation. Users would understand records better if descriptive instruments indicate who created records and the purposes of their creation.²⁰ But achieving these goals through the application of the fonds concept

to government records posed significant challenges. These challenges stemmed from the hierarchical structure of government agencies as well as the significant degree of administrative change in twentieth-century bureaucracies. Modern government structures were (and are) subject to ongoing change, through the creation, dismantling, merger, renaming, and dissolution of various levels of the hierarchy such as ministries, divisions, branches, and regional offices. Government recordkeeping systems also go through similar changes, as they too are created by one agency and passed on to the custody of new ones. These systems may also be dismantled and apportioned among these other administrative entities, which might then merge them with other records into modified series. Government records thus come into archival custody as the products of record creating and recordkeeping systems associated with these various actions of these mutating agencies. In order to establish provenance in the fonds-based approach, the records had to be assigned to one exclusive fonds creating body. Thus the context behind the records association with this one agency would be the basis of the archival description, rather than the fuller picture of the actual multifaceted contexts that had shaped most records.

One question that immediately confronted archivists charged with creating an accurate and clear representation of context in the fonds-based system was – what is a fonds creator? It was one thing to define a fonds as all of the records of a given creator, but what entity or entities in a complex, constant evolving, hierarchical bureaucracy create fonds? Every individual employee of an institution could be

considered a creator of records. Are all of these individuals' records separate fonds? Since that would be impossible to implement, are fonds creators the largest entity in the hierarchy, a mid-sized entity, small units, or every unit? In the dynamic realm of government bodies there are some, as Krawczyk described, 'freaks of administrative stability' which lend themselves quite well to a fonds-based description. The records of stable, static bodies are often easily distinguishable from other, more complex government creators. Entities such as boards and commissions have tended to experience relative stability and create administrative records independently from other government agencies.²¹ But these types of government entities are exceptions to the general environment of complexity, hierarchy, and mutations over time. Krawczyk concluded that two major issues were typically identified with a fonds-based system of description. The first was the challenge of coming to a workable definition of a fonds creating body. The second was the problem of assigning multi-provenance series to a predefined and exclusive fonds. If records were to be assigned to their proper single fonds, to which one creator should the provenance of records, created over time and in many places, by more than one creator, be attributed? Krawczyk and the AO sought guidance in their effort to apply consistently criteria for determining fonds-creating bodies.²²

The AO looked to the National Archives of Canada's (NAC) report on its adoption of the fonds concept in 1995 for assistance with the definition of the creator of a public sector fonds. The NAC model for a defining an independent creator was

based on the following criteria; i) a legal identity, ii) an official mandate, iii) a defined hierarchical mandate, iv) a sufficient degree of autonomy, v) an organizational structure, and vi) an independent recordkeeping system. The AO found that the NAC's interpretations of these criteria (based on the work of French archivist Michel Duchein) did not fit the characteristics of the entities it encountered in the Ontario government.²³ Archivists at the AO concluded that they could not apply the NAC's view that a fonds creator had to have, for example, a clear legal identity and an official mandate. Some existing ministries of the Ontario government had no enabling legislation or otherwise legally stated mandate, but relied on legislation that established predecessor ministries which had since been transformed into newer structures. The NAC guidelines offered some advice on how to proceed, but in the context of the Ontario government, the AO concluded this required too many exceptions or explanations to be practicable. In the Ontario government experience, there was a degree of informality about organizational change. There was an absence of legal or regulatory documentation providing evidence of ministerial mandates related to the nature and timing of the creation of new administrative entities. Therefore, applying the criteria of legal identities and official mandates for fonds-creating bodies proved extremely perplexing. The criteria appeared limited to the problem of determining subordinate fonds-creating bodies within a larger administrative structure. The criteria failed to address challenges associated with functional and name changes. Archivists were given some latitude in determining the differences between a name change and a new creator. In these and other cases,

questions arose over the definition of 'significant functional change' in context of shifting structures. In other instances, creating entities met some criteria (in terms of defined hierarchical position and organizational structure) while simultaneously lacking elements of other criteria. For instance, an agency did not enjoy the requisite degree of autonomy to be considered a fonds-creating body.

However, the evidence of the records indicated that the same entity had a separate recordkeeping system, relevant to its work as a branch, but was not part of the central registry system of a superior ministry or any other branch. So, the very existence of records created by this branch, according to the criteria, would not be sufficient to have this entity defined as a fonds-creating body, despite the existence of records of its own 'fonds'. Krawczyk suggests that the focus of the AO's investigation was on problems of functional shifts and name changes and the uncertainty over precise moments of staggered changes.²⁴

These were some of the main challenges associated with trying to identify what administrative entities out of the myriad of ones available could be defined as *the* creators of fonds. (Without knowing that, fonds-level description of records as a faithful reflection of their provenance could not begin.) Another key challenge to the fonds-based system of description arose from attempts to link specific records series to their appropriate fonds. The fonds-based approach assumed that a series be considered a group of records (integrally related to one another in a single filing system) linked to one provenance entity. The definition of a fonds for a corporate

body is “the whole of the documents, regardless of form or medium, automatically and organically created and/or accumulated and used by a particular corporate body in the course of that creator’s activities or functions.”²⁵ This definition, emphasizing the *whole* of the documents and relationships to a *particular corporate body*, explicitly suggests that a one-to-one relationship must exist. The assumption is that the activities of creation and accumulation and use of *all* the records being described are attributable to just one particular corporate body. This assumes that the context of creation of a series is uniform and static, and that ongoing accruals to a series of records would be attributable to the same provenance entity as previous portions of the series, or that a series is typically created, used and transferred to the archives by a single creator. Archivists at the AO questioned this assumption and were able to demonstrate that it was unwarranted, and indeed, provided a misguided approach the description of archival government records.²⁶

The AO’s analysis of government records revealed many instances when the creation of series over time and the custody and transfer of the records were not uniformly attributable to just one provenance entity. A response to these challenges associated with multi-provenance series within a fonds-based system would require distortions of the records’ provenance which were inconsistent with the basic purpose of provenance-based description that the fonds system was supposed to protect. One solution was to assign records series to the fonds of the one agency among its creators over time which was its most recent creator -- on the assumption that the entire series

would have been integrated into the records of the most recent creator. The drawback of this proved to be that, even assuming that the entire series had been brought forward into the custody of the most recent creator (a large assumption) the provenance relationship of the portion(s) of the series created by earlier creators was weakened. This would obscure the records' provenance. This solution also did not meet the criteria for establishing a fonds that had been set out in the accepted definition of a fonds, since the fonds of a given creator would not necessarily contain *all* of its records if some had been assigned to a more recent custodian of them. Indeed, choosing any one administrative entity (as *the* creator of the fonds) out of the many records creating entities in the typical hierarchical institution (in which the various layers of the bureaucracy have had a hand in the creation of the same series) distorted the provenance relationship of the several layers with a given records series. As was also suggested, linking a given series to the fonds of at least two creators, would simply compromise provenance again when it was actually linked to many more. Anything other than linking series with all their creators, whether one or more, would inevitably be arbitrary and inconsistent with provenance. Strict adherence to the precise definition of fonds, and applying it to large, frequently changing government administrations, constrained the efforts of archivists to represent more accurately and with clarity, the contexts of creation of government records over time and in different places.²⁷

The application of fonds-based criteria for government creators and their records proved disappointing. It was deemed an inadequate response to the realities of describing government records. The creation, dissolution, and structure of record creating agencies in the Ontario government illustrated that criteria central to application of the fonds concept could not be applied consistently or were too constraining. Overall, the fundamental purposes of the conceptual model were undermined by its very application. Krawczyk indicates that the AO looked to other institutions such as the National Archives for guidance, but that revealed that there was a great deal of latitude and arbitrary decision-making in applying the fonds concept, which did not encourage its adoption at AO. Therefore, like the Record Group, the fonds concept was deemed inappropriate.²⁸

In January 1997 a discussion paper was circulated at the AO which documented the observations just described. Two options were identified: i) continue to struggle with the inconsistent application and definition of fonds for government records, making concessions and distortions that would perhaps be workable, but not desirable within the dynamic context of the government of Ontario (basically making the data fit the model); or ii) adopt the Australian inspired series concept as the basis for description of government records and devise a model that would represent more accurately contextual information about archival records, both private and government. The second option was unanimously accepted by staff archivists and management. Krawczyk indicates that support for this view had emerged over the

1990s as archivists became increasingly familiar with the international archival literature on complex provenance information, experiments at AO with 'flexible description',²⁹ debate over the definition of "fonds" and theoretical and practical problems associated with applying the concept to multi-provenance records.

Archivists were also more increasingly familiar with archival literature on the complexity of administrative change.³⁰ A body of archival literature had challenged the theory underlying the fonds concept and the practical problems in applying it. Archival writers also noted that these problems would only become more challenging when archivists confront electronic records emanating from increasingly complex and networked records creating environments. Computing seemed likely to increase the ability of various administrative entities to share in the creation of particular recordskeeping systems and series, thus undermining further the conventional view that records have one primary creator and fonds to which they belong.³¹

Another key factor was the evolution of the technology for computerizing archival descriptions. The arrival in the late 1990s of Web-based, hypertext computing made it much more practical to display and make widely available the multiple interconnections between records series and their creators that the series system required.

In November 1997 the series system for description of Ontario government records was officially adopted as institutional policy. A Prototyping Team was established to explore options for a descriptive database of all the AO's holdings, with a view to the development of a computer system that would accommodate the new

series approach for government records description.³² In preparation for the automation process, the AO developed policies and procedures essential for implementation of the new system. A standing Committee on Intellectual Controls was established and charged with crafting manuals that provided criteria for identifying required contextual elements for agency histories and records descriptions, and instructions on the creation of relationships between these two entities.³³ At the heart of the system are the connections made between records and their creators. A researcher may locate all series created by a given agency or all agencies that have contributed to the creation of a given series. The system is entered in three possible ways: i) through a pathway which allows a search of all series and fonds described in the system; ii) through one which allows a search of all records creators; and iii) through one which allows a search of all file titles. Researchers can enter a keyword to explore each of these three pathways. If the keyword is in the description of a series, fonds, creator, or file the information about them will be retrieved.³⁴

If a series description is located, a researcher will find it contains the series title, dates of creation of the records in the series, their dates of accumulation, physical extent and media, a "Scope and Content" summary of the functions performed by the creator of the series, the type of filing system used to organize the records, the types of documents it contains and their subject themes, and indication of whether a finding aid list of titles of files in the series is available online. The series description will also

indicate the names of the agencies of the Ontario government which created the series. Two types of agencies are identified: the immediate creator or the agency directly responsible for the preparation and management of the documents in the series and the most senior agency to which that immediate records creator reported. The senior agency is known as the “controlling agency.” This emphasis on these two administrative levels of the provenance of records mirrors the Australian system as devised by Peter Scott. It does not reflect Chris Hurley’s view that “ambient” levels of provenance between the controlling agency and the immediate agency creator ought to be an explicit feature of the system. Hurley’s view that information about functions provides a valuable access point is not built into the system through a formal functions thesaurus, but is provided less formally through the keyword access point because a researcher may enter a function term as a keyword. Without a thesaurus, though, the researcher will have to come up with the function term used in the system unaided.³⁵

The information in the series description about the identity of the records creators links the researcher to further information about them. This information is identical to that provided when a researcher enters the descriptive system through the specific pathway established to retrieve information about records creators. A keyword search launches the pursuit of information through this pathway. The keyword retrieves a list of names of record creating agencies with that keyword in the description of them in the system. This information includes a “History and Function”

section which provides the agency title (and alternate titles), its dates of existence, functions, and administrative history, the names of agencies that preceded and succeeded it (if any), the names of agencies subordinate to it (if any) and which controlled it (if any), and the titles of all series the agency created. All agency and series titles provide links to the specific descriptive information about them, should a researcher wish to pursue it.³⁶ A keyword search of the pathway into the file title descriptions will produce a list of all titles in all the series and fonds in the system with that keyword in them. The file title information will contain the title of the series to which the file belongs, with a link to the series description, which, in turn, links with the various features of the information about creators and other series mentioned above.³⁷

The AO's agency descriptions consist of an administrative field with the administrative history of the agency and the inclusion of a 'functions' field. A functions field was intended to outline the activity which generated (and gives evidential meaning to) the relationship between the records and the agency being described. Archivists at the AO included this on the assumption, taken from Australian perspective, that an agency is really an event in the life of a series and records as series (or anything else) are by-products of functions. Archivists involved in the initial design of the system were convinced of the information retrieval potential of 'functions' as a distinct element of contextual data.³⁸ The AO addressed it in only a limited way though. This decision reflected the nature of the challenges

associated with designing an information system that could reflect completely and accurately the complexities of context around multi-provenance records and dynamic creators. Krawczyk maintains that in the context of the system design the interpretation of creator-records relationships needed to be well established before incorporating another element or layer of context. As well, the resources required to devise another element of contextual layering beyond records and creator descriptions in the overall design of the description database was a persuasive negative factor.³⁹

The AO is one of the few prominent archives outside Australia to implement the series system. Since the late 1990s, it has made major strides in that direction, but since this work is so recent, the literature which describes or comments on the AO's efforts is as yet limited. The conceptual base and practical application of the system can be viewed and tested via the AO Web site.⁴⁰ The AO was utilizing the Record Group concept at the moment it joined the Canadian RAD-based archival paradigm. But over time, the limitations of applying a fonds-based approach to government records caused the AO to look at alternatives to conventional descriptions. The challenges experienced at the AO were similar to those experienced by their Australian counterparts some thirty years earlier. The archivists at the AO responded to the intersection of the rediscovery of provenance, the discourse around archival descriptive standards, and the possibilities for series description of new computer technology through their contribution to the Canadian archival description discourse. It looked, for all intents and purposes, like a fresh take on tradition.

The further significance in the Canadian setting of the AO's initiative is its break, albeit incomplete, with the RAD framework. Although the fonds-based RAD model is appropriately contextual, it is a conceptual straitjacket which reflects traditional assumptions about the nature of archival records. The Canadian RAD standard has an inherent weakness in its commitment to the fonds. Archivists at the AO recognized this. But the AO has not overthrown RAD entirely. The fonds is still used as the basis for description of private archives at the AO and the RAD rules for describing the data within the AO's series system have also been retained. Nevertheless, the AO has accomplished no mean feat -- structural change in a very well-established, national descriptive standard. In so doing it has helped create both a new foundation and new possibilities for archival description in Canada. Taking the AO's efforts as a point of departure, Canadian archivists can continue the exploration of the terrain of archival description beyond the existing RAD standard. Recent thinking about archival theory in Canada and other countries encourages this exploration. A discussion of the resulting possibilities for archival description is the focus of chapter four.

Endnotes

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1. Archival development in Canada in the period from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century was characterized by a small community of archivists which was involved in searching for, collecting and copying historical documents. Their activities and practices were conditioned by the influence of historical societies and the local history movement. See Carman Carroll, "Developing a Historical Laboratory: The

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- Genesis of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia," in Craig, (ed.), The Archival Imagination, Donald Macleod, " 'Quaint Specimens of the Early Days': Priorities in Collecting the Ontario Archival Record, 1872-1935," Archivaria 22 (Summer 1986), pp. 12-39 and Terry Cook, "Archives Yesterday: A Glimpse at the Enthusiasms and Tribulations of Sir Arthur Doughty," Archivaria 1 (Winter 1975-76). The Library and Archives of Canada (formerly the National Archives of Canada) began as a repository of historical documents and influenced the development of a profound Canadian archival commitment to the historical mission and the cultural role of archives. Jay Atherton, "The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897-1956," in Nesmith, (ed.), Canadian Archival Studies; Ian Wilson, "A Noble Dream. The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada," in Nesmith, (ed.), Canadian Archival Studies; Danielle Lacasse and Antonio Lechasseur, The National Archives of Canada, 1872-1997 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet, no. 58, 1997).
2. Laura Millar, "Discharging Our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada," Archivaria 46 (Fall 1998), pp. 103-146.
 3. The Archives of Ontario Web site includes a brief explanation of the transition from the Record Group concept to fonds-based approach to arrangement and description. See "Arrangement at the Archives of Ontario: A Canadian Series System" at <http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/about/series.htm>
 4. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 29-30, 41-42.
 5. Tom Nesmith, "Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," in Nesmith, (ed.), Canadian Archival Studies, pp. 159-184; Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," p. 35. Cook says of provenance in the mid-twentieth century in Canadian archives that "Theoretical lip-service was paid to the concept and in practice it was either, ignored or actually undermined."
 6. Nesmith, "Archives from the Bottom Up," pp. 4-10; Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 36-37.
 7. David Bearman and Richard Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," Archivaria 21 (Winter 1985-86), pp. 14-27.
 8. Duchemin, "The History of European Archives," pp. 14-24. Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Archival Oneness in the Midst of Diversity: A Personal Perspective," The American Archivist 59 (Winter 1996), pp. 14-29.
 9. Heather MacNeil, "Archival Theory and Practice: Between Two Paradigms," Archivaria 37 (Spring) pp. 6-20; Heather MacNeil, "Archival Studies in the Canadian Grain: The Search for a Canadian Archival Tradition," Archivaria 37 (Spring 1994), 134-149; Tom Nesmith, "Nesmith and the Rediscovery of Provenance: A Response," Archivaria 38 (Fall 1994); Andrew Birrell, "The Tyranny of Tradition," in Nesmith (ed.) Canadian Archival Studies, pp. 415-420; Terry Cook, "The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on Total Archives," in Nesmith, (ed.), Canadian Archival Studies, pp. 339-360.
 10. See, for example, Barbara Craig, "The Canadian Hospital in History and Archives," Archivaria 21 (Winter 1985-86), pp. 52-67; Gabrielle Blais, "Recovering a Lost Heritage: The Case of the Canadian Forestry Service Records," Archivaria 25 (Winter 1987-88), pp. 84-92; Doug Whyte, "Excavating the Archival Legacy of the Department of the Interior: The Records of the Mining Lands Branch," Archivaria 25 (Winter 1987-88), pp. 93-106; Doug Bocking, "The Records Go West: Department of the Interior Records in the Saskatchewan Archives," Archivaria 25 (Winter 1987-88), pp. 107-112; Terry Cook, "A

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- Reconstruction of the World': George R. Parkin's British Empire Map of 1893," in Nesmith, (ed.), Canadian Archival Studies, pp. 325-338; and Tom Nesmith, "Pen and Plough at Ontario Agricultural College, 1874-1910," Archivaria 19 (Winter 1984).
11. Nesmith, "Introduction: Archival Studies in English-speaking Canada," pp. 4-10.
 12. Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Rules for Archival Description (Ottawa, 1990), D-3.
 13. Debra Barr, "The Fonds Concept in the Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards Report," Archivaria 25 (Winter 1987-88), pp. 163-170. Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds," in Eastwood, (ed.), The Archival Fonds, pp. 31-85. Michel Duchéin, "Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems of Respects des fonds in Archival Science," Archivaria 16 (Summer 1983), p. 67.
 14. Kent Haworth, "The Voyage of RAD: From the Old World to the New," Archivaria 36 (Autumn 1993), pp. 5-15. Wendy Duff and Marlene van Ballegoie, RAD Revealed – A Basic Primer to the Rules for Archival Description (Ottawa: Canadian Council of Archives, 2001), p. 6. The term 'fonds' was selected (instead of 'papers' or 'records') because it was not media-specific, could accommodate records of both persons and corporate bodies and would represent the distinction between 'natural' accumulations of records and collections – an artificial aggregation of records.
 15. National Archives of Canada. Archives and Government Records Branch. "Criteria for the Establishment of Fonds for the Records of the Government of Canada," (Ottawa: May 1995), p. 8. Federal funding was made available to archival institutions in Canada for archival descriptive work that adhered to the RAD (fonds-based) approach. The participation of archival programs in inter-archives networks within Canada required the acceptance of the centrality of fonds within their descriptive systems.
 16. Heather Heywood, "Facing Reality: Implementing Descriptive Standards at the Archives of Ontario," Archivaria 35 (Spring 1993), pp. 335-39.
 17. Ibid., pp. 337, 339.
 18. Bob Krawczyk, "Cross Reference Heaven: The Abandonment of the Fonds as the Primary Level of Arrangement for Ontario Government Records," Archivaria 48 (Fall 1999), p. 132.
 19. Ibid., p. 131.
 20. Bureau of Canadian Archivists, Toward Descriptive Standards: Report and Recommendations of the Canadian Working Group on Archival Descriptive Standards (Ottawa, 1986), p. 57. Duchéin, "Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems," p. 67.
 21. Terry Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems, and Solutions," Archivaria 35 (Spring 1993), p. 24. Krawczyk, "Cross Reference Heaven," p. 133.
 22. Krawczyk, "Cross Reference Heaven," p. 136.
 23. Duchéin, "Theoretical Principles and Practical Problems," p. 67. National Archives of Canada, "Criteria for the Establishment of Fonds," pp. 8-9.
 24. Krawczyk, "Cross-Reference Heaven," pp. 138-140. Bob Krawczyk, Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB) Workshop: Series System, Regina Saskatchewan: October 8-9, 2002, p. 3.
 25. Bureau of Canadian Archivists, The Rules for Archival Description, p. D-4.
 26. Krawczyk, "Cross-Reference Heaven," p. 144.
 27. See "Arrangement at the Archives of Ontario: A Canadian Series System" at <http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/about/series.htm>

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28. Krawczyk, "Cross-Reference Heaven," pp. 137. Archives of Ontario, "Arrangement at the Archives of Ontario."
 29. Archives of Ontario, "Arrangement at the Archives of Ontario. "
 30. Bearman and Lytle, "The Principle of the Power of Provenance," p. 19.
 31. Terry Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era," Archives and Manuscripts no. 2 (November 1994).
 32. Archives of Ontario, "Arrangement at the Archives of Ontario." Negotiations led to the creation of a joint project between the AO and the International Development and Research Centre MINISIS Systems Group to develop a descriptive system using relational database software.
 33. Archives of Ontario, "Arrangement at the Archives of Ontario."
 34. See the Archives of Ontario Web site at
<http://www.archives.gov.on.ca/english/common/collections.htm>
 35. See Archives of Ontario website search page for archival descriptions at
<http://server1.minisisinc.com/minisa.dll/10560/1/0?SEARCH>
 36. See Archives of Ontario search page for Records Creators at
http://server1.minisisinc.com/minisa.dll/144/ARCH_AUTHORITY?DIRECTSEARCH
 37. See Archives of Ontario search page for Files and Items at
http://server1.minisisinc.com/minisa.dll/144/ARCH_LISTINGS?DIRECTSEARCH
 38. Archives of Ontario, Ontario's Description Manual, Chapter 29 - "Ontario Government Agency Histories," p. 29.9. Chris Hurley, "What, if Anything, is a Function?" Archives and Manuscripts 21, no. 2 (November 1993). Bearman and Lytle, "The Principle of the Power of Provenance," pp. 22-23.
 39. This information was provided to the author during formal meetings with Bob Krawczyk in March, 2003.
 40. The Archives Descriptive Database Orientation provides information regarding the underlying conceptual structure of the system at
<http://server1.minisisinc.com/archon/addhelp.htm>. The design of systems consisting of authority records separated from records descriptions represented ideas about representing provenance that had been advocated early in the descriptive discourse. See Bearman and Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," pp. 24-25 and Cook, "The Concept of the Archival Fonds," in Eastwood, (ed.), The Archival Fonds, pp. 67-68. An American archivist, Max Evans, called for descriptive systems based on descriptions of records linked to authority records as early as 1982. See Max Evans, "Authority Control: An Alternative to the Record Group Concept," The American Archivist 45 (Spring 1982), pp. 249-61.

Chapter Four : Enhancing the Series System: Recent Trends in the Theory and Practice of Description

Since the late 1980s, the fonds-based approach was the only standard framework for description in Canada until the AO devised an approach based on Australian models. The initiative at the AO helped pave the way for further explorations of contextualization and archival descriptive systems. Other repositories, such as the Archives of Manitoba (formerly the Provincial Archives of Manitoba) and the Saskatchewan Archives, have started to (re)imagine current models for descriptive work in light of the series system.¹ The Archives of Manitoba is attempting to depict all levels of multiple provenance as the records there, especially the corporate records of the Hudson's Bay Company, reflect up to seven levels of hierarchy for a series of records. The initiative in Manitoba has been inspired both by the accomplishments of the AO and Australian archivists. Archivists at the Archives of Manitoba can take advantage of Ontario's experiences. Similar to the AO's experience, the work in Manitoba reflects postmodernist views about the archival enterprise. This has influenced the design of a networked system that attempts to represent richer and complex histories of records, in the interests of both archival management and an increasingly computer literate audience.² Therefore, the alternative to the fonds concept is undergoing development by some in the Canadian archival community

Advocates of Canadian standards have only recently responded to the sustained criticism of the fonds approach (see Figure 1).³ The relatively calm surface of Canadian

archival theory and practice was only slightly disturbed by the AO's introduction of the series system. The most visible public reaction to it came two years after its adoption. It was prompted by Krawczyk's conclusion that Canadian descriptive standards based on the fonds suffered from a lack of essential prior standards for arrangement or for determining the identity of fonds creators. Without that, he said, standards of description simply impose a common format for description upon the surface of a highly irregular underlying structure.⁴ Canadian archival educator and early proponent of the fonds system for RAD, Terry Eastwood, responded that "principled rules" for identifying fonds creators were possible to devise as the basis of a standard. He maintains that a fonds creator is an "agency" with "functional sovereignty" over its formally mandated area of activity.⁵ He argues that a weakness of the series system is that it does not define records and series creating agencies clearly. Supporters of the series system view them as those entities which have directly done one or more of creating, accumulating, using, managing or controlling a body of records (or series). For Eastwood, this may have the benefit of linking records to their most immediate creators, but does not adequately provide "the broader history of creation" that the fonds concept would, if expressed through his view of an agency. He believes that his admittedly "maximalist" view of fonds would capture in larger single aggregations all records of his agencies, or the umbrella institutions of which most of the Australian agencies would be a part. He acknowledges that Australian archivists such as Chris Hurley point out that the series system does allow researchers to pinpoint all the records created by the Australian version of an agency and that by following the "cross

references" in this system, as Krawczyk notes, a researcher can piece together all records of all related agencies or all records of the type of entity that Eastwood describes. Instead of "cross reference heaven," Eastwood thinks this would be a researcher's "nightmare."⁶

Although pursuing all the records of a given creator in the series system can be a challenge at first (or until one is comfortable with the system), Eastwood concedes that fonds-based description (in Canada at least) has not been successful in performing the task that is the series systems' strength – documenting the multiple provenance of records. The question then becomes, does it make more sense to enhance the series system, or improve the fonds system? Although the fonds system may be open to the adaptations Eastwood proposes, he does not outline how this would be done systematically in practice to capture the contextual relationships the series system now captures so well. The series system, while not without some of the flaws Eastwood notes (which Australians from Hurley to the RKMS Project and the Australian Society of Archivists' Committee on Descriptive Standards have also noted) does go a long way to addressing the major weakness of the fonds system that Eastwood recognizes. It would thus seem wiser to enhance the series system to address its drawbacks, rather than embark on the major reconstruction the fonds system would need to address its limitations. Perhaps surprisingly, Eastwood is agnostic about the way ahead. "Whether a repository opts for one conceptual approach or the other," he concludes, "the acid test is to realize their full potential." As Eastwood observes, whether description follows a fonds- or series-based approach, there is no longer any debate about the need for more

contextual information. It is now a question of how best to create systems capable of communicating to users the contextual complexity of the creation of aggregations of records (such as series or fonds).⁷ As Eastwood suggests, whatever the choice, descriptive standards in Canada have fallen behind “the revolution in the thinking about administrative and intellectual controls.”⁸ Exploring the nature of this revolution in order to outline the features of future archival description is the focus of this chapter.

The discourse on archival description in Canada since the 1990s has focused on the current state and future role of descriptive standards. Advocates of either the fonds concept or series system debate the merits of descriptive systems based on either one or the other. Differences between the two represent conflicting views of the conceptualization of records creation, provenance, records, and even the timing of descriptive actions. More recently, this discussion of archival description has been radically transformed by heated debate between archivists of the Jenkinsonian tradition, who see archivists as (rightly) uninvolved in the creation of records, and those animated by the postmodern idea that they inevitably intervene in it because participants in a given activity cannot attain neutral detachment from its results. This debate has produced a preliminary outline of revised approaches to description. The emergence of ‘a third way’ for description has been lead by archival educators Verne Harris (a South African postmodern thinker and critic of conventional descriptive standards) and Wendy Duff (a key contributor to the development of such national and international standards).⁹ They have combined their experiences at the archival coalface and theoretical insights into a compelling reflection on historical archival practices and

standards. They have collaborated on a comprehensive synthesis of the fundamental issues related to archival descriptive standards over the past two decades and more recently, the impact of postmodern archival theory. Their provocative work provides a strategy for integrating several key concepts, those shared and contested,¹⁰ that are relevant for the archival enterprise. Duff and Harris offer a vision for archival descriptive standards that would reconcile the common aim of the opposing approaches -- creating representations of context - with a more inclusive, 'inviting' standard for description more relevant to archiving in a postmodern context.¹¹ The chapter attempts to give graphic representation to an interpretation of just such a model.

Creating representations about records and their contexts has been constrained by the development of standards based on the fonds approach and its assumptions. Models of representation are necessarily constructions and standardizing descriptions can be less constraining and still remain faithful to core archival principles and aims. The model proposed here attempts to reconcile the need for standards with a shift from archival descriptive practices based on 'modern' assumptions towards those inspired by postmodern sensibilities.¹² The model does not represent any framework being devised currently within the author's home archives, the Saskatchewan Archives, but it grew in part from reflections on a proposed case study of the application of the AO's series system to certain government records at the Saskatchewan Archives. The initial rationale behind a case study was to enhance the AO's 'series' system. But, conducting research into the record creating activities of an entity of the Saskatchewan government,

and its predecessors and successors (see Figure 2)¹³ and a group of records in archival custody related to aboriginal issues confirmed that the structural components on which the series system is based, especially the separation of contextual data, are sensible and very useful. However, after two years participation in a descriptive standards initiative and a reading of probing observations by archival theorists, this initial focus on simply adapting the series system seemed a limited aim.¹⁴ In light of this recent literature, exploring the potential of making more substantive enhancements to the series model, reflecting more compelling conceptual questions and solutions, was deemed by the author as a more engaging project.

The proposed conceptual model was conceived in response to calls in the literature for representing more layers of context around records, especially those related to 'archival layering' or the actions archives take with records. In a limited, very preliminary fashion, this descriptive model takes the AO's series initiative as a point of departure and incorporates data content elements of the Canadian RAD standard into a more inclusive framework. The purpose is to explore the potential for a framework for description which depicts relevant contextual elements and reflects postmodern ideas. A further primary concern is to articulate an approach that enables archivists to be more accountable for what they do, and thus to be more transparent about their management, presentation, and provision of access to records in archival custody.

At the heart of this preliminary model is the idea, expressed in the recent work of Harris and Duff, Laura Millar, and Peter Horsman, that the primary aim of description is not to pursue and apply the highly elusive proper definition of fonds, series, and

agencies or records creators, or even to place singular stress (as both the fonds and series systems do) on outlining the administrative relationships between creators and between records and creators.¹⁵ The direction of recent thinking is toward more flexibility in these matters in order to gain more understanding of record creation and records history as a contingent phenomenon and to incorporate archival accountability for the many interpretive judgments involved in making a more flexible system. Thus the bodies of records in such a system may not be in any pure or consistently applied sense the traditional objects of archival description: archive groups, record groups, fonds, or series. They may instead be records related by their provenance in groupings that archivists identify and can justify. After identifying such groups, the key is to describe as much as possible of their contextual provenance (like the series system), but then explain as far as possible how the records came to be created, including an account of how archival decisions shaped them. This approach, while not exactly the conventional series system, as it may result in groupings that pioneers of the system would not call series, is within the spirit of the more flexible approach to the series system that is called for in the Australian Society of Archivists' 2003 guide to series-based archival description. It says that "The guide does not provide practical guidance on the identification and delineation of records series or how to identify an agency. These issues may be resolved by each archive implementing the series system according to its own needs and requirements. Archives are able to make their own or jurisdiction specific decisions about the ways that the series system should be implemented and still operate within the framework of the series system."¹⁶

As inspired by Duff, Harris, Millar, and Horsman, the new model would be built on the identification of four broad elements of historical context related to archival records (see Figures 3).¹⁷ The identification of four broad contextual categories, namely *Provenance History*, *Ambient History*, *Records History* and *Archival History* reflects, to a large degree, a conception of description articulated by Laura Millar. Millar, a provocative critic of the fonds concept has outlined a descriptive system incorporating three of the four categories above. Taken together, these four components could provide an overall picture of layers of context around the groupings of records archivists identify according to provenance. The *Provenance History*¹⁸ component represents multiple creators over time. This element (based on the AO series system) would consist of narratives describing the histories of multiple provenance entities that had a relationship with records and the nature of those relationships. In the realm of corporate entities they could be represented as creating, using, accumulating, and transferring entities. The *Records History*¹⁹ element relates to the physical entity being described -- the records themselves. This element would consist of narratives related to characteristics of records creation and their management and movement over time before archival custody. This is the history of recordkeeping activity, essentially the 'story' of the archives as 'records'. The type of information documented would describe the purposes for the records creation, how they were created and used by various administrative entities, where records might have been transferred and the reasons for changes in custody, and whether records were lost, destroyed, enhanced, or altered over time and the reasons. The boundary between the *Provenance* and *Records History*

elements is the *Ambient* entity that would provide a layer of context for provenance entities, a notion articulated by Hurley. This component would provide information about the functions related to formal record creating and recordkeeping activities, usually associated with corporate bodies. It would also depict ambient functions that animated specific records creating and recordkeeping by individual provenance entities while in both formal and less formal environments. However, the author anticipates this component, because of its novelty, will prove challenging and might result in conflicts or duplication of information with data depicted in the *Records History*.

The fourth component of the system is the *Archival History*²⁰ element. This element would describe the story of the records as 'archives'.²¹ The documentation of archival 'intervention' would provide narratives about the selection, management, and presentation of archival records. This would make known to users the processes of identifying potential archival records and acquisition strategies devised by repositories based on their legal mandates or informal objectives. This element of the model would provide links to structured information about appraisal where archivists could share with users their formal reports, insights, interpretations and discussions relating to appraisal values.²² The structured information would consist of documentation of the choices made about the records acquired and the appraisal criteria and methods used to make these determinations. Further, this element would consist also of documentation relating to the records not acquired and the rationale for such decisions. Providing more transparency for the appraisal process would be important for two reasons. First, it would make known to users that the records being described are most likely not the

‘whole’ of any records from a particular records creating environment to which the records relate – nor are they ever likely to be. (Thus they are not fonds in the conventional sense, a point Millar makes to illustrate the weaknesses of the fonds concept.)²³ The records in archival custody are just slivers or traces of a larger documentary activity. Secondly, appraisal information provides a significant measure of accountability, since appraisal archivists are not simply identifying records with archival value. Their decisions are creating archival value. Therefore, the records accessed by users would provide a view of the appraisal process and give a sense of the broader context in which decisions were made about the preservation of archival records on the basis of theoretical ideas, practical constraints (imposed by technology and lack of resources) and societal context.²⁴

The *Archival History* component would also be comprised of information on the processes used for the management of archival records within a repository. This would provide a view of the involvement of archivists in giving meaning to records through ‘value-added’ descriptive representations. Records are subject to ongoing interpretation by archivists throughout the history of the records.²⁵ This element would serve as the place where users could make sense of what has been created in part through archival intervention. Information of this kind would reflect the context in which archivists made decisions about what records to emphasize above others in finding aids and public programming activities, for example. Putting records through descriptive treatments and selecting them for inclusion in on-line exhibits and publicly accessible databases are methods of privileging certain records for better access. Historically,

descriptions have been presented as accurate, factual, and neutral representations of the contents of archives and, as such, there was little or no indication of the nature of the interpretive representation supplied by archivists. However, archival descriptions have often reflected the outlooks and research interests of the archivists who write them.²⁶

Duff and Harris suggest that a new more flexible descriptive standard could also invite researchers into the process of description. Being open to users would respect the fact that other interpretations beyond those of records creators and archivists are worthy of inclusion in the system documentation. Providing users an opportunity to add their own layering would acknowledge that different users require different ways into records and contextual information. As an enhancement to this information, the *Archival History* component could serve as the place where users could find information which assists them to locate and interpret archival records. The use of the records by researchers over time and links to publications, research projects, multi-media productions, etc., created from archival records could be documented and tracked. This would constitute a contextual layer where users could embed their own interpretations and historical (re)telling of the archival records. From a public service point of view, this could also serve as a means of capturing, in a meaningful way, ongoing relationships to archival records and reactions to the archival perspective. Substantive information about users, their use of archival records and their satisfaction (or disappointment) with descriptive tools has not usually been a goal of archival management. Retrieval slips for records should not simply be seen as attempts at measuring public service needs with archival service delivery. User studies are scarce

and those that have been conducted indicate that standardized contextual structures are a barrier to getting to records as they are often too voluminous and confusing.²⁷ Where users studies have been conducted, they suffered from the inherent reluctance of users to be candid about their research. This will no doubt remain a problem for any system which invites user input, but users may still have valuable information about the context of the creation of the records that they may be willing to share.

In any event, the *Archival History* element would be a gateway through which users could journey back behind the records to understand why they are seeing what they are seeing in the way they are seeing it – the slivers, traces, and spectres of an archival record.²⁸ In general terms, the implementation of a descriptive system with an archival history component will be a contentious issue for archivists since making public this type of documentation has never been part of any archival descriptive systems. And this would indeed be a major enhancement of the conventional series system.²⁹ The selection, preservation, and presentation of archival records remain tied to positivist assumptions about archival neutrality, rather than an understanding of the contingent nature of archives. This will be received by some archivists with either apprehension, scepticism, or outright dismissal (or all of the above).

The model being proposed here does not call for the overthrow of RAD, and least not yet! To be fair, RAD is an approach which strives to represent the contextual qualities of archival records (albeit through a traditional understanding and presentation of that context). It also makes provision, for example, in its “custodial history” section for information about the physical movement and ownership of the

records after their creation and up to their acquisition by an archives. But this is typically used in a conventional way merely to report on these shifts in location and control and to outline for legal purposes the provenance of the records, not to explore how these shifts may have shaped the records. Although RAD has this feature, it reflects overall a view of what needs to be known about records that is limited and limiting. Therefore, this thesis supports the argument that archivists should devote energy to imagining an alternative standard that strives to deploy scholarly research in more substantive ways for the creation of more comprehensive representations of the activities which account for the existence and characteristics of archival records.

As alluded to above in relation to custodial history, perhaps RAD's greatest failing is that it does not reflect the postmodern insights that have come to the fore in archival thinking in several countries. This is somewhat understandable because RAD was devised before this development in archival thought. Still, descriptive standards such as RAD should address it. There are several ways in which postmodern theory challenges traditional assumptions about records and the role of archivists that still inform much archival practice. In general, postmodern theory challenges traditional Western 'grand narratives' or comprehensive world views. Grand narratives or 'big stories,' as Duff and Harris call them, enter social life in the form of both records and less tangible aspects of social memory.³⁰ They support those in positions of power. The imposition of dominant interpretations of the past marginalizes and excludes those on the peripheries of power. The "big stories" have been instruments for social control as

they often suppressed others' stories, collective histories, and shared memories of the past.

The relationship of grand narratives to archival records is bound up in traditional 'modern' assumptions about records. These assumptions maintain that interpretive boundaries between inscribed texts and their contexts are firm and stable and a record's context is fixed and simply waiting to be discovered. The role of the archivist in this view is to unravel the meaning and significance of records through intellectual control and description. Archival interventions, including arrangement and description, are thus disconnected from the processes of records creation and from broader societal influences. By extension, the archival endeavor in general remains outside of the political or societal power relationships reflected in archival records.³¹ Postmodern assumptions about records challenge directly these traditional modern ones. The records we use, suggest postmodernists, are mediated to us by the influences acting on them through the records' complex histories. The records also mediate what we can know and thus help create social constructs that can enhance the power of records creators and act as a form of social control over contested terrain. Therefore, dominant voices and perspectives became those conveyed by society's institutions of memory. As a consequence, for example, archives are constructed 'houses of memory' that have traditionally excluded or marginalized non-official records and voices.³² The "big story" can impede individuals' attempts to construct their own meanings by reducing the space, confusion, and sense of open-endedness that are needed to pursue alternative ones. The "big story" imposes dominant meanings where there may well be

a diversity of meanings.³³ Most archival repositories are bursting with records that represent these grand narratives created by official powers in the exercise of social control. The ethical burden created through the absence of 'other' smaller stories has only just begun to exert pressures of a different nature.³⁴ Archival intervention has always been a part of the construction of memory and implicated in the relationships of power that play out in the contested sites that are archives.

Archivists contribute to the grand narratives, memory construction, and the 'closing' out of alternative interpretations. These are the dangers inherent in grand narratives. Postmodern archival theorists believe there are such dangers in any process of archival description.³⁵ A crucial aspect of archival standardization, closely tied to the postmodern discourse, is that it reinforces the overriding narrative by insisting on a common way of speaking about or describing archives. Standardization makes judgements about the value of some points of view. It privileges certain perspectives while silencing others. Archivists engaged in the design of standards are operating within a realm where the exercise of power and official remembering shuts out other values and determines what is forgotten. Therefore, standards are not neutral, natural, or value-free. For example, Canadian descriptive standards reflect an overriding concern about textual records.³⁶ This bias relegates non-textual records to the margins as 'special-media' archival records.³⁷

There are two key actions that elevate an approach to the status of a standard. The creation of a rule set agreed upon and deployed in more than one community or site of activity is one. A second is the sustained imposition of these rules in order to

facilitate the replacement of unique (non-standardized) elements with universal methods of measurement and description within jurisdictions of similar activity.³⁸ Standardization is a process of embracing and adhering to agreed-upon terms. But, those terms and methods of application are historically conditioned. The “big story” of archival description which has dominated the archival enterprise for nearly two centuries, at various times and in different jurisdictions, consists of the assumptions behind concepts of archival impartiality, respect des fonds, provenance, original order, the series approach, which highlight records as authentic evidence and the identification of records for research.³⁹ The archival grand narrative has been powerfully expressed in the last few decades in a range of thinking and activities concerning descriptive standards. Archival description has the power to shape grand narratives. The archivist shares in the exercise of power to control which stories and experiences become part of the archival record and which will not. Archivists cannot stand outside this power of remembering and forgetting.

Description is itself a narrative constructed by archivists to tell stories about records, creators, and contexts of creation. In describing records archivists are continually identifying context, constructing it, presenting it, and (re)presenting it. Archivists select and identify certain layers for inclusion in their representations. They make decisions about which layers to highlight and privilege through description. More recently, they determine which records will get prominence over others through inclusion in on-line multi-media archival exhibits. This is accomplished through the primary medium of narratives and the telling of stories about context. Whether

archivists employ the fonds-based approach, a series-based system or something else for representation of context behind records, they cannot escape the 'realm of narrativity'. Archivists cannot remove themselves from their contributions to the narrative constructions of the past. The use of grand narratives represents an historical tendency to put borders around the unknown and open-ended and provide some recognizable closure.⁴⁰ The use of standard language and terms or language is about imposing and restraining any deviations. Standardized naming is particularly relevant to descriptive standardization. The process of naming makes things knowable, controllable, presumably predictable, and brings order to chaos. It is the business of science to name nature and this is no less evident in archival science. Archival science in the Canadian context has evolved into predictable naming conventions through placing structural parameters around disordered and complex interpretations about archival records - unpredictable contexts presented in standardized descriptions.

Thus, standardized intellectual containers are the outgrowth of descriptive standardization. This takes the form of large conceptual boxes such as fonds, series, collections, and such smaller ideas (data content fields) as dates of creation, title of records, scope and content notes. Containers of contextual and content data are intended to bring order to what appears as confused, disordered, unique realities of archival records. With 'the standard' archivists can utilize consistent filters and terms, group similar or particular elements, impose parameters around the scope of elements, and ultimately determine the amount of descriptive narrative relevant to the records. Archivists choose where a narrative of several paragraphs is deemed appropriate, or a

standard phrase will suffice. The application of standards is characterized by the struggle over how to make generalizations about distinct elements while identifying unique characteristics of similar concepts. For example, date fields, such as for dates of creation and dates of accumulation of records, are considered distinct enough elements to identify separately. However, restricting the standard to just these two choices leaves out space for dating other processes not strictly reflective of the creation of one type of record but relevant to the context of other media.⁴¹

Descriptive standards also have rules for the imposition of titles on records which inherently do not have titles.⁴² A scope and content field is available to document the internal structure and content information relevant to the records. Implicit in this is an obligation to indicate the records' potential subject matter. This is a holdover, perhaps, of the tradition of assisting researchers to identifying archival records which contain specific subjects of interest to them. Attempting to identify the relevant subjects (and assign them the correct description) in a group of archival records for potential information retrieval is of limited value.⁴³ Records are not created to be about something.⁴⁴ They were created to serve a functional purpose in a business or daily activity. Therefore, archival records have the potential, when it comes to their 'subject', to be about a great variety of often unpredictable subjects. Only the users of archival records and the perspectives they bring to their search will 'know' what these subjects are.

Despite the debate around the differences of the two approaches, they both share some significant elements. Both systems highlight the evidential value of archival

records and focus on the more formal corporate and 'official' record creating perspectives. Further, the fonds concept or series approach constrains the efforts of archivists to depict context that does not fit into the established parameters of the grand narrative. By continuing to use either system, archivists continue to put layers over the contested terrain, and obscure their roles in the keeping and forgetting of memory. Both were created without the input of crucial stakeholders, the users of archival records. Finally, both reflect the sustained focus on struggling with appropriate data content relevant to physical objects at the expense of depicting more meaningful, broader contextual record creating entities and processes. Therefore, both perpetuate the creation of descriptive boxes through the perspective of archivists – conceptual containers that are crafted, closed, and shelved (or stored increasingly as electronic documents) for future retrieval. One observer of archival description concludes that this amounts to nothing more than making binary, electronic versions of traditional analog, paper-based finding aids.⁴⁵ This suggests that the current archival mindset in Canada is informed still to some degree by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century archival theory and practices and reflected in descriptive standards. The mindset for description must change in order to imagine models that are more appropriate for the postmodern context in which archivists are working presently.

However, the author supports the argument of archival theorists who caution against dismissing standards outright since, like our need to record memory is part of the human condition, respecting the standard has become an integral component of the modern Western tradition. The case for continuing a standard approach is compelling.⁴⁶

Archivists want to participate in the creation of memory through the telling of their stories with the records. If archivists gave up employing narratives through standards because standards are just relative constructs, they would be without a means of telling stories. But, archivists should engage themselves more openly in the messy, constructed business of grand narratives and standards. Secondly, technological realities presently make the construction of any complex common archival interfaces for archival representations (whether as conventional descriptions or new ones) extremely challenging without some sort of standard.⁴⁷

Archivists have not considered themselves as active participants in the dynamics of power relations. Archivists have denied (and continue to deny) the subjective nature of their descriptive work on the grounds that their craft is undertaken in an objective neutral fashion. More recently, the widespread commitment to the creation of descriptive standards has encouraged their claims to objectivity and impartiality. As a result, archival description becomes the “handmaiden to preservation and (while respecting this and preserving that) they play no part in records making. Their job is to keep records which somebody else made. They are like photographers taking baby photos. They make representations of the end product but they never participate in the creative act.”⁴⁸ Denying their creative role in the ongoing construction of memory has had a significant influence over the evolution of the profession towards a more constrained and sterile endeavour. The sustained use of descriptive standards as they look currently has been a self-legitimizing process. According to Duff and Harris, this has fostered a degree of professional disingenuousness and left Canadian archivists and

their standardized representations vulnerable to charges of perpetuating and imposing big stories.

The rudimentary model for archival description being proposed here attempts to conceive a standard descriptive system built on the identification of broad layers of context and linkages between and within the layers. Implicit in the design of this model is the expectation that archivists focus on a traditional aspect of descriptive activities -- sustained research in the deconstruction of the context behind the records. Analyzing the context behind the record would involve examining the intentions and objectives of records creators and accumulators (individuals and corporations), the administrative and ambient contexts in which records creating activities occurred, the functions performed that caused records creation, the characteristics of recordkeeping systems of corporate entities, the records intended audiences, and the internal features of individual types of records regardless of media (using diplomatics where applicable).

The model of descriptive standards suggested here builds on the series system insight into the multiple provenance of records and their ongoing creation by various creators who have custody of them. This model extends this account of the creation of the records, however, into the archival interventions and contributions by researchers which recontextualize or recreate the records. The combined work of records inscribers and pre-archival custodians, archivists, and researchers creates the narrative of how and why the records were created and used both before and after they arrive in archives. This narrative is largely missing from the descriptive systems now employed. The narrative which is provided in standardized descriptions (whether in fonds-based

or series-based systems) strongly implies that records are readily arranged and identifiable entities, with few anomalies or complexities, except for the complex administrative relationships that connect their creators together. This imposed tidy standard structure leaves the impression that records are orderly, controllable, and thus highly reliable vehicles to the past. This is the traditional archival grand narrative which conventional descriptive standards support. The series-based approach, made more flexible as Chris Hurley and the Australian Society of Archivists now propose, and animated more by the spirit of Millar, Horsman, and Duff and Harris, could be enhanced by going beyond the narrower focus on setting out administrative relationships. As important as that is, without more room within formal descriptive systems for the sometimes ungainly groupings records are put in and the often untidy and only partially understood narrative or history behind their creation and management by inscribers and archivists, archival description will be much poorer.

The contexts behind archival records are more complex and dynamic than can be represented by existing models. If postmodern archival theorists, and more traditional theorists for that matter, call for richer contextualization, then archivists need newer models to accommodate these concepts. This involves the creation of a more flexible, less-rigid standard. Standard descriptive systems should aspire to the depiction of the dynamic quality of records, their creators over time, and the contexts of creation. Descriptive systems should endeavor to depict the nature of archival intervention, and engage users of descriptive instruments and the records in order to provide 'space' for other interpretations. In order to (re) formulate theory and (re) engineer practices,

archivists need new tools or models to carry out descriptive practices. They will require new conceptual containers and presentation models as archival interfaces that will accommodate, with more sophistication and transparency, the layering of context, creation, and ongoing (re) creation of archival records over time.

Endnotes

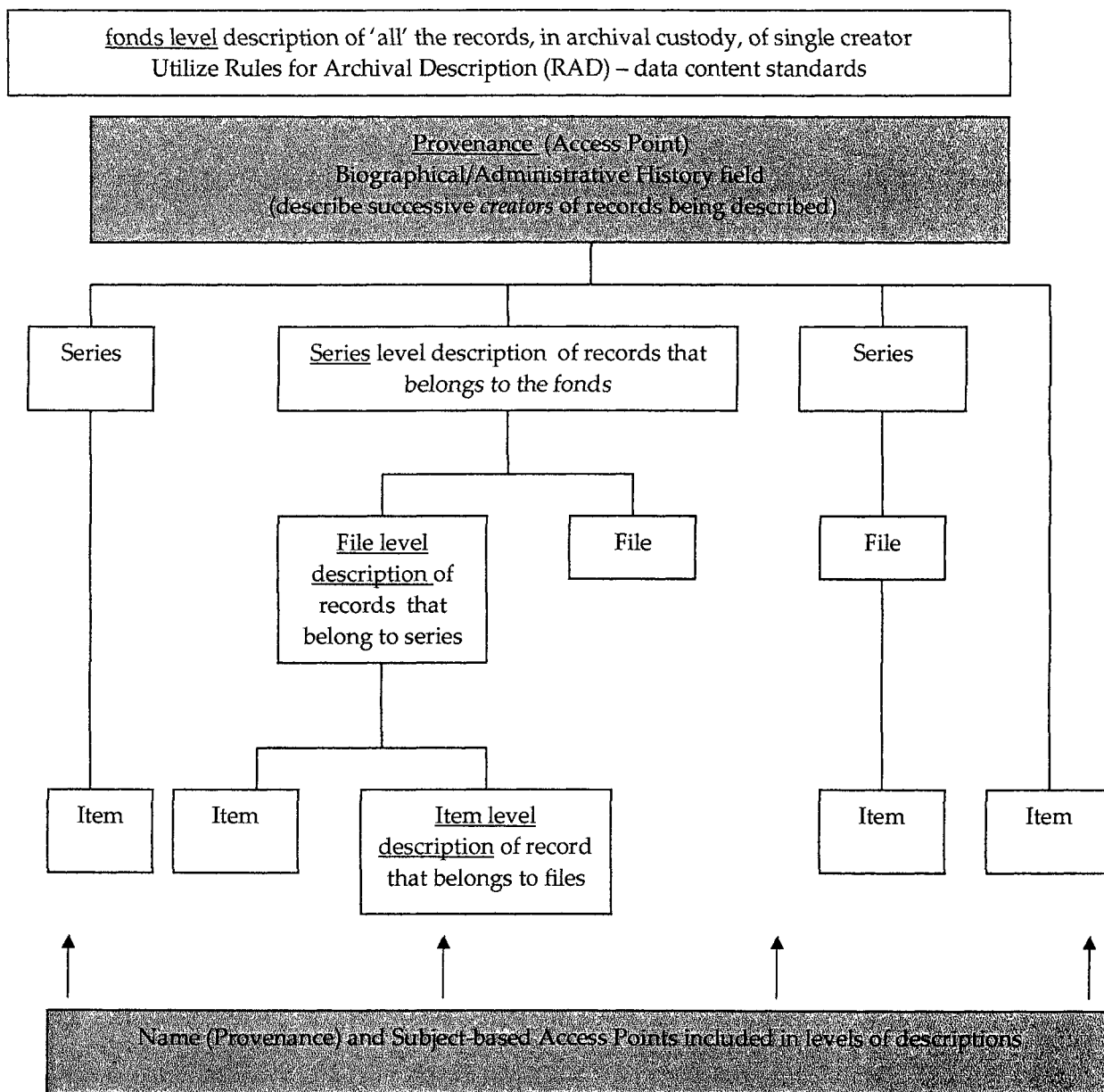
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1. Jody Baltessen, "Description: A Foundation for Integration. The Enabling Role of Technology." Report prepared for Provincial Archives of Manitoba Management, May 2000. Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Description Project Team – The Keystone Project: Founding Principles. Report prepared for Provincial Archives of Manitoba Management, December 2000.
 2. Information obtained in formal meetings in October and December 2002 with staff archivists involved with the systems re-engineering project entitled "Keystone Project".
 3. Figure 1 is a representation of the fonds concept on which the Canadian standard, RAD, is based. The hierarchical structure is comprised of descriptions of records, from the general to the specific, belonging to one fonds-creating body.
 4. Krawczyk, "Cross-Reference Heaven," pp.131-132. Krawczyk notes here: "It is indeed one of the ironies associated with Canadian archivists accomplishments in the development of standards for description that the Rules for Archival Description assume that materials ready for description have been first arranged into fonds based on their provenance – yet as archivists we have no practical standards for arrangement, and no commonly understood or applied definition of 'fonds-creating body.' In other words, we are applying exacting descriptive standards to records that are frequently arranged according to no standards at all."
 5. Terry Eastwood, "Putting the Parts of the Whole Together: Systematic Arrangement of Archives," *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000), pp. 99-106.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
 7. *Ibid.*, pp. 114-16.
 8. *Ibid.*
 9. Duff and Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description," p. 265.
 10. *Ibid.* Duff and Harris maintain: "In the process, we have found a mode of exploration at once hospitable to difference and committed to what we would call an integrative instinct."
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
 12. Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz, "Archives, Records, and Power: From (Postmodern) Theory to (Archival) Performance," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 3 and 4 (2002), pp. 173-175.

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13. Figure 2 depicts the dynamic record creating, accumulating, and transferring environment of a Saskatchewan government entity over just a brief twenty year period.
 14. The Saskatchewan Archives Board is undergoing an initiative to introduce descriptive standardization while integrating archival activities around description. RAD as a data content standard has been adopted. The overall framework being developed will be based on the separation of records information and authority records. Series as the highest level of records description for government records has been adopted. Like Ontario and Manitoba, this was deemed the best way of anticipating the potential benefits and efficiencies afforded by information technology.
 15. Laura Millar, "The Death of the Fonds and the Resurrection of Provenance: Archival Context in Space and Time," *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002). Peter Horsman, "The Last Dance of the Phoenix, or the De-Discovery of the Archival Fonds," *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002). See especially pp. 21-23.
 16. Australian Society of Archivists Committee on Descriptive Standards, "Describing Archives in Context," p. 6.
 17. Figure 3 is a representation of the broad layers of contextual elements related to a group of archival records that could be depicted in a descriptive system, based on relational database architecture. The description of records in archival custody would be documented in the Records History element. This would be the 'gateway' for researchers to explore the other contexts behind the records identified in the broader elements of Provenance History, Ambient History, and Archival History
 18. Millar, "The Death of the Fonds," pp. 12-13.
 19. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
 20. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.
 21. Figure 4 is a representation of the type of context information that would be documented as records became archives and accessible to researchers.
 22. Margaret Hedstrom, "Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1 and 2 (2002), pp. 37-38. Terry Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives," *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001), pp. 34-35.
 23. Millar, "The Death of the Fonds," pp. 6-7. Ian Wilson, "The Fine Art of Destruction Revisited," *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000), pp. 132-133.
 24. Verne Harris, "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1 and 2 (2002), p. 84.
 25. Nesmith, "Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate," pp. 144-45. Hedstrom, "Archives, Memory, and Interfaces," pp. 40-41.
 26. Hedstrom, "Archives, Memory, and Interfaces," p. 40. Duff and Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description," p. 278. They add here that "Just as archivists document the historical background, internal organizational or personal cultures, and various biases or emphases of record creators, they need also to highlight their own preconceptions that influence and shape the descriptions and consequently the meanings of the records they re-present to researchers."
 27. Wendy Duff and Penka Stoyanova, "Transforming the Crazy Quilt: Archival Displays from a User's Point of View," *Archivaria* 45 (Spring 1998), pp. 44-79. Bob Krawczyk, Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB) Workshop: Series System, Regina, Saskatchewan: October 8-9, 2002, p. 4. Users' opinions or reactions to series system are largely unknown.

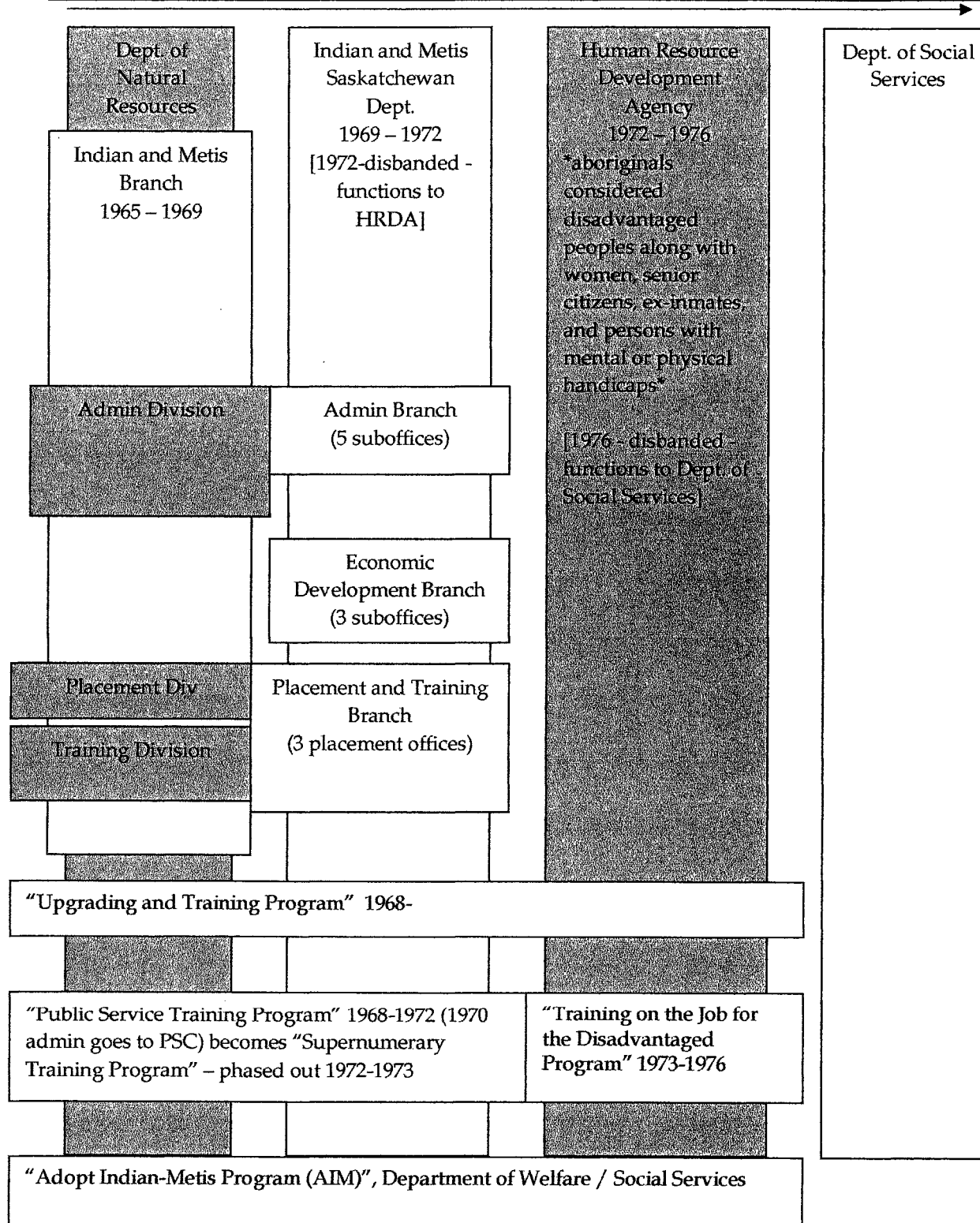
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28. Joanna Sassoon, "Chasing Phantoms in the Archives: The Australia House Photograph Collection," *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000), pp. 117-124.
 29. Descriptive standards at the SAB involved struggles over the documentation of aspects of archival depiction. To date, description records include a data field capturing the names of archivists responsible for the arrangement and description of records being described. The field is used for administrative purposes and is not revealed to the public. This is just as well as this hardly constitutes a significant move towards greater archival transparency. However, it does reflect an entrenched reluctance to provide users of archival records substantive information related to archival accountability.
 30. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). This work investigates social memory transmitted through non-inscribed methods of remembering practices, and commemorative ceremonies, but has relevance for the discussion of the archival endeavor and the search for non-traditional practices. Connerton says, "For it is surely the case that control of a society's memory largely conditions the hierarchy of power; so that, for example, the storage of present day information technologies, and hence the organization of collective memory through the use of data-processing machines, is not merely a technical matter but one directly bearing on legitimation, the question of the control and ownership of information being a crucial political issue." p. 1.
 31. Duff and Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description," p. 264.
 32. Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1 and 2 (2002), pp. 87-109; Harris, "The Archival Sliver," pp. 63-86; Evelyn Wareham, "From Explorers to Evangelists: Archivists, Recordkeeping, and Remembering in the Pacific Islands," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 3 and 4 (2002), pp. 187-207 and "Our Own Identity, Our Own Taonga, Our Own Self Coming Back": Indigenous Voices in New Zealand Record-Keeping," *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001), pp. 26-46.
 33. Ciaran Trace, "What is Recorded is Never Simply 'What Happened': Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture," *Archival Science* 2, nos. 1 and 2 (2002), pp. 137-159.
 34. Cook, "Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth," p. 26. From ancient times to the last century, women and their experiences were systematically excluded from society's institutions and memory tools – archival records.
 35. Duff and Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description," p. 281.
 36. Joan Schwartz, "We make our tools and our tools make us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp. 55-56.
 37. *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
 38. Duff and Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description," p. 281. They maintain here that "The wider the span, the greater the distance, the more heterogeneous the modes, then the greater the violence done to the local, the individual, the eccentric, the small, the weak, the unusual, the other, the case which does not fit the conceptual boxes that are unavoidable in any form of standardization."
 39. Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," pp. 22-25.
 40. Harris, "The Archival Sliver," pp. 82-83.
 41. Duff and Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description," p. 282. Other activities are those such as reproduction, receipt, transfer, transmission, and circulation.

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42. Millar, "The Death of the Fonds," p. 5
 43. Bearman and Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," p. 21.
 44. Bob Krawczyk, Association of Manitoba Archives (AMA) Workshop, November 2, 2001, RAD Part II, part 7.2, Topical Subject access points, p. 13.
 45. Hurley, "The Making and Keeping of Records: (1)," p. 8.
 46. Duff and Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description," p. 283.
 47. Hedstrom, "Archives, Memory, and Interfaces," pp. 41-42.
 48. Hurley, "The Making and Keeping of Records: (1)," p. 10; Cook, "What is Past is Prologue," p. 46. Cook suggests "the traditional notion of the impartiality of the archivist is no longer acceptable - if it ever was. Archivists inevitably will inject their own values into all such activities, as indeed they will by their very choice, in eras of limited resources and overwhelming volumes of records, of which creators, which systems, which functions, which transactions, which descriptive and diffusion mechanism, indeed which records, will get full, partial, or no archival attention."

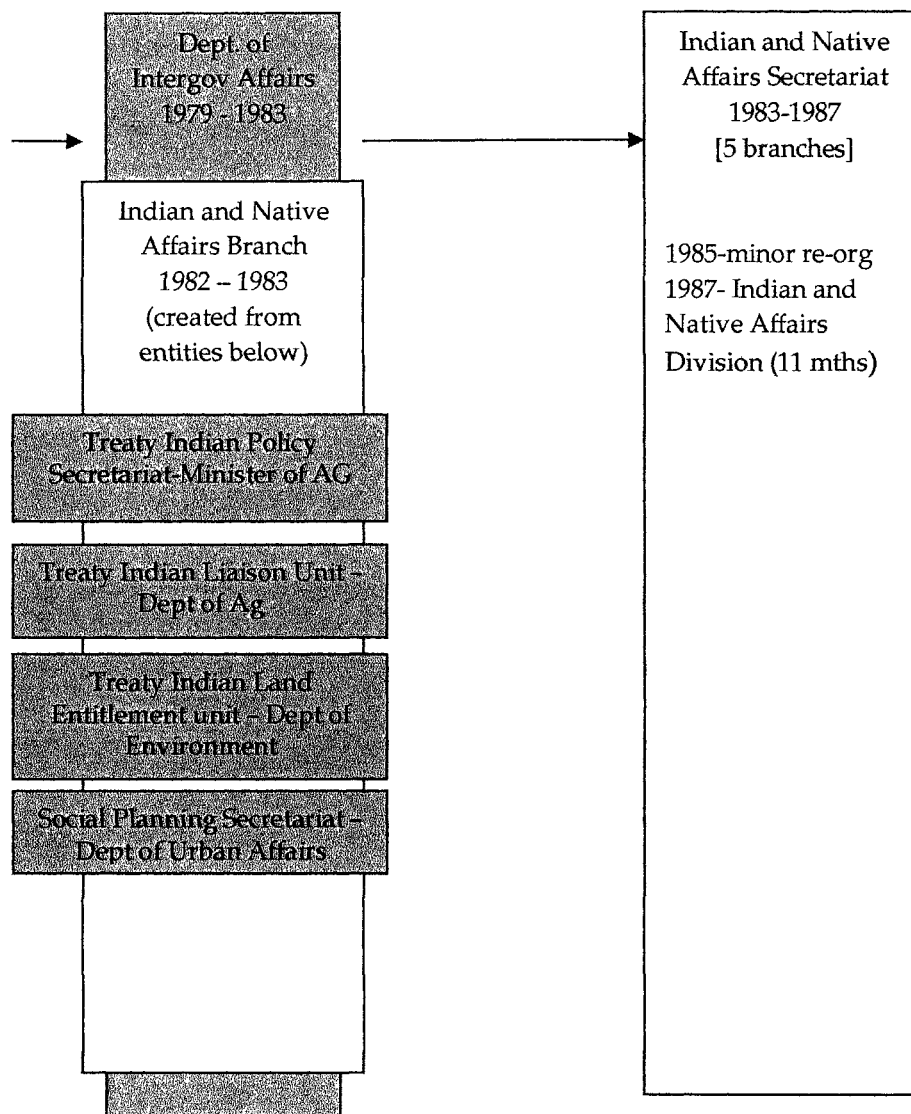
Appendix I – Figure 1 – Fonds Concept of Multi-Level Description of Archival Records



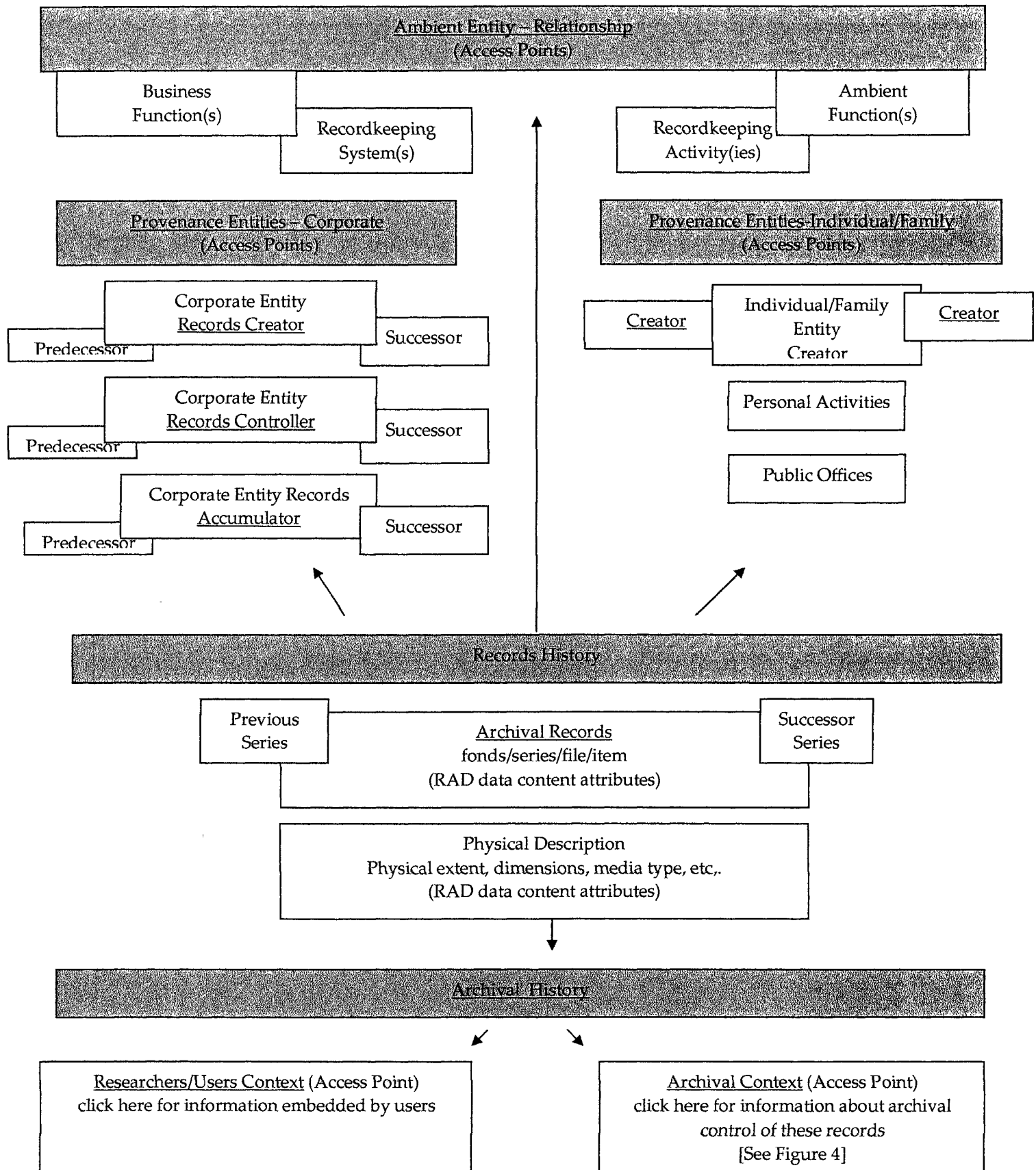
Appendix II - Figure 2 – Successive Saskatchewan Government record creating entities responsible for facilitating the social, economic, and cultural integration of people of Indian ancestry from the early 1960s to mid 1980s.



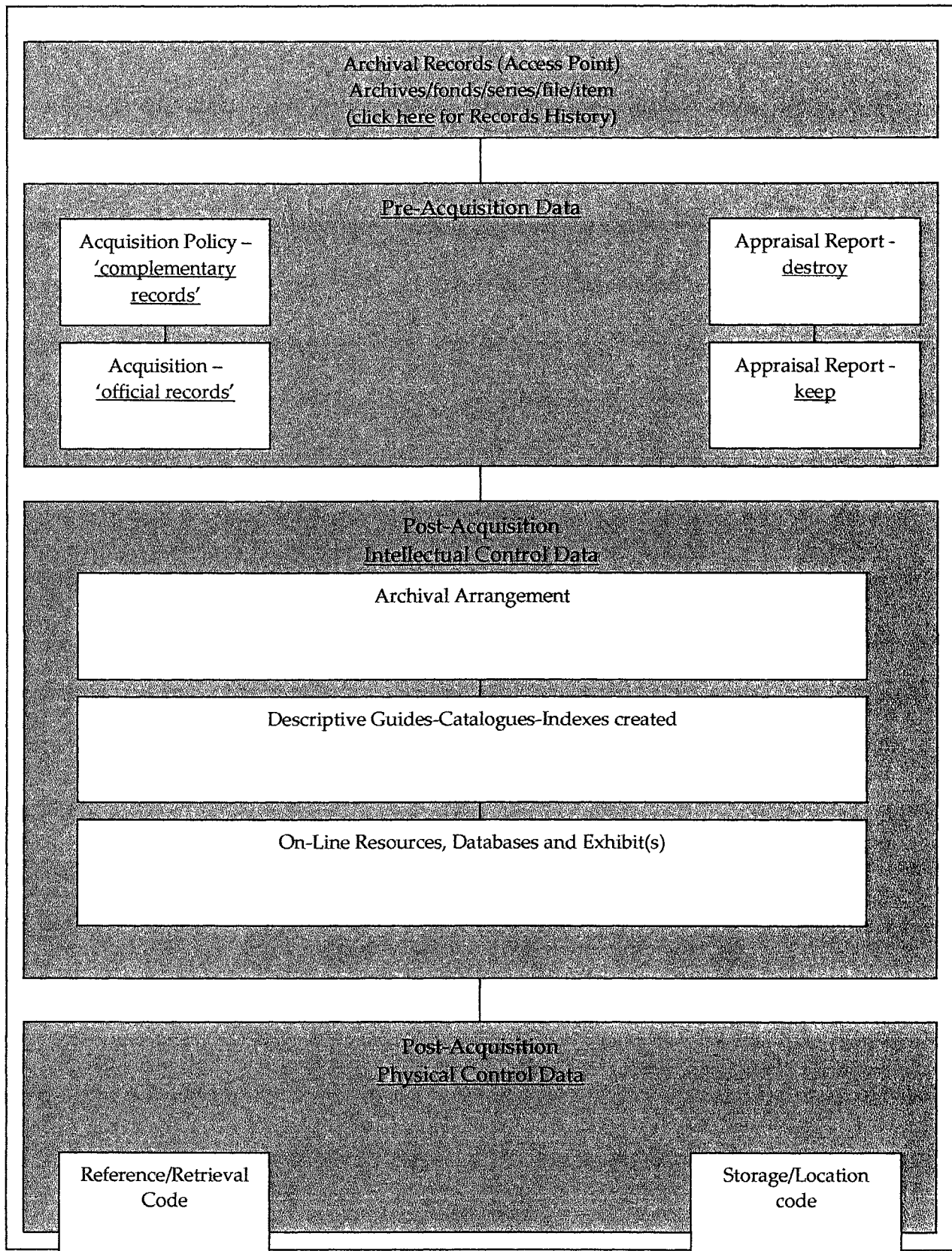
Appendix II - Figure 2 – continued.



Appendix III - Figure 3 – Conception of a Context Control/Archival Interface based on relational database architecture



Appendix IV - Figure 4 - Archival Context



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