

was forming a committee which still has not reached a publishable conclusion. Here was a clear case for the president to exercise leadership. Instead, because of delay, we have lost this opportunity. Must we be so suspicious of our leaders that we allow them to say in public only what each paid-up member of the Association has pondered and revised *ad infinitum*? Why are we not seeing the ACA president quoted in media coverage of "hot" issues such as freedom of information, access, and the disposition of papers of elected officials? Even an occasional letter to the editor would be a tonic.

Nevertheless, we have a very real archival community in Canada from which I have derived a great deal of comfort, support and pleasure. We have not yet seen the limits of our potential for professional growth. How far we progress will depend to a great extent on how successfully we can come together, understand each other and act on our conclusions.

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A Conspiracy Against the Canadian Identity

by BERNARD AMTMANN

Among those articles which comprise the heritage of a nation, the papers of people who have played a role in shaping its history are of the greatest importance.

Such a collection is offered by my firm, Montreal Book Auctions Ltd., in the Gowan Papers. We have invited inquiries in an announcement which appeared in our catalogues nos. 99 & 100. It now reappears in our catalogue no. 101, May 25, 1977.

Up until now we have received only one inquiry from a provincial government archives, followed by a firm purchase offer at a price the institution felt was fair, even generous. As it was only one tenth of our estimate of the value of the collection, we could hardly accept it.

When we consider the financial evaluation of historical papers as exemplified in the Gowan Papers, and this is generally applicable to any large collection of historical papers, we reencounter the strange and remarkably familiar phenomenon of an almost complete absence of interest among institutions, universities, collectors and the general public.

I am ready to admit that manuscripts and letters of Canadian statesmen and political figures have little overt appeal to people in general and are given little priority. As well, the political and social problems a nation faces on a daily basis make the occupation of selling and buying such material appear virtually immoral. However, if it becomes a matter of morality, the buying of paintings and artifacts seems to be more immoral than the acquisition of letters and papers of Sir John A. Macdonald and his like. In the context of national expenditures, amounts disbursed for cultural luxuries are relatively small, and the amounts required for historical manuscripts and letters are negligible.

Historical collections of the magnitude of the Gowan Papers are to be considered distinctive national treasures and private collectors and institutions feel that they belong in national institutions of an archival character, either provincial or federal. But national archival institutions are faced with the dilemma that they already have too

much of the same type of material, and that their budgets are very much restricted. For this reason the financial evaluation of the professional archivist differs greatly from that of the professional dealer or auctioneer. If it may be assumed that manuscripts and letters have ideological as well as research value, overly under the influence of the academic, the archivist is mainly concerned with the research value, and his conception of the financial value is coloured by the consideration of how much the material will contribute to research.

Nevertheless, there is a good and lively market for any other objects that are part of the Canadian heritage, houses and places, furniture and antiques of any description, stamps and medals, paintings and pictorial material, Indian and Eskimo artifacts, photographs, and the like. There is also a good market for manuscripts, letters and papers of contemporary public figures. My own archives and papers were sold at a satisfactory price. The papers of Canadian poets, writers and artists are in demand. The papers of Bertrand Russell, some years ago, went to McMaster University for a reported price of more than \$500,000. The National Museum reported some months ago various purchases of Indian artifacts, among which was a purchase at a London auction in the amount of \$285,000. The case of the Disraeli Project initiated and undertaken by Queen's University at Kingston, Ont. might also be of interest. The Disraeli Project was established through a Canada Council grant in 1975 to edit and publish the 16,000 Disraeli letters thus far located, with Queen's University actively searching out additional letters and reference materials. In no way negating the interesting merits of such a project, it is nonetheless a disturbing paradox that neither money nor interest is available for a contemporary of Disraeli, our own, and Kingston's own, Sir John A. Macdonald. Should not a project to edit and publish the letters of Sir John A. Macdonald, aided by a grant from the Canada Council, to Queen's University or some other Canadian University, also be viable and worthwhile?

What I am saying here should not be construed as either polemical or controversial. I very much approve of acquisitions like the Russell Papers, of the purchase of old masters by the National Gallery of Canada, of material which enriches the cultural and intellectual life of the nation. How vital it is to strengthen Canadian institutions in their holdings of this type of material and to repatriate articles of Canadian heritage found abroad. Although some of the material might belong in the category of luxury items, a nation aspiring to more than a Xerox culture orientation must be granted the primary power of supplying those cultural and intellectual requisites.

I have discussed our dilemma with a good friend of academic standing, and here are some of his opinions:

Canada has not yet concerned herself in a major or serious manner with the acquisition or retention of national treasures. Sporadic efforts have been made to halt the export of cultural objects, and to encourage the deposit of personal and company records through a tax remission valuation. But export restrictions cannot encourage the transfer of important collections of papers to public (i.e., for the use of the public) depositories.

There is a large area where no satisfactory mechanism exists for the movement of collections of papers from owner to depository. Differing philosophies cloud the issue as some libraries and archives are willing to pay premium prices for certain holdings; others feel that the public-spiritedness of individuals may bring owners to donate collections to public institutions; still others deplore high prices paid, materials going out of the country, and nevertheless do not make any avid efforts to ensure that collections offered for auctions receive a fair market exposure. As a consequence of these varied and complex attitudes many significant political, personal, literary and business collections are in private hands, the owners hurt that they are accused of "selling" collections, and confused that no appropriate bid has been made.

We give the National Gallery something of a free rein in acquiring Canadian art and old masters. The art market has developed over the years to the point where sufficient experience

exists to permit a fair evaluation. When some particular treasure comes on the market — beyond the financial capabilities of the institution — special avenues exist for acquiring further funds if the institution can make the case for purchase. No one today expects that the Gallery must wait for donation or death to acquire treasures.

Collections of papers — i.e., personal letters of leading historical, political, business or literary figures — are much more part of our cultural heritage than single paintings, be these ever so important in themselves. But works of art are much more readily sold and bought. The collections should be sought after with more zeal and pertinacity, and the owner and purchaser should have access to more experience and knowledge of fair value than is usually the case. At the present time there is neither market experience nor free play in the collections field to permit the establishment of a fair market price. Indeed auction records show that in Canada various significant collections of papers have been offered by auction with discouraging results to those who would see them go to a Canadian depository at a price acceptable to the owner.

As a dealer in historical manuscripts and papers my experiences are chiefly confined to the Canadian market. For many years, in word and print, I have expressed my deep disappointment and frustration in this line of endeavour. In 1971, at the meetings of the Erasmus Circle, I considered various aspects of the problem. In 1973, my "Open Letter to Canadian Archivists"¹ was published in the journal of the Canadian archivists, and subsequently in the *Antiquarian Bookman*, a U.S. weekly. In some quarters my opinions and statements were considered provocative and controversial. In 1975 I acted as chairman of a committee for the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of Canada in an ongoing discussion with the Department of the Secretary of State relating to the Cultural Property Export and Import Act. In 1976 I was a participant in the orientation seminar arranged by the National Archival Appraisal Board. Colleagues from Great Britain and the United States expressed the views of professional dealers and auctioneers as appraisers of historical manuscripts and papers versus the point of view of institutional and archival buyers and appraisers. These were interesting meetings and both parties came to a better understanding of the opposite standpoints. No agreement in principle was reached which could apply to the case of the Gowan Papers here under review. [The National Archival Appraisal Board is offering appraisal service for historical materials *donated only* to archival repositories in Canada in connection with resulting tax credits by Revenue Canada. However, the values set cannot be designated fair market values since market forces do not play directly on the transactions or on the judgments of the board.]

In the case of the Gowan Papers, no market exists and therefore it is not possible to establish a fair market value. Nobody will deny that the Gowan Papers have value in the context of Canadian heritage. No one will suggest that the owner discard the material. No one will suggest that due to the absence of a market the owner has to accept any price offered by a buyer. In effect, this would constitute dictating a price instead of evaluating the material. It would be discriminatory to both the owner and the material. If the owner wishes to discard and to destroy the material, this is his decision; if he desires to sell it, this is his right and he has the right to expect a fair price!

It is my business to evaluate and estimate books, pamphlets, manuscripts and letters, and it is my considered opinion that \$250,000 is a fair and realistic appraisal of the Gowan Papers. It is a conservative appraisal and it does not take into consideration that within the next few years the value of the collection could double or triple. It does not take into consideration that every single item is unique, that many of the items have special importance, and that the sum total of all this is a splendid manifestation of real national heritage for Canada and Canadians.

¹ Bernard Ammann, "An Open Letter to Canadian Archivists," *Canadian Archivist* 2, no. 4 (1973): 42-47.

During the debates in the Canadian Senate on the Cultural Property Export and Import Act the late Senator O'Leary said the following:

There are some lines I have intended to quote to you, but my friend Senator Hicks used them as we were leaving the dinner table today, so I put them aside. These are the lines: "The wise nation preserves its records, gathers up its muniments, decorates the tombs of its illustrious dead . . . and fosters national pride and love of the country by perpetual references to the sacrifices and glories of the past." This was Joseph Howe . . . he did not say, however, that one must have a law to do that. It is an invitation to common sense, to common patriotism. . . . (Senate, *Debates*, April 17, 1975, p. 768)

The fact that no Canadian market for the Gowan Papers exists, apart from the solitary low offer from a Canadian institution, which the owner of the Gowan Papers considers insulting and outrageous (a statement with which I agree) coupled with the fact that no interest has been shown at all, proves very clearly that Canadians are essentially uninterested in the history of their country, and are singularly endowed with apathetic feelings of national pride. There are more contemporary terms to express what Joseph Howe in 19th-century romanticism called national pride and love of the country, but while his words may sound archaic, the substance remains. As long as materials of the nature of the Gowan Papers are not appreciated and are neglected by Canadians, the search for a Canadian identity will go on. It is not governments and institutions which are to blame, it is the Canadian intelligentsia which is at fault. It is not what is called the Canadian Establishment — the bankers, the brewers, the merchants, the rich and powerful — who are at fault, but another establishment, more powerful and more insidious that has created this situation. Indeed, it is the ongoing conspiracy of the Canadian academic establishment that has retarded and delayed the discovery of the Canadian identity. The banker, the brewer, the lumber merchant can do much, but they cannot give the country a soul and an identity. The journalist, the poet, the writer, the professor, the librarian, the archivist can.

English and multicultural Canada have been shocked out of their ideological and cultural complacency by the events of the 15th November 1976. The idea that a separation of Quebec would fracture Canada is disturbing to many Canadians. However, in a cultural context Quebec was never part of Canada, has always existed in a more or less splendid isolation. Yet, when it comes to national pride and love of the country, Quebec had more of it than the rest of the country. The idea of Quebec independence originated in this ideological climate and is a direct and logical result of it.

We need a new philosophy of the Canadian heritage, a new approach to it. We need to build shrines for the men who made this country. We need new dimensions in the study and teaching of Canadian history which will lead to a better understanding of our heritage. We have to call a halt to the conspiracy of the academics against the Canadian past. We have to cajole and charm the custodians of the Canadian heritage, the librarians and archivists, to make their holdings available to the youth of this country and to induce the academics to make clear its significance. It is the task of the academics to approach foundations and corporations for funds to carry out a number of projects leading to a better appreciation of our past. It is the duty of our academics to edit and publish the letters of our Disraelis and our Russells. For it is in presenting proudly the riches of the Canadian heritage that our identity is established. The sorry spectacle that no serious offer is forthcoming, that no market exists for a collection like the Gowan Papers, will one day be a thing of the past. In rejecting 2000 letters written by Sir John A. Macdonald and his contemporaries, we reject our heritage and we reject our identity.