**The Evolution in the Status and Functions of an Archivist**

The role of an archivist has evolved significantly throughout history, reflecting the changing needs and contexts of societies. Historically, archivists were often seen as "selected craftsmen" responsible for systematically protecting and managing archives. They served as record keepers and guardians of important documents, frequently acting as royal court historians, particularly during the era of absolute monarchies. Their primary focus was on administrative utility and serving the needs of the ruling elite.

However, the French Revolution brought a pivotal shift in the archivist's role. As the revolutionary authorities declared public access to archives and transformed archival institutions into "the laboratories of history," archivists started to emphasize the historical significance of their work. This transition marked a change from being instruments of government to places of learned research.

Napoleon Bonaparte recognized the political significance of archives, stating that "a competent archivist is more useful in governance than a competent general." The control of the past became a tool for controlling the present, as seen in the confiscation of records during the Napoleonic Wars and their concentration in Paris.

In the 19th century, the establishment of national archives and specialized archivist schools in various European countries further professionalized the field. Archivists began receiving education in diplomatics, paleography, sigillography, and philology, alongside legal and institutional history, making them not just record keepers but also historians themselves.

In the middle of the 20th century, the United States further redefined the archivist's mission. With the growing volume of records, the National Archives and the Society of American Archivists embraced a more proactive role for archivists, involving them in the appraisal and selection of records. This marked a departure from earlier notions that archivists should not intervene in the process of selecting records.

In conclusion, the status and functions of an archivist have evolved from being mere record keepers for the elite to becoming historians, researchers, and proactive participants in the management of records. Archivists now play a critical role in ensuring access to historical records while also preserving the past for future generations. Their mission has expanded to serve both the present and the future by providing valuable raw material for research and contributing to the understanding of history and society.