

Submission to the Expert Panel on The Status and Future of Canada's Libraries and Archives

1. How would you describe the services Canadian, including Aboriginal Canadian and new Canadians, are currently receiving from libraries and archives in Canada?

I'd like to speak on behalf of Special Libraries, as the Manitoba Director of the Western Canada Chapter of the Special Libraries Association and as a representative of Volunteer Manitoba.

Special Libraries are an integral but not often mentioned, group of libraries that cover a huge range of information services in both the for profit and non-profit worlds.

I also manage a directory listing of over 5000 non-profit and government agencies in Manitoba which provide a myriad of services, many of whom rely heavily on the easy availability of Public Libraries to carry out the research required to keep these agencies offering the services they do, as well as a place they can refer their clients to for a variety of services; they provide meeting places, places people can escape extreme heat and cold, and places where they can access the internet and other sources of information regarding employment opportunities, housing, services for aboriginal people, new Canadians, young people, and seniors.

There are currently approximately 18 registered members of the Special Library Association in Manitoba, but many more that would easily qualify as Special Libraries. Using the aforementioned directory, almost 400 of the 5000 programs listed contain the word 'library', and many more of them provide information services by a number of other names. These Libraries are essential to the fabric of our community, offering a wide range of services to the Aboriginal community and to new Canadians.

These range from the collections of smaller museums such as the 26th Field Regiment Museum in Brandon, that tells an important story of that regiment, and the place that it is part of, to adult literacy centres like the Aboriginal literacy Foundation or the library at the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba that holds a special collection that is open to the public, but few of us would have ever thought of as existing.

2. Libraries are currently hybrid operations, constantly pulled toward traditional services by many core users and pulled, equally, by a concern for relevancy from other users and potential users. What issues are libraries facing as they try to make the transition to new service models?

One of the biggest issues libraries, and especially Special Libraries are facing is the lack of knowledge that they are there, and provide an invaluable service, and the mistaken belief that all information is

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easily accessible on the internet. And that is equally true for large depository collections such as our National Library and Archives, and much smaller databases such as my own at CONTACT Community Information. In the course of transitioning to new service models, we need to remain aware that a great deal of professional intervention by highly skilled individuals goes into the production, design, and maintenance of any information resource, be it a public library or an online search engine such as google or a directory of social services, granting agencies, specific research papers, or government publications.

3. How do Libraries and Archives measure outcomes of their service and community impacts?

Tragically and ironically the best measure for outcomes comes when a library is no longer there. When they are gone, they will be missed. More immediately, we live in an information era, and there is a direct economic impact of the uninhibited flow of information on the successful economic operations of any society. It is not a coincidence that the most successful enterprises (be they ancient empires or contemporary businesses) have strong and successful information flows. And the most rigorous of these is a Library.

4. Are libraries the appropriate institution to catalogue, store, and provide access to research data? If not, which institutions should provide these services?

Professionally trained librarians bring highly specialised skills to bring information together and make it easily and efficiently accessible. Of course there are other service models and other institutions that can provide these services, but our current model is heavily predicated on 250 plus years of a liberal world view.

Community Outreach and Awareness

1. Would Canadians know of, or understand the contributions you make to library/archival service in Canada?

Most people I speak to, including at one time, my own employer, can not necessarily see my role as a librarian, and indeed my predecessor in this role would not have considered himself one. And the Special Library Association itself has agonized over available labels. But the effective flow of information has become the keystone to our current economic and political system. While people need to be reminded, perhaps through the work of this panel, that this information flow must not be halted, it doesn't take a lot of imagination to envision a society where this information doesn't flow.

- Imagine a world where you can't find out if jobs or housing or social assistance is available – A Special Library does this
- Imagine a world where nobody will tell you that there is a new drug available, and that it is being provided through our national health care system. – A Special Library does this

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- Imagine a world where nobody tells you that there are alternatives to pouring toxic herbicides on your lawn – A Special Library does this.

2. In the digital era, what support for patrons do/should libraries provide?

The medium has changed, online searching and finding aids have become more sophisticated, but expected services have not. Libraries should continue to provide information. In this digital era they should make the enormous amount of information easily accessible, and should continue to assist in locating relevant and complete information.

3. What in your opinion are the specific roles for libraries and/or archives and/or museums and other heritage institutions in community building and memory building.

Heritage institutions of all kinds serve as a repository (read catalogue) of collective memory, to be read, shared, and understood by its consumers, consumers, who by the way, are not passive sponges, but active agents of reification and change. Beginning with the subtle cues of the architectural style (is the library a friendly space, as many of the more contemporary libraries are, or is it a deliberately intimidating temple full of icons, and powerful messages) and culminating with a complete collection of the knowledge of a society in a particular time and space. That knowledge creates a strong bond, and the more people that can access and share that knowledge, the greater the sense of community. The role of the library, therefore, is to reinforce that bond of community, make the collective knowledge accessible and comprehensible to all users of the library including people from other cultures, be they aboriginal or new Canadians, and build up a solid historical, geographical, political, economic and social memory.

New Directions

1. What are the main challenges of born-digital material for your institution?

The main challenge for all Special Libraries is the adequate description, storage and access of this material.

Description: print material is often easy to describe at the most basic level (and often we didn't bother except deep in the cataloguing data); we can generally agree whether an item is a book, fiction, government report, ephemera etc. In the born digital world, all is just a file. Refined standards for description are essential.

Storage: this raises more problematic questions. Is the storage secure, will it fail when one server is down, perhaps because of a flooded basement, or strong winds? Can it be viewed, and worse tampered with. To recognise that a book has had words erased, or pages removed is easy, but in the case of a computer file, this is much more difficult. Is the storage in another jurisdiction, and therefore is the material being held subject to restrictive access that is beyond our control? And finally there are real

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concerns about restricted information and controlled access. This can vary from library to library, and while a library in a law firm and a library in a non-profit agency providing, for example, valuable health information to the general public, are both Special Libraries, they can have very different issues regarding safe and proper storage.

Access: There are personal privacy concerns between client and solicitor, and there may be information only the holder of that information, and the intended reader should access. And there can be concerns about intellectual property and corporate secrets that allow a corporation to carry out its intended and legitimate business. The sharing of that information can damage that business, and adequate storage must be assured.

2. **What will be the function and future of a brick-and-mortar library or archives in a paperless future?**

The Library, whatever the medium, remains a meeting place, a forum of uninhibited discussion, and a principal building block of community and society. That aside, it remains a centre for the management of information. It is not so much a font of knowledge, where ideas swirl around (we could call this the internet) but a carefully managed series of boxes, cabinets and assorted containers with professional trained managers – called librarians, who can, using their highly specialised skills, retrieve any kind of knowledge as and when requested.