



December 13, 2013

Jessica MacQueen  
The Royal Society of Canada Expert Panel on The Status  
and Future of Canada's Libraries and Archives

Dear Ms. MacQueen:

Please accept this as my submission to the panel. I strongly believe in the importance of archives as keepers of authentic historical records. We have a main and four branch archives for our organization, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada, which is an amalgamation of four congregations which were separate until the decision to join together was taken on November 18, 2012. The legislation granting this amalgamation passed in the Ontario Legislature on June 13, 2013.

Since amalgamation has taken place, we have set up a new, main archives for our congregation. The original four archives have remained as branch archives, located in Hamilton, London, Peterborough and Pembroke. We have 1.5 paid staff positions, and two volunteer positions filled by retired Sisters. We have recently undertaken a needs assessment for our branch archives, and are supporting the work required to complete the preservation, arrangement, and description work identified as necessary to meet archival standards.

We collect records pertaining to the history and business activities of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Hamilton, London, Peterborough and Pembroke. We provide reference services to the members of the congregation, as well as to members of the public. We are often called upon by the public for assistance with genealogical inquiries or information about local history, and by congregational members for information about missions undertaken by the Sisters, although the scope of reference inquiries is quite broad. The Sisters of St. Joseph were very active and set up many important public institutions which remain today, the historical records of which are kept in our archives. Although we are a private archives, our sites are often the only places where members of the public can find out, for example, about an ancestor who stayed in an orphanage, or the history of a local hospital. We often have reference requests referred to us by the Diocesan offices in our communities.

The contributions we make to archival service in Canada may not be well-known to Canadians, because we do not have a web presence yet, and have not digitized and made available any of our records

online. We will be setting up a web page on our website for the main and branch archives, and this may go a long way to informing the public, and other religious communities, of our holdings. We are also an institutional member of the Catholic Archivists Group, which raises our profile in this archival community, and of the Archives Association of Ontario, which raises our profile province-wide.

The main factor which inhibits us from providing better services for Canadians is lack of funding. Since the federal government cut the National Archival Development Program, archives across the country have suffered. The NADP was a \$1.7 million dollar program that provided a lifeline to archives across the country, as well as skilled advice, support, and access to a national database for 800 repositories. We could very much benefit from being able to make an application to this program, were it still available. The elimination of the NADP also affected smaller archives like ours because of its impact on professional organizations which provided services to us, such as the Archives Association of Ontario, which had to increase its membership fees as a result, and had to cut one archives advisor position. It is also worth mentioning the terrible impact these cuts had on the Canadian Council of Archives which developed the cataloguing standard, RAD, on which we rely as archivists. Now we are all competing for less money than ever before, and we have all had to reduce our services. The worst cuts were to our national memory institution, Library and Archives Canada. Lack of adequate funding means that we cannot do as much outreach which means fewer people know of our services, and those who do must cope with longer wait times for assistance.

In the coming years, the challenges for our archives will be developing solutions around digital preservation, as well as ensuring we are able to cover the costs of continuing to preserve our analogue records. It is costly to reformat audiovisual materials; to replace enclosures which have become acidic; to maintain environmentally controlled storage; and to pay staff to carry out preservation work and provide access to collections. Fewer staff are now working but these staff have increased workloads, and the challenge will be to provide healthy working environments and opportunities for new graduates. Our volunteer archivists will retire, and we will need to make decisions about the care of our branch archives. While we would like to be able to collect more records, we are hampered by the costs associated with new accessions, including the need for more space, staff, and supplies for processing. The only solution is to increase government funding support, since the pool of philanthropic donors is limited, particularly for denominational archives, notwithstanding that we provide services to the public as well. The NADP should be reinstated and more funds allocated to it than previously.

Turning now to the framing questions, we will try to provide answers as they apply to our archives.

### **Services**

1. Our archives is open to Aboriginal Canadians and new Canadians. Our congregation partners with At'losha Native Family Healing Centre and the Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children at Western University to strengthen connections with indigenous peoples. Currently, we have an exhibit at our London site about Josephs' House, a shelter for refugees established by the Sisters of St. Joseph.
2. Digitization is our major challenge. It is costly to purchase a high quality flatbed scanner and software, to do the initial appraisal and preservation required, to develop metadata, and to process records to archival standards. Since audiovisual materials can only be preserved by reformatting to digital copies, this is also a challenge because of the high cost associated with this work which must be contracted out.

3. We need to develop impact evaluation tools. At present, we simply track the number and type of reference requests, archives visits, and outreach projects which take place.
4. Archives are more appropriate than libraries for cataloguing, storing and providing access to research data if this data is in the form of original, unique records. Librarians have not been trained in preservation techniques, or in the archival principle of respect des fonds.

### **Community Outreach and Awareness**

1. We will soon have a webpage on our website so this should help Canadians learn about the contribution we make to archival service in Canada. We are also thinking of applying to be an exhibitor at the Ontario Legislature which would raise our profile. Among the archival community, we have a high profile due to the engagement of our archivists in professional organizations.
2. Patrons may request that the archivist search the holdings and compile information for their purposes, or patrons may be served records under the supervision of the archivist.
3. Ways in which archivists can support patrons include participating in research into digital preservation, taking part in initiatives such as Archeion, and making records which do not have copyright or privacy restrictions available in digitized format.
4. Archives are critical for memory and community building. Archivists keep original manuscripts, photographs, artifacts and other media and maintain these so they are authentic, have integrity and are reliable over time. Archives provide evidence which can be relied on in a court of law and in proceedings such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings. The reason for this is that archivists ensure the provenance and chain of custody of the records in their care is documented. Archives support individuals and communities by providing access to information about family and local history, and protecting these records for future generations. Without archives, we will soon lose evidence of our actions, decisions, choices, triumphs and failures. The archives is the dependable, reliable memory on which we must rely because our human memory is malleable and fragile. Recently, at our London site, we began an oral history project to gather the memories of the elderly Sisters who live in the convent. We are also researching how we can use our archives to work with people living with dementia.

### **New Directions**

1. We do not have an enterprise content management system in our organization, so one challenge is to ensure that electronic records are transferred to the archives upon disposal if they have content which should be preserved long-term. Another challenge is ensuring all our archives are able to save material in preservation formats such as wav, TIFF, and PDF/A, because this requires funds for software and hardware. Yet another challenge is finding sustainable, non-proprietary software which is not too costly to implement for storing accession and description records. A further challenge is finding non-proprietary software to serve as a digital repository for born-digital records.
2. Archivists should play a leading role in the digitization, dissemination and long-term preservation of Canadian heritage. They are the experts, and should always be at the table when I/T solutions that involve records management, permanent retention, and access are taken. Archivists have been working for years on researching digital preservation, and in fact, Canada has taken the lead in its work through InterPares.
3. Brick and mortar archives will always be important. The lifespan of digital and optical records is very short compared to that of analogue records. While a Kodak gold preservation

CD may last 100 years, manuscripts on rag paper with gelatin sizing have lasted centuries. The born-digital, or the digitized record made from an analogue original, are always at risk of bit rot, being deleted, altered, copied and repurposed, and technological obsolescence. It is critical to retain the originals in an archives where they can be preserved, and in the case of born-digital records, migrated. The original analogue records, whether old films, reel-to-reel tapes, artifacts, photographs or manuscripts, must be kept in case the digitized versions fail. Finally, many patrons will always prefer to see the original as opposed to an online copy. There is nothing that gives you the feeling of touching history more than holding an original manuscript in your hands.

## **Education**

1. We need more archival studies courses in Library and Information Sciences programs. We also need more distance courses in archival studies. Currently, there are only a few universities in Canada which offer MAS programs, and there is no university in Canada which offers a distance MAS program in Canada such as the one offered by the University of Dundee in Scotland. We also need more paid internship and practicums for students. Our London site provides opportunities for MLIS students from Western University to volunteer and gain experience in every aspect of archives work. We always have applicants for these volunteer positions and the students tell us that they are grateful to have the opportunity to practice the theoretical skills they learn in the classroom in real-life.
2. Students need to learn more practical skills such as how to make enclosures, how to carry out records inventories, and how to make exhibit mounts. They also need technological skills in database design, and coding skills such as in PHP and SQL. Core competencies for archives should focus on preservation and technological skills.

## **Resources**

1. It would be helpful to have a consortia for small archives for digitization projects, such as reformatting audiovisual materials and scanning. These costs are too high for small archives to bear on their own, and much historical material is being lost due to the inherent vices in the media itself.
2. We can develop funding proposals to any philanthropic foundations that allow religious charities to apply, but these are fewer than those available for public archives. Since we have charitable status, it may be difficult to charge a user fee to patrons of our archives, and in any case, this would not bring in a lot of revenue.
3. We would need more initially in terms of a budget increase, since we have a lot of material which needs reformatting and digitization. If we received an increased budget and consistent adequate resources, by 2017, our main and branch archives could accomplish a lot, including:
  - a. complete RAD compliant archival descriptions of current holdings;
  - b. complete preservation work on current holdings such as replacing acidic enclosures to ensure analogue records remain accessible;
  - c. appraise and reformat the most valuable audiovisual records;
  - d. appraise and digitize frequently requested or fragile records for preservation and access;

- e. share information about holdings of public interest online, along with digital exhibits of records for which there are no copyright or privacy concern;
- f. develop travelling exhibits and in-situ displays that showcase the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph and their contributions to Canada;
- g. provide paid internships to students;
- h. develop tools to measure and evaluate our archival programs and services;
- i. ensure that the irreplaceable and valuable records of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph and their legacy and in Canada is preserved for future generations of Canadians.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to add our voice to those of archivists and librarians across Canada. The richness of our culture, heritage and collective knowledge is preserved and shared because of archives and libraries. Without these heritage institutions, we would be an impoverished nation indeed. The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada recognizes the critical importance of archives, and does so through their own substantial support of archives in four geographical locations.

Sincerely,

Mary Kosta  
Archivist  
Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada