

is approved, will be in a position to distribute some grants; but governmental archives will more easily absorb the costs of new programs relating to religious archives than be likely to assist financially private organizations to do it themselves."¹¹ If the government cannot see its way to assist institutions directly, there are other means of easing the operation of institutional archives. Institutions which open their archives for public research could be exempted from sales tax and duty on equipment and other supplies equivalent to what is allowed for public institutions, and could be made eligible for Canada Council and other federal and provincial grants that aid cultural programmes. It seems that Caesar is so intent on keeping what is his separate from what is God's that religious archives are not allowed any of these benefits. The Cultural Properties Act may correct the existing inequality. At present, donors giving papers to non-public archives can claim only partial value as an income tax deduction, whereas donors to a public archives may deduct full value for gifts. Credit must be given to PAC personnel who were involved in the preparation of this law.

The arguments against institutional archives seem to be cost, a history of poorly-run institutional programmes, the physical separation of materials, and the fear that institutions once assisted in establishing archives might not maintain the necessary support. I would counter briefly with the following points. First, I question whether government-run archival programmes are always more economical. Second, had some of the effort that has gone into acquiring the papers of institutions been directed toward encouraging administrators to establish archives for their institutions and into advising them on how to do it properly, institutional archives would not be in such poor shape. Advice and assistance will go a long way in bringing about better programmes in private institutions, as will a reserve of trained archivists from which institutions can select directors for their programmes. Physical separation of records can be compensated for by copying exchanges and by such comprehensive guides as the *Union List of Manuscripts*.

Perhaps I am naive in what I think possible from government and in what I am asking archivists of public institutions to support. A time of retrenchment is not the time for personal whims and gratifications or for needless division and duplication of effort. The number of institutions willing to support respectable programmes may be very small, but there is a larger number which do not wish to place their records in public archives and which might be persuaded to begin their own programmes if the advantages were effectively pointed out to them. My final argument for institutional archives might be considered reactionary, but institutions might prefer private endeavours in a time of increasing government control, might employ those worn virtues of personal dedication and private pride, might allow records to retain their individuality and be enhanced by direct association with the creating people and institution. If I am wrong in my estimate of the state's ability to provide the ultimate, efficient, comprehensive programme for the nation's records, leaving no room for other archives, credit it to human inadequacy which also may be allowed to persist in some corner.

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Do We Need New and Improved Researchers?

Few readers will quarrel with the good intentions and concern expressed by Professor Regehr in his short note concerning computerized finding aids in the last issue of

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Archivaria. Feedback from patrons of archival institutions is valuable and *Archivaria* is an ideal platform for such frank exchanges of opinion. As Professor Regehr states in his conclusion, nothing will ever replace the competent archivist who knows the collections in his custody and who provides all researchers, not only the "historian-scholar," with accurate reference aids and advice. Nobody will dispute that. To say so, however, amounts to nothing more than another blessing of motherhood.

Regehr implies that in the past, each graduate student and academic leaving the Public Archives of Canada was confident that the archivists consulted had provided all possible leads and documents pertinent to his research. Even if this were true, which is doubtful, it still does not take into account the new realities which a tremendous proliferation of information since World War II has imposed on archivists, who must now manage increasingly voluminous collections. Although modern archivists will continue to improve the reference aids to older collections, their basic commitment must always be to bring under control as rapidly as possible that material, historical or otherwise, which they have assessed to be of permanent value. While computers assist in accelerating and improving the accuracy of this process, the responsibility of determining the basic structure and contents of reference aids does not change. The computer is merely a tool: it will only do that for which it has been programmed. Although current computer applications for the handling of archival information do not yet provide all the answers, and most likely never will, the tool should not be abandoned. That a typist made mistakes in transcribing handwritten information was not justification, as it appeared to certain critics in the late nineteenth century, to scrap all typewriters. Whatever means are used—whether hand or computer—the crucial issues are the quality and quantity of the information. The problem for archivists, and even more so for researchers, is not the computer itself, but the particular kind of indexing which the machine has until now been programmed to provide. Whether the actual keyword indexes are obtained by repeated manual retyping or through computer assistance is, however, hardly relevant: it is the aim and scope of the indexing which is at stake.

In this debate, no distinction should be made between "hit-and-run" researchers and "scholars." Indeed, many scholars who use keyword indexes for the purposes for which they were designed have effectively increased their research potential and have reduced the time required to establish certain facts which might otherwise have escaped their attention entirely had the only research aid at their disposal been a hundred-page list of record descriptions. Indeed, what characterizes the good researcher is not so much his search as his findings.

Such recent improvements in indexing as the use of multiple (or clustered) keywords or such a sophisticated indexing technique as PRECIS (Preserved Context Indexing System) will increasingly permit more efficient information retrieval. As in the past, however, such systems will work only if the basic record descriptions are adequate. For any researcher who does not need or may not want to use indexes, keyword or otherwise, the complete lists of records will always be available. But the sheer size of modern record series will force the modern historian to improve his research methods, unless he prefers to waste a disproportionate amount of time in fruitless searches. As for archivists, there is little chance that overnight they will become "efficient technical officers" as long as they continue to get their basic training in the history departments of this country.

Although a quick search will never replace scholarly research, the latter does not eliminate the need for the production of efficient research aids and the improvement of research methods. Surely Professor Regehr does not propose to resurrect the Luddite bands of the Industrial Revolution.

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