Making It to the Major Leagues: Career Movement between Library and Archival Professions and from Small College to Large University Libraries

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ABSTRACT

ISSUES OF CAREER MOVEMENT AND CHANGE are examined between library and archival fields and from small colleges to large universities. Issues examined include professional education and training, initial career-planning and placement, continuing education, scouting and mentoring, job market conditions, work experience and personal skills, professional involvement, and professional association self-interest. This examination leads to five observations: 1. It is easier, in terms of career transitions, for a librarian to become an archivist than it is for an archivist to become a librarian; 2. The progression from a small college venue to a large research university is very manageable with the proper planning and experience; 3. At least three of the career elements—professional education, career-planning, and professional association self-interest—in their best moments provide a foundation that enables a future consideration of change between institutional types and professional areas and in their worst moments conspire against the midcareer professional in terms of change; 4. The elements of scouting, continuing education, work experience, and professional involvement offer the greatest assistance in career transitions; 5. The job market is the wildcard that either stymies or stimulates occupational development.

INTRODUCTION

Eleanor Gehrig once asked her husband, baseball legend Lou Gehrig, "What's the difference between a baseball player in the high minor leagues and a man in the major leagues?" The Yankee great responded, "One step." The answer was both simple and complex, loaded with all the pain, passion,

and perplexities of a game that has been transformed into a business and anointed as the national pastime. As a former high school baseball player who has seen at least one classmate make it into the majors, Gehrig's answer made sense in pondering a professional path in the library and archival fields. That autobiographical and professional pondering, in both its simplicity and its complexity is examined here. What are some of the elements of that one step that might separate a player in the informational minor leagues from one in the majors? Is this distinction of the quicker-stepped major leaguer valid when technology is in some sense leveling the playing field? Are there, indeed, major and minor leagues in the information world? And can a baseball player (read librarian) learn to successfully play cricket (read archivist) or vice versa?

The first part of this examination requires a brief autobiographical sketch. In early 1998, I accepted an offer to join the University of Minnesota's library staff and felt, in the process, like I had finally made it to the bibliographic big leagues. For sixteen years I had been trying to hone my game in the minors, first as a reference/instructional-services librarian in a small private college, then as the library director for that same struggling enterprise (moonlighting at the same time as a medical librarian at the local hospital), and finally as the director of archives in another, more financially secure, small college (now turned university). Now, at one of the nation's leading research libraries, I had the chance to take all those hard-learned lessons (and more than a few pleasant experiences) to the next level. Although physically older, I was a step quicker and (I trusted) a step wiser. I had made the one step.

I had followed, for the most part, a course mapped out in graduate school. The course was simple and straightforward: I wanted to be an academic librarian who began my career in a small college library. From there I hoped to move to a midsized college or university setting (with some additional administrative responsibilities) and finally find my way to a large research university. Small college, university, multiversity: that was the plan.

But even while formulating this plan I wondered if one could go straight from library school to a research university position. Other recent graduates seemed successful in jumping straight to the majors. But as graduation neared, I was still waiting on the bench. The library market for entry-level professional positions in the early 1980s was rather bleak. At the time there was only one half-time academic position available in Minnesota (where I attended library school and spent the better part of my second year lobbying to keep the school open. It was, quite possibly, my first taste of life in the major leagues.) Given that dim career-market prospect—the professional equivalent of Fenway Park's Green Monster in left field—resumes were scattered abroad in a kind of preprofessional fungo. Eventually I secured interviews with two Chicago-area institutions: a renowned private research library and a small undergraduate college. The college interview was facilitated by informal contacts with the previous library director, much in the manner of

a minor-league scout, and resulted in a successful appointment. The major leagues, in the form of the research library, became a later career goal.

Two years later another scout, in the guise of a college president, appointed me as the library director. This was followed nearly three years later by yet a third scout (an historian) and an invitation to switch institutions and professions, moving from a library directorship to director of archives. At least one archivist, well-placed within the profession and serving as a consultant to the search process, was suspicious of a librarian (even one with archival training and experience) moving into a position that might be better filled by drafting from within the archival profession. Was this a case of interleague rivalry or another scout wanting to promote their own hot prospect?

Working in library-rich Chicago, home to both the American Library Association and the Society of American Archivists, provided additional opportunities to make contact and establish working relationships with library and archival colleagues from a wide range of institutions. Work in professional and scholarly associations provided additional contacts. When *The Chronicle of Higher Education* posted the position for curator of special collections at the University of Minnesota in the spring of 1997 Gehrig's one-step difference to the major leagues seemed surmountable. I entered the draft process of the major leagues.

It may be wise, at least for the moment, to place the baseball metaphor that has struggled through the first innings of this article on the injured-reserved list and turn to those questions of movement between library and archives professions, the transition between small college and large university, and the specific elements of career transition that seem fundamental to a discussion of midlife career transitions between institutions and across professions. These elements include, but are not limited to: professional education and training, career-planning and placement, scouting and mentoring, job market conditions, continuing education, work experience and personal skills, professional involvement, and professional association self-interest.

If we accept the definition of a midcareer, seasoned professional as someone in their 40s with fifteen to twenty years of experience (St. Lifer, 1994, p. 45); and if these elements are examined both historically at the time of professional entry (for me this occurred in 1982) and at the time of professional transition (I moved into the archive profession in 1987 and returned to the library profession in 1998); and if this examination is placed within the contextual continuum of small college–large research university and library-archives professions, then the following observations can be made:

1. It is easier, in terms of career transitions, for a librarian to become an archivist than it is for an archivist to become a librarian.

2. The progression from a small college venue to large research universi-
   ty is very manageable with the proper planning and experience.
3. At least three of the career elements—professional education, career-
   planning, and professional association self-interest—in their best mo-
   ments provide a foundation that enables a future consideration of
   change between institutional types and professional areas. In their worst
   moments, these elements conspire against the midcareer professional
   in terms of change.
4. The elements of scouting, continuing education, work experience, and
   professional involvement offer the greatest assistance in career transi-
   tions.
5. The job market is the wildcard that either stymies or stimulates occupa-
   tional development.

IT IS EASIER, IN TERMS OF CAREER TRANSITIONS,
FOR A LIBRARIAN TO BECOME AN ARCHIVIST THAN IT IS
FOR AN ARCHIVIST TO BECOME A LIBRARIAN.

There is very little in the literature (by that I mean the literature of both
archives and library professions) that specifically addresses a midcareer
change between the library and archives professions. But the literature is
full of discussion and debate on professional education, accreditation, cre-
dentialing, and professional identity, all of which provide the backdrop for
an individual's decision to change careers. The differences between these
two professions show both the gateways and the barriers that make such
transitions possible or improbable, depending on the direction of profes-
sional travel. Librarians have a clearly defined "terminal" degree; archivists
do not. The ALA accredits programs; the SAA does not. Oetting (1989)
writes:

> The library profession has struggled for many years with the problem
> of distinguishing between librarians and other professional library
> workers and has effectively decreed and more importantly enforced a
> professional definition based almost solely on an ALA-accredited M.L.S.
> There is no equivalent understanding or accepted credential in the
> archival profession, nor is it likely that there will be one in the near
> future. (p. 135)

Martin (1994) amplifies this observation when he notes that

> The library school has evolved from the status of an independent trade
> school to one of the constellation of professional schools that charac-
> terize the modern university. Meanwhile, archivists have failed to estab-
> lish a similar program or curriculum to prepare students for entry into
> the profession, with serious deleterious effects on the competence of
> practitioners, the availability of resources with which archival institu-
> tions achieve their goals, and the status of the profession. (p. 545)

Martin (1994) goes on to state: "Individuals may claim the status of archivist without having completed any specific course of study and without any specific educational credentials" (p. 546).

In preparation for his article Oetting (1989) surveyed ARL libraries on the status of archivists and the credentials necessary for appointment. The second question in the survey asked, "Does your library require that archivists possess an ALA-accredited M.L.S. as a condition of employment?" Oetting (1989) reported that:

> almost half of the libraries responding require that archivists at their institution possess an ALA-accredited M.L.S. Further, this figure is increased since many of the libraries responding negatively indicated that they strongly prefer an M.L.S.-wielding candidate. Since at least half of all professional archivists are employed by academic institutions, this one statistic points out the interesting dilemma that many archivists face: if they do not want to rule out a major market for archival employment (i.e., college and university libraries), they must obtain an academic degree that is not considered sufficient in and of itself by the archival profession. (p. 137)

Credentials, beyond the M.L.S. or Ph.D., do not exist in the library world. In the archives world it is a different matter. The Academy of Certified Archivists places a professional stamp of approval on successful examinees.

> Certification, however, has been one of the most hotly contested issues ever to face the archival profession. Even with its approval as an official program of the society, there is no guarantee that it will be widely accepted as a meaningful credential. This is particularly true since it is not intended to be the initial professional credential for entry-level archivists, unlike the M.L.S. which is the "terminal" credential for entry into the profession. (Oetting, 1989, p. 136–137)

Finally, because of these differences in education, accrediting, and credentialing, librarians have a clearer professional identity; archivists' identities remain somewhat fuzzy. Contrary to the assessment by Hermans (1997) that "the image of the profession of an archivist is almost a paradigm: the well-known stereotyped phrases are persistent and have a long tradition" (p. 18), the professional image remains ambiguous. What comes readily to mind is not a paradigm (a word we might wish to banish from the English-speaking world) but the MacNelly cartoon that graced the cover of the Summer 1992 issue of *The American Archivist*. In the cartoon Professor Cosmo Fishawk, a.k.a. the Perfessor, enlightens his nephew, Skyler, on the piles of paper in his office: "This is not a *dump*. It's an archive." "What's the difference?" Skyler asks, to which the Perfessor replies, "An archive is a dump without the seagulls." The image is even more confusing to those outside archivy and reminds me of a box I once found in my one-person archival shop, an echo of the MacNelly cartoon. The box had the word "Trash" written in bold, black marker on one side. In what one might imagine as a

somewhat confused state of mind, the box's owner apparently had a sudden change of heart. The word "Trash" had been crossed out and written next to it, in equally bold lettering, was the word "Archives." "The archival profession," Oetting (1989) observes, "led by its professional organization, the Society of American Archivists, has responded to the need for self-definition with two basic approaches: individual certification and guidelines for graduate archival education programs. Both approaches have fervent supporters and opponents. This, in turn, contributes to the confusion outside the archival community as to how to define an archivist" (p. 136).

Given the professional atmospherics that existed in the mid- to late-1980s library and archives communities, it is not surprising that I was able to make two early career moves that effectively broadened my professional experience. The first, somewhat experimental step into medical librarianship took advantage of the firm foundation of graduate education accredited by the major professional association that, in concert, provided a clear professional identity. The second, more adventurous step into collegiate archives was launched by the successful and rewarding completion of that first stride, a reiteration of the importance of one's undergraduate degree (in this case, history, thus echoing Gabehart's [1992] observation that "it would appear that an individual would be more employable in the archives field with an undergraduate degree in history" [p. 437]), the additional administrative experience as a library director, and the relative disarray of the archival profession in terms of graduate education, accreditation, credentialing, and professional identity. A move in the opposite direction— from an archive into a library—would have been difficult, especially if the archive was historically focused and quite happy to accept employees with either an undergraduate or graduate degree in history. An archivist working in an institution requiring the M.L.S. or a dual library science–history degree would have been much better served. To resurrect the baseball metaphor for a moment, such education and early career-planning would have allowed him or her to hit at least a double and put him or her into scoring position.

THE PROGRESSION FROM A SMALL COLLEGE VENUE TO LARGE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY IS VERY MANAGEABLE WITH THE PROPER PLANNING AND EXPERIENCE.

In the mid-1990s writers noted that "the process of career progression virtually has been ignored in librarianship literature" (Phillips, Carson, & Carson, 1994, p. 541). This comment is somewhat surprising given the 1989 pronouncement in *Library Journal* that career development was to be one of the "issues of the nineties" and the creation by the ALA in 1991 of its planning document, "The Decade of the Librarian: 1990–2000." Yet, it remains true that at the time little was to be found in the professional journals on such issues as "plateauing" and "entrapment" that were appearing

in the career and management literature (Carson & Carson, 1997, pp. 64, 69). Such is still the case, especially as it relates to progression from types of institutions. At the same time, various facets of the existing literature and research can be teased to produce some interesting leads in providing a portrait of transition from smaller to larger institutions.

Another brief autobiographical sketch is in order at this point. Fourteen years into my career I had experienced directorships in both library and archives settings. I had taken advantage of a tuition benefit and had nearly completed a second master's degree in theological studies. The small college/university setting in which I found myself offered three possible career alternatives: promotion into a newly created vice presidential position overseeing all information structures on campus (i.e., library, archives, academic computing), employment in a different position at another institution, or retention of my current position. The first option demonstrated institutional attentiveness to change, what Newman (1995) describes as

> a movement in higher education to merge and restructure services in order to reduce personnel costs and duplication of services, create economies of scale and efficiency, and increase productivity. Many of these changes are necessary, since administrative staffing in higher education grew at a much faster rate than faculty staffing in the 1980s . . . But the smaller rate of growth in the number of faculty and other academic support areas leaves the perception of a large disparity between "management" and "labor" in higher education.
>
> Over the past few years, higher educational institutions have tackled this disparity in different ways. Some have done so by merging the library, the computer center, telecommunications, learning resource centers and study skills centers into one organization unit in order to reduce budgets for institutional maintenance. Such a change, while being a valid method of reducing administrative costs, portends an uncertain future for academic libraries and their administrators. (p. 91–92)

Even with the uncertainty, this first option was the most attractive, but the leading candidate was a member of the university's board of directors who also happened to be the library director at a midsized university in a populous southern state. Nonetheless, I applied for the position, but circumstances beyond my control dictated the final outcome. The vice presidential position was abandoned after the primary candidate prematurely died. The president and his second-in-command informed me that if I wished to advance to a higher level of responsibility then my most realistic career path was one that led beyond the institution. At the same time my parents and in-laws had all recently retired and there was a strong familial interest in moving closer to them. The search began for a position that fulfilled both professional and domestic interests.

Planning and experience were the key elements in this transition. The initial plan that dictated movement from a small college to a midsized university to a research institution was amended to include a geographical

element. The career target tightened to a small circle of larger academic institutions in the upper Midwest. Throughout my career, as a way to keep current with the job market and to make sure my skills were at the proper level, I continually scanned professional employment postings. Most of the positions at my level and in my fields of interest indicated the necessity of a second master's degree, increasing familiarity with technology—especially as it related to the Internet—and ACA certification for archival positions. While certification remained problematic in my mind, the second master's degree was nearly completed. One additional element was added to the plan: interview preparation and experience. The creation of the vice presidential position at my then-current place of employment provided me with the opportunity to update my resume and solicit letters of support. Because of the demise of both the position and its leading candidate, however, no interview took place. Fortunately, another job interview presented itself off-campus, and although I was not successful in my candidacy, it did provide me with a valuable experience.

Other professional experience, on a number of fronts, came into play as well. I had been extremely active in a local consortium of private academic libraries in the Chicago area. This, in turn, provided contact with a state-wide organization of private academic libraries and with the state chapter of ACRL. Leadership in all of these positions, especially in regards to resource-sharing, acquainted me with personnel from a number of library systems and from larger academic institutions, particularly with staff members in Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) libraries. In addition, and because of my archival work, I communicated with subject specialists and faculty members from institutions across the country and in Europe. Although I was an individual member of ALA and an institutional member of SAA, my professional involvement in these associations was almost nonexistent due to costs, lack of institutional support, and other time and management concerns. I attended a number of Midwest Archives Conference (MAC) gatherings, but I never attempted greater involvement in this or any of the other organizations. There was a greater degree of activity, however, in the work of two ethnic historical societies and in an academic society, The Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study (SASS), that put me into frequent contact with scholars in the humanities and social sciences from a broad range of institutions. This planning and these experiences, in essence, "set the table" for the next possible career move. Newman (1995) provides a snapshot of where I perceived myself to be at this point in my career.

> Given the nature of changes within as well as outside the academic library, it seems fair to predict that professionals with a generalist background who can adapt to changing environments, who can transfer skills from one area to another, and who can communicate effectively with different important user groups will be most prepared to direct the academic libraries of the future.

> Where does one find this type of academic generalist who has the
> necessary credentials yet possesses the institutional strengths to man-
> age the library and other campus information systems? These individ-
> uals will come from a variety of sources and may or may not be iden-
> tified through the typical search and screen process. *The size or academic*
> *reputation of the institution may have little bearing on a candidate's ability to*
> *perform* . In fact, individuals from small- or medium-sized academic in-
> stitutions may have assumed management responsibilities in academ-
> ic libraries early in their careers and, as a result, may bring good man-
> agement skills to the library. Additionally, they will have had numerous
> opportunities to work on many issues within the institution. (p. 96;
> emphasis added)

At the same time, there was never a strong sense of what the literature
has termed "entrapment" or "plateauing," although in hindsight it is now
clear that both of these characterizations were probably accurate. Techno-
logical aptitude, while important, was not an overriding concern in career-
planning and did not present what Smith (1995) describes as "a poignant
awareness and a sense of frustration about the ways in which their career
paths have been blocked or irrevocably altered" (p. 23). Conroy (1995)
comes closer to the descriptive mark in describing my midcareer perspec-
tive, although the physical, mental, and emotional symptoms were not as
marked or were absent altogether, and there were few, if any, negative fac-
tors in terms of performance and job appraisal. In terms of the type of pla-
teau, I was facing what Bardwick (1986) described as a structural plateau
which exists in hierarchical organizations with limited upper-level positions
relative to the larger number of position seekers (p. 49) and probably a
combination of what Kaye profiled as "productively plateaued—continued
interest at position without movement. They see challenge and opportuni-
ty in their assignments, although the position and responsibilities remain
at the same level" and "partially plateaued—continued high interest in one
portion of the position's responsibilities. Personal initiative and motivation
remain vigorous" (cited in Conroy, 1995, p. 14). When the opportunity
came for a midcareer transition from archives back to library work, the
author presented most of the typical behaviors and attitudes outlined by
Phillips, Carson, and Carson (1994), that is:

    a) more realistic about the ability of career to satisfy needs.
    b) a highly productive phase, as requirements of the career have been
       mastered and difficult performance goals are established. . . .
    c) fully socialized into the profession, adopting values congruent with
       those of the field.

However, two typical behaviors and attitudes were taking on a heightened
significance:

    d) as skills become organization and career-specific, career change
       would require substantial reinvestment.

e) opportunities for career change begin decreasing with increasing
age. (p. 542)

Thus, I had the sense that while I was not entrapped, the time to make a
move was becoming more important in terms of career-planning.

AT LEAST THREE OF THE CAREER ELEMENTS — PROFESSIONAL
EDUCATION, CAREER-PLANNING, AND PROFESSIONAL
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IN TERMS OF CHANGE.

Professional education and training encompasses all coursework, practi-
cums, internships, and work-related experience within the context of a
graduate-level, professionally accredited program of instruction leading to
a master's or doctorate degree. In my case, this meant a two-year master's
program accredited by the ALA within a specific course track for academ-
ic libraries, requiring additional course work outside the library-school
curriculum (archives administration, taught in the history program, and a
120–hour practicum in one of the university's archives). In addition, I
worked as a student assistant for two subject bibliographers in the universi-
ty library, with two National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant
projects for a third library staff member.

In 1980 there were seventy-one accredited library programs listed by
the ALA (American Library Association [ALA], 2000, Accredited). There
were no accredited archive programs at this time. In 2000, ALA listed fifty-
six programs in the *Directory of Institutions Offering Accredited Master's Programs*
on its Web site (ALA, 2000, Directory). Common sense would lead to a con-
clusion that a reduction by nearly 27 percent of the accredited programs
offers the prospective North American librarian fewer choices in terms of
specialization and a greater need for geographic mobility. Financial and oth-
er resources might also be under greater strains. In a similar vein, Newman
(1995) remarks on the uncertain training of future administrators:

> We are seeing changes in the field surpassing changes in the schools
> themselves, and as a result the schools may be becoming increasingly
> irrelevant. During the 1970s the number of accredited library educa-
> tion programs increased dramatically, and the 1980s began with approx-
> imately sixty such programs. In a little more than a decade, 20 percent
> of these programs have been discontinued at some of our most presti-
> gious universities. This may be a reflection of the value that colleges
> and universities place on libraries, librarians, and the leadership of
> academic libraries in higher education. The status of the library pro-
> fession is being severely challenged, and to compete in colleges and

> universities today the library education programs will have to adapt to
> changing needs and will have to provide more in the areas of technol-
> ogy, management, and administration. (p. 98)

SAA currently lists graduate programs in nineteen states, the District of
Columbia, and Canada in its *Directory of Archival Education in the United States
and Canada, 1999–2000,* but the "SAA does not accredit archival education
and training programs, institutes, or courses, and inclusion in this directo-
ry does not imply endorsement or approval by the Society" (Society of
American Archivists [SAA], *Directory,* 2002). Elsewhere, the *SAA Directory*
states that:

> In 1994 the Society of American Archivists approved the Guidelines for
> the Development of a Curriculum for a Master of Archival Studies
> Degree. "SAA believes that programs of the extent and nature outlined
> in these guidelines are the best form of pre-appointment professional
> education for archivists." . . . Currently, no such degree programs ex-
> ist in the United States. The M.A.S. programs that exist in Canada are
> based on similar guidelines established by the Association of Canadi-
> an Archivists. (SAA Archival Education, 2002, Introduction, para. 1)

An individual contemplating a midlife career decision involving movement
between libraries and archives is thus faced with opposing or confused pro-
fessional trends. Movement from the library world into the archival arena
presents one with the prospect of entering a profession in search of a stan-
dardized program of instruction and, possibly, an increasing reliance on
certification in the credentialing process. Movement from an archival set-
ting into a bibliographic universe presents one with the prospect of attain-
ing an additional accredited degree. Based on these educational forces, it
would seem easier for a librarian in midcareer to make a move into an ar-
chival position than for an archivist to make a similar move in the other
direction. The SAA admits as much when it states in the *Directory* that:

> Individuals can prepare for a career in archives through a variety of
> educational programs. Most entry-level positions require an undergrad-
> uate and a graduate degree, together with archival coursework and a
> practicum. Although archivists have a variety of undergraduate majors,
> most receive graduate degrees in history or library science. Some have
> degrees in both fields. Other useful specializations include public ad-
> ministration and political science. A Ph.D. is often preferred for high-
> er ranking positions in academic institutions. (SAA Archival Profession,
> 2002, Qualifications for Employment, para. 1)

It is this openness to variety, even as the profession moves towards a stan-
dardized program of instruction and credentialing, that invites the profes-
sional to consider the archival profession as a career alternative.

Career-planning and placement are both individual and institutional
responsibilities and activities that have become more visible and vital. For
many midcareer librarians the early- to mid-1980s was "a time when pro-

spective librarians faced a confused and contracting educational system, low salaries, scarce job openings, and diminishing status" (O'Leary, 2000, p. 21). For the most part, my own planning and placement was self-motivated and self-directed at the time I entered the library profession in 1982. General career assistance and some faculty guidance were available, but individual devices and desires drove the process forward. Institutional responsibility, especially within the context of a small private college that was struggling for its own survival, was limited to conversations with faculty colleagues (who for the most part were ignorant of the library profession and the prevailing job market) and to the growing and helpful insights of librarians from other institutions. During these early days of my career the most helpful comments may have come as part of the annual review process.

By 1989, seven years after my entry into the library profession and two years after my switch to the archival world, the editors of *Library Journal* were stirring the waters and observing that "the overarching issues surrounding professional development, continuing education (CE), and career ladders for both professional and other library staff have not been addressed adequately" ("Career," 1989, p.52). The perception, not documented here but a reality at the time, was that local consortia, state library associations, regional organizations, and the professions at large (both library and archives) were beginning to factor career-planning and continuing education into programmatic and conference-planning. At the same time, the jargon of the career planners and advisors from the business/human-resources world was finding its way into our professional literature. Thus, by the early 1990s we could speak of glass ceilings and plateaus and quite possibly mix the metaphors in the process of describing our plight. The topography of our careers and the ability to explore that terrain were encapsulated in convenient alliterative tablets. The way off the plateau involved responsibility, recreation, reassessment, and reshaping (Conroy, 1995). Even if this repetitive, rumbling roar created some cognitive dissonance, there were still some helpful observations for those considering a change of scenery. For example, Conroy (1995) states:

> Library leadership—in associations and schools—must be alert to the impact of plateauing on the field as a whole. Mentoring and networking with personal and professional contacts offers both information and support for career changers. When a field is structured so tightly that movement and change is difficult, organizations become stagnant. The result of this is often diminished creative responses to environmental demands. By remaining flexible and open to hiring laterally or from nontraditional sources, managers allow plateaued staff additional opportunities. (p. 16)

THE ELEMENTS OF SCOUTING, CONTINUING EDUCATION,
WORK EXPERIENCE, AND PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT OFFER
THE GREATEST ASSISTANCE IN CAREER TRANSITIONS.

It may be a truism, but in the course of making the various transitions
between professions and institutions, who one knows is as important as what
one knows. And one is noticed more often when one throws oneself into
one's work, as a minor-league pitcher throwing a no-hitter would be noticed
by players on the bench and scouts in the stands. In my experience there
were a number of scouts who had an eye for talent (or who found them-
selves in need): the college president, the history professor, the library di-
rector. The difficulty with these scouts, however, was in their own focus or
horizon—in other words, they served, for the most part, as *internal* scouts
within an organization or network of like-minded organizations. All of these
scouts were part of the small college–liberal arts network within the Chica-
go metropolitan area. And while these individuals played an important role
in making transitions to greater levels of responsibility within institutions
or in making a professional transition from librarian to archivist, they were
not particularly helpful—with the exception of writing letters of recommen-
dation—in a transition that would take the author to a different type of
institution. Burnam & Green (1991) comment that the significant profes-
sional issue of moving from one type of library to another "is seldom dis-
cussed verbally or in the library literature" (p. 10).

What I needed was a different type of exposure that would put me in
contact with a different pool of scouts, those—to use the baseball metaphor
again—who were scouting the minor leagues for major league talent. Here
I must be cautious, for I am not equating small, liberal arts colleges with
the minor leagues. Far from it. Rather, the problem with this type of insti-
tution is that the range of experiences and the contacts with people can
sometimes be limited by budget or salary—limits that can be found in any
number of institutions and that cut in any number of ways. Green (1991)
observed "that the size of the library affects what a librarian does as much
as the type of library. The smaller the library, the greater the range of re-
quired library skills; the larger the library, the more specialization is need-
ed" (p. 13). One of the strategies that I employed, sometimes subconscious-
ly, was to explore the avenues of continuing education and professional
involvement. Beyond the self-evident value of continuing one's education
and becoming a better professional, there was the "value-added" potential
for personal interaction. Here I made contacts with individuals from a va-
riety of institutions, most of them acting in a nonscouting capacity, that
provided additional outlets for professional creativity and involvement. In
those arenas of resourcefulness and participation, names and faces were
remembered, actions and activities recorded. One never knew when a non-
scout would become a scout, or when a tip might be handed on to those
responsible for recruiting. In my case, I had the added benefit of having a

remarkable supervisor who became a true mentor—one who continually was on the lookout for opportunities for improvement or participation and who had her entire staff's best interests at heart.

Ironically, scouts as they have been previously described here did not play a role in the latest transition from small-college archivist to research-university curator/rare-books librarian. We may need to expand the notion of scout to include members of a search committee. This expansion of the scouting definition would seem to place an even greater weight on how these committees are chosen and how they go about their work. Not being privy to their deliberations in my own case, I can only hazard a guess that the strength of the resume and the letters of recommendation prompted the committee to extend an invitation to interview. The author applied for his current position as a relatively unknown individual. No one on the search committee had any professional contact with him. If known at all, it was as a graduate student almost two decades earlier. Yet, even during the interview process there were signs of hesitancy and concern, primarily over the question of whether or not the candidate would be able to handle the transition from a small college to a large university, from managing a small student staff to administering an entire department. Their fears were justified, if not totally grounded in the literature—small though it is—that is cited above (especially Newman, 1995). Three years later, in the process of undergoing a thorough review for promotion and continuous appointment (and at the time this article was being written), a letter advocating my promotion was written by a well-known supporter of the university libraries. There are two sentences in that letter that are highly appropriate to quote here and that underscore the immense importance of a search committee: "As I reviewed his curriculum vitae, the thing that stood out for me was how relatively obscure he had been until he came to the University. It seems to me that the selection committee that brought him to the University in the first place is to be highly recommended for discerning his potential and promise and choosing him above others" (Andersen, 2000). This is in stark contrast to Burnam & Green's (1991) comment on "the reluctance of academic research library administrators to look beyond their own familiar surrounding for dynamic and bright managerial talent" (p. 10–11).

THE JOB MARKET IS THE WILDCARD THAT EITHER STYMIES OR STIMULATES OCCUPATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

We do not know, ultimately, what the job market will be like in the future, but it seems that we are in a much better position than we were two decades ago to provide some very good and very educated estimates. These forecasts and the added availability of information via the Internet provide us with the necessary tools to think about, if not act upon, a career-transition move. Occupational outlook reports and job hotlines are available online. Electronic lists are sent a continuous stream of job notices. Every-

thing, it seems, is now part of the mental mix in this type of contemplation: education, accreditation, certification, continuing education, and professional cross-fertilization and integration.

I am tempted to argue that midcareer transitions across professions and between types of institutions, at least in the library and archives fields, will be easier in the future. Part of this ease may come, in part, from the continued merging or combination of programs at the graduate level of study. For example, Hermans (1997) notes from an archival perspective that "[w]hat we will see is a growing cooperation between archival and librarian education programmes, which will eventually lead to an integration of both. But also the archivist of today will have to enhance his level of knowledge in this field. If he or she will not, an obsolete, isolated position somewhere in the basement of the cultural information building will be the future" (p. 19). This echoes Cook's (1986) observation that:

> In the case of librarians, there is such a range of different jobs that orientation can follow career choice. What is important is that all training in the information sciences, archival and other, must allow for movement across the orientational boundaries. . . . If we must recognise that archivists (like documentalists and many librarians) should take an active part in academic research in other disciplines, we must also see that the appropriate training probably comes best from a combinded [sic] school of information studies. (p. 201)

At the same time, I am hesitant about such pronouncements because so many elements are in flux. Witness, for instance, the new talks about and renewed attention to professional education within the library and archives communities. Examine as well trends in the information-industry sector of the economy and the recent demise of so many "dot.coms" or the increasing layoff notices found in the business and technology sections of local newspapers. If I am somewhat ambiguous in my thoughts about the future, I am less so when it comes to a discussion of the traits and characteristics that allow me to master that ambiguity during times of transition. While I may disagree with Cook's assertion that "the whole bias of professional education should be towards developing a management approach," I would certainly agree with the claim that "an information professional is one who can manage the task of applying resources to the solution of problems" (Cook, 1986, p. 201). Finally, the wisdom gained in the process of making a midcareer transition may have its source in the kernel of advice given on the American Library Association's Web site to interested students considering the merits of generalization or specialization:

> Some students enter a master's program knowing what they want to do when they graduate, some have not made a decision, and some see their interests shift once they are exposed to the wide variety of types and settings in which librarians and information professionals work. You should plan a program of study based on an assessment of your past

experiences, education, personal strengths and interests, geographic mobility, intended career path, and future plans. Although you should be aware of job market opportunities, these should not necessarily dictate specializations. Faculty advisors can help in the process of developing a program of study that fits your needs. (ALA Guidelines for Choosing a Master's Program in Library & Information Studies, 2002, "Generalist vs. Specialist," para. 1)

Or, as this is the bottom of the ninth inning (to bring this baseball-laced exercise in transition to its conclusion), what better words of wisdom could be offered than those from another New York Yankee and font of memorable quotations, Yogi Berra: "You got to be very careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there."

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ADDITIONAL READINGS

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