



# Love Among the Archives: Writing the Lives of Sir George Scharf, Victorian Bachelor

*Helena Michie, Robyn Warhol*

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Part biography, part detective novel, part love story, and part meditation on archival research, *Love Among the Archives* is an experiment in writing a life. This is the story of two literary critics' attempts to track down Sir George Scharf, the founding director of the National Portrait Gallery in London, famous in his day and strangely obscure in our own. After discovering Scharf's scrapbook of menus and invitations from England's most stately homes, the authors began their adventures in the archives of London, searching Scharf's diaries, sketchbooks, and letters for traces of the man who so loved dining out. Addicted to Victorian novels, the authors looked for a marriage plot, but found Scharf's passionate attachment to a younger man who had hidden from him a secret engagement; they looked for a Bildungsroman, but found that Scharf never left his beloved mother. Always short of money, self-educated, talented, irascible, gregarious, prolific, and snobbish, this son of a poor immigrant artist was to become the right-hand man of an earl he called "my best friend." The written record of his nightmares, debts, gifts, and dinner parties comes together to produce a rich Victorian character whose personal and professional lives challenge what we think we know about sex, class, and profession in his time.

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