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“I have always believed that I have one of the best jobs in the world, and it doesn’t matter to me if society doesn’t understand or support our work as much as we would like. The important thing is that we know that what we are doing is essential in a democratic society.”

- Kent Haworth¹

“The single greatest importance of archives lies in their very existence.”

- John Macleod²

At least since May 2010, when the Library and Archives Canada (LAC) unveiled its “modernization” plan, there has been increased public debate surrounding the potential implications the management of our largest archives might have on the record Canadians would have in the future, how and where that record might be preserved, and how it would be made accessible. The tone of this debate demonstrated increasing concern as the full impact of subsequent policy decisions from LAC became clear, affecting not only LAC, but archives across the country. There is little to applaud in the decisions that have been made. The past three years (at least) have damaged the reputation and functioning of the LAC, thoughtlessly hindered a Canadian archival network of national value and of international reputation, and have subtly questioned one primary role of archives: that of acquiring the permanently valuable records of our society. If we are to find anything to salvage from this, it is that we now have an opportunity to engage Canadians with the nature and range of issues surrounding archives, and what might be at stake should we fail at the archival enterprise.

Archivists have long used the concept of “accountability” to highlight the value of their work. Without question, accurate, complete, and authentic records are as necessary for historical evidence as they are for redress, as valuable for individuals as they are for the efficient functioning of institutions, organizations and businesses, including the business of governance. We have been ambitious in our pursuit of “acquiring, preserving, and making accessible” the permanently valuable records of our society. Canadian archivists are known for the concept of “total archives,” a strategy which has developed into four main features: the need to acquire both public and private records as a means of fully documenting society; collecting records of value regardless of medium or format; the integration of records management with archival management; all supported and achieved through the actions of a robust archival network across the country. But while accountability is an important result of this work, perhaps it is time to consider instead, the concept of “responsibility.”

¹ Winner of first Membership Recognition Award: Response. *ACA Bulletin*, September 2002, p. 7

² “Editor’s last word: Where lies the greatest importance of archives?” *ACA Bulletin*, October 2003, p. 27.



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For this is a collaborative enterprise. The *responsibility* for ensuring this work is done – and done well – must be held jointly: by archivists, but also by government at the federal, provincial and local level; by communities and by institutions. At its heart, this fundamentally becomes an issue for our society as a whole: whose records should be retained? Which documents ought to be available in the future? Are the records of the “everyday” as important as those of the “elite?” Ought we to care about the records of “minority groups, activist communities, marginalized populations, or social outcasts...the preservation of records that document the everyday lives of all Canadian citizens in an increasingly diverse society”?³ As we consider issues such as equality of access, or equality of service to Canadians across the country, we might also consider equality of preservation – the need to proactively attempt to ensure these records, as well as those of governments and institutions, are identified and retained. By actively committing to acquiring both “public” and “private” records, and by actively committing to assist in the sustainability of local and community archives, we are more likely to have an archival record in which all Canadians might see themselves accurately reflected. Surely the question is whether or not, as a society, we believe this to be a worthwhile endeavour. If we do, then we jointly have a responsibility to ensure it can be done.

Cuts to NADP

We have done so in Canada through the Canadian Council of Archives and the network of archives across the country. We may be ambitious in our reach, but we have also been strategic, using joint resources to build standards, created a national database of holdings, set conservation standards and achieve them. We have done so with the expectation that small local archives could meet national and international standards, as indeed could any archival institution in the country. For most archives across the country, an important source of funding to enable full participation was a peer-reviewed, shared cost contribution program, most recently known as the National Archival Development Program, or NADP.

Certainly much of the LAC’s recent difficulties stemmed from substantial budget reductions. One of the decisions made was to cut funding to the (NADP). There is no province or territory which has not been affected by this decision. Indeed, the outcry over cancellation of this funding has been sufficient that both the former Minister of Heritage, Hon. James Moore, and the current Minister, Hon. Shelley Glover, indicated an intention to “ask the next Librarian and Archivist of Canada whether the Program can be restored within LAC’s budgetary constraints,” noting “LAC’s independence.”

The history of this program can be traced to 1985, when \$2.5 million was allocated by Ottawa to the Canadian archival system, provided through the Canadian Council of Archives, and – for

³ Sheffield, Rebecka. “Total Archives.” <<http://www.archivalobjects.com/total-archives.html>>



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bureaucratic ease, but not as an operational function – via what is now the LAC. To be clear, the money was originally the result of lobbying by the archival community and was never intended to fund an internal program of the LAC, but was federal recognition that the archival enterprise was a national, co-operative venture. It should be noted that all of the archives within this network make their holdings available to *anyone*: all Canadians have access. One need not be a student at the University of Saskatchewan to use our collections; nor be a resident of Prince Albert to enquire about records held there. However local the core funding for Canadian archives, the reach of these institutions is both national and global.

Cuts to this funding have been incurred previously: the original \$2.5 million was reduced to \$1.7 million, the amount available at the time the program was cancelled. That the loss of this amount, shared across the country, should have such a profound effect ought to be evidence enough that Canadian archives are poorly funded. Had the original investment kept pace with inflation, the amount provided to the Canadian archival community in 2013 would be \$4.8 million – certainly a more reasonable figure given the changes and challenges, particularly in the digital age.

Digitization, Access and Service

An interesting detour has occurred in the public discourse: access and service to archival records are now understood to be managed almost exclusively in the digital realm. The provision of archival material – scanned images or documents – when requested by researchers is now a common element of archival work; and increasingly, there is a sense that archives ought to be proactively digitizing their holdings and mounting these online. Parallel to this is the realization of how much material is now “born digital.” The assumption is that such items will be easier to manage and retrieve upon request, and cheaper to maintain. Everyone has used Google: what on earth could be simpler? And indeed, one of the framing questions posed by the Royal Society is “what will be the function and future of a brick-and-mortar library or archive in a paperless future?” These assumptions fail to appreciate the full impact of managing digital records.

First, consider that archives are really about *evidence*, not simply information. We need to transform the conversation from one simply based on “ease of access” to the issues of ensuring authentic, accurate and complete records – the evidence, and our trust in that evidence – is managed properly in a technological landscape that is constantly in flux, ephemeral in nature and easily manipulated. Unlike librarians, archivists are not managing a relatively small number of digital formats, but *any* format (including software) originally used by the creator of the record. This is extraordinarily diverse, and each has specific preservation issues. The conversation ought to be considering the true cost of preservation over time, and – as more is maintained on local hard drives, the issue of acquisition and its counterpart: the ease at which these records might be lost. This is not a simple



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issue; nor, as has been suggested, is it inexpensive – or even *less* expensive than management of traditional, “analogue” records.

And indeed, even if we were to continue merely to discuss the transformation of those traditional records into digital surrogates (for ease of access), we need to begin with a more realistic identification of exactly what that means. It is important to note that archivists have responded to the call for online access through the digitization of numerous documents and images, and continue to build “virtual” exhibits and databases of our holdings. In Saskatchewan, we have created inter-institutional projects – simply because to provide such material is not simply a matter of scanning, but of technical support, funding for server space, and a commitment – again – to managing migration and preservation over time. This is not something available or affordable for many of our smaller institutions to pursue independently. We might also note that, for digital surrogates or born digital material, online access must involve a discussion of copyright, privacy, and transparency – with relevant and appropriate closure periods which are easily understood and applied consistently. Finally, despite the considerable work that has been done toward increased online access, the estimate is that we have perhaps one percent of our holdings available. Given the extent, diversity and range of archival collections across the country, perhaps we might look to our traditional finding aids, in addition to the work of scanning. Perhaps having better online access to the finding aid for a properly arranged and well-described collection is true service to Canadians, enabling access with context; together with the attention to metadata associated with digitized materials, and the use of standards enabling harvesting and sharing.

The Future

However closely allied we are as professions, there is a distinction to be made between archivists and librarians; as indeed, there is distinction to be made between the nature of our holdings. A librarian has recently termed that difference one of “commodity documents” – books – and “non-commodity documents” – primary source materials.⁴ More frequently, though, this has been framed in terms of the published and the unique; and indeed, much of what differentiates how we manage our holdings stems from the fact that archival material is singular. We must act with dispatch to acquire records; if lost, they are lost forever. Identical holdings cannot be found in institutions across the country, but in a single location. These facts have sped the formation of ArchivesCanada, the online national database of holdings; and have encouraged archivists to consider how best to provide access through digitization. There is considerable opportunity for archives to work together

⁴ Anderson, Rick. “Can’t Buy Us Love: The Declining Importance of Library Books and the Rising Importance of Special Collections.” Ithaka S+R Issue Briefs, August 2013 <<http://www.sr.ithaka.org/blog-individual/cant-buy-us-love-rick-anderson-kicks-new-ithaka-sr-issue-briefs-series>>



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to help manage the enormous task of acquisition, preservation and access of the “born digital” record – something we are frankly unlikely to achieve by working independently.

But the work of gathering the *evidence* of our society, regardless of form, requires as its foundation the *support* of society. This must be considered a joint enterprise, a shared responsibility. The true value – and cost – of the authentic record ought not to be discovered only when we discover it is gone. We urge the Royal Society panel to include among its recommendations the need to properly fund the LAC, as well as to restore – at a rate consistent with the original fund, adjusted for inflation – the funding previously available to the Canadian archival community. We suggest this funding be more in line with that of the Tri-Council grants, with no demand for cost-sharing, and with multi-year projects enabled; and that a minimum of \$1 million per year be for projects relating to the management of electronic records. We urge the Royal Society to use its influence to help begin to shift the discourse surrounding archives, our shared history, and the evidence of our society, to more fully embrace the complexity and value of the archival enterprise.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Avery, President

on behalf of the
Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists

Attached: Outreach activities

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Saskatchewan Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation through SaskCulture Inc.; and of the Government of Canada through Library and Archives Canada and the Canadian Council of Archives.





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Appendix: Outreach Initiatives of the SCAA

(Please note a majority of these were funded through NADP / CCOP) This list identifies some, but not all the outreach activities of the Council and member institutions.

Archives Week:

- first requested in 2005, established in 2006
- proclaimed each year by the provincial government
- events across the province, including “Celebrity Reader” event in Saskatoon, which has attracted the participation of former premiers Allan Blakeney and Lorne Calvert; then-Lt. Gov. Gordon Barnhart; Senator Lillian Dyck, authors Yann Martel, Guy Vanderhaeghe, and David Carpenter; etc. Portions of this event are posted to YouTube.
- “A Night at the Roxy” free (archival) film event and “Film Night” in Regina
- “Archives Pavillion” as part of the Heritage Festival of Saskatoon
- a survey of views about the value of archives to society
- “Roadmap to your Past: Genealogy Open House
- regular events at small archives across the province; this year in Humboldt, La Ronge, Lloydminster, Melfort, North Battleford, Shaunavon, Whitewood, Wilcox

Community Outreach:

- regular sessions, using archival resources to tell the story of Saskatoon’s history to:
 - Classroom and student groups
 - Community Associations
 - Service clubs
 - Seniors’ centres and groups
 - Other organizations
- Saskatchewan Centennial 2005 phone card collection: joint venture with Hotel Association of Saskatchewan, OPCOM Hospitality Solutions and Centennial 2005 committee to use heritage photos on phone cards
- various exhibits, at archives across the province, at the University Library and at other public venues (such as the Co-op grocery store, shopping malls, and theatres)
- bilingual displays at Journées du patrimoine / Heritage Days, Societe historique de la Saskatchewan
- displays at SGS annual conference, Regina Exhibition
- display at SUMA conference
- sponsored the band, “The Provincial Archives,” at Louis’ (student pub), University of Saskatchewan



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Culture Days:

- “Archives in your Attic” (intellectual and monetary assessments of archival material held privately; conservation advice given)
- “Archives and Beer” and “Beer Night” – four speakers on the history / popular culture surrounding drinking and prohibition in Saskatchewan, based on archival collections. Repeated by popular demand, at a local pub.
- “Monkeying Around with Archives” at Government House (for youth)

Newspapers and Other Publications:

- Regular columns in the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* (City of Saskatoon archivist)
- regular features in the *Saskatoon Express* (Saskatoon area archivists);
- event-specific articles based on other projects (such as *Our Legacy*, *Wish You Were Here*, etc); throughout the province
- *Saskatchewan History* (Saskatchewan Archives Board)
 - articles by SCAA members
- articles in *Saskatchewan History Review*
- regular features in *Saskatoon Home* (City of Saskatoon archivist)
- produced and sold two calendars

Radio and Television:

- phone in show (CBC) with outreach archivist
- regular feature on CTV News (City of Saskatoon archivist)
- event-specific promotional interviews (particularly around Archives Week)
- Reel Stories from the Archives: partnership with Access Communications to develop 12 part series

Film and Video:

- “Lives and Letters” – four short features; including “To Robert Gordon,” which won the Saskatchewan Motion Picture Industry Association (SMPIA) Showcase Award for short film, in ‘Human Interest (single or series)’ category, 2009
- “The Truth is in There” – four short videos for YouTube

Books:

- “Wish You Were Here” booklet;
- A book project, “Then and Now” was cancelled with the loss of the NADP;
- we are currently working on a project; University of Regina Press has expressed interest.

Youth Heritage Fairs:

- sponsors of prizes relating to best use of primary sources, awarded at each of the provincial regional fairs since 2008





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Online exhibits (both SCAA and institutional-led multi-institution sites):

- All Frocked Up: Glimpses of Cross-Dressing in Saskatchewan
- At Work: Historical Images of Labour in Saskatchewan
- Canada Quiz / Quiz Découverte canadienne
- Combined Virtues: Saskatchewan's Ukrainian Legacy
- A Doukhobor Song of Days | Version française
- Exhibits for Kids:
 - Farm Machinery
 - "Hey, We're Moving Into Town" (Rural Depopulation)
 - Overcoming Disaster
- Main Street, Saskatchewan / Version française
- Medicare: A People's Issue
- Northern Research Portal (University of Saskatchewan)
- Our Legacy (Material relating to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples, found in Saskatchewan cultural and heritage collections)

- Persuasion: Print Advertising and Advocacy on the Prairies (University of Saskatchewan)
- Prairie Populism (digitized images and documents from Manitoba and Saskatchewan archives)
- Saskatchewan's 1944 CCF Election / Les Élections de la CCF en Saskatchewan en 1944
- Saskatchewan and the Visual Arts
- Saskatchewan in Two World Wars
- The Saskatchewan Landscape | Le Paysage de la Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Presents: An exhibition of theatre and drama /
La Saskatchewan présente : Une exposition de théâtre
- Saskatchewan Remembers
- Saskatchewan Quiz
- Saskatoon: The Early Years
- Wish You Were Here: Saskatchewan Postcard Collections (University of Saskatchewan)

Institutional Sites:

- Allen Sapp Gallery
 - Through the Eyes of the Cree





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- Avonlea and District Museum
 - Avonlea's Prairie Pioneers

- City of Regina Archives
 - Regina: The Early Years

- City of Saskatoon Archives
 - Putting Out Fires
 - A Sporting Proposition: Images of Sport and Recreation in Saskatoon, 1911
1971
 - A View From Above

- Claybank Brick Plant National Historical Site and Museum
 - A Little Brick Plant in the Middle of Nowhere

- Clayton McLain Memorial Museum
 - Atton's Lake - A Summer Meeting Place

- Diefenbaker Canada Centre
 - The Avro Arrow
 - Images of a Country: Canada's Flag Debate

- Grand Coteau Heritage and Cultural Centre, Shaunavon
 - Through the Eyes of Everett Baker

- Humboldt and District Museum
 - A Line Through the Wilderness

- Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery
 - Like a Falling Leaf - The 1954 Plane Collision Over Moose Jaw

- Saskatchewan Archives Board
 - The Birth of a Province - Saskatchewan 1905
 - Saskatchewan Homestead Index
 - Saskatchewan Settlement Experience

- Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre
 - Aboriginal Arts Gallery Saskatchewan
 - Aboriginal Faces of Saskatchewan: A Photo Gallery
 - Remembering Our Heroes: Saskatchewan First Nations Veterans
 - Stories of our Elders





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- The Virtual Keeping House: A First Nations Gallery
- Saskatoon Public Library Local History Room
 - Prairie Gold: Sports Heroes from Saskatchewan
 - Quirky Facts from Saskatoon History
 - Saskatoon Through the Ages: selected photographs from the Local History Room Gallery Shows
- Société historique de la Saskatchewan
 - La Fête fransaskoise | English
 - Le Musée Virtuel Francophone de la Saskatchewan / Virtual Museum of Francophone Saskatchewan
 - La radio française en Saskatchewan | French radio in Saskatchewan
- South Saskatchewan Photo Museum, Arcola
 - Pioneering Photography
 - A Century of Education
- University of Regina Archives & Special Collections
 - Regina College - A Historical Timeline
 - Florence Kirk - Letters from China, 1932-1950
- University of Saskatchewan Archives & Special Collections
 - Ambisextrous: Gender Impersonators of Music Hall and Vaudeville
 - Balfour W. Currie: The Second International Polar Year
 - Building the University of Saskatchewan
 - The Changing Face of the Saskatchewan Prairie
 - Deo et Patriae: Events in the History of the University of Saskatchewan
 - Documenting Saskatchewan
 - The Doukhobours in Canada: a select bibliography
 - Hans S. Dommasch: Canada North of 60
 - Frederic Harrison Edmunds: The Canadian Landscape
 - From the Athabasca to the Mackenzie Delta: A journey on Canada's Inland Waterways
 - Hans Gruen Postcard Collection
 - "Herstory: An Exhibition"
 - "I've Been to England ..." (Ruth Hood and the Overseas Education League)
 - John Reeves, Portrait of the Woman
 - Marine Invertebrate Larvae: A Study in Morphological Diversity



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- Northern Research Portal
- The Northwest Resistance
- ParticipACTION
- Passions Uncovered: Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Pulp
- Persuasion: Print Advertising and Advocacy on the Prairies
- Postcard Views of Indigenous Peoples
- Postcard Views of Qu'Appelle Valley
- Postcard views of Southeast Saskatchewan
- The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool
- Resources for Aboriginal Studies
- Robert N. Hurley: Skypainter
- Saskatchewan Resources for Sexual Diversity
- Saskatoon Light Infantry (including searchable name index diaries)
- Scattered Leaves: the Otto Ege Medieval Manuscript Collection
- The Student Experience
- University of Saskatchewan Music Collections - Murray Adaskin
- Walter Murray: The Lengthened Shadow

