

Obituary

Charles Edwin Welch, 1927–1998



Edwin Welch was one of a small band of archivists who emigrated to Canada after the Second World War, bringing with them a great deal of varied experience which was to make a significant contribution to the administration of archives in this country.

His early research covered English church courts in the Middle Ages, for which he received a master of arts from Liverpool University in 1953 and a

doctorate from the Southampton University in 1968. After earning a diploma in archives administration from Liverpool University in 1967, he became a member of the Society of Archivists. He served as Honorary Treasurer of the Society from 1957–71, a length of time which has probably not been equaled. He was successively archivist of the cities of Plymouth and Southampton during the 1960s and archivist of Churchill College, Cambridge, from the years 1966–71, which included custody of Winston Churchill's papers.

Up to this point Edwin's career had developed steadily to the point that in 1971 he was invited to teach archives administration in the Library School at the University of Ottawa. Shortly thereafter he arrived in Canada with his wife, Monica, and young family. Unfortunately the school closed three years later, whereupon Edwin became the first Municipal Archivist of the City of Ottawa. Edwin's wide experience with municipal records enabled him to place the archives on a foundation upon which his successors were to build very effectively. Housed in a school building, the City of Ottawa Archives became a model of its kind. In particular, Edwin recruited a first class conservator from England, a step which resulted in the establishment of a conservation laboratory probably unrivalled by that at any other Canadian municipal archives at the time.

In 1978 he received another blow to his career when he was dismissed from his position as a result of a serious disagreement with the City Clerk. This challenged his principles and revealed him as a man of obstinate courage. During the next three difficult years, he worked as honorary archivist of the Ottawa Historical Society, while Monica obtained work as a librarian.

In 1981 he became Archivist/Records Manager for the government of the Northwest Territories in Yellowknife. This time his services were fully appreciated and he was able to develop an archives repository to everyone's satisfaction, including his own.

Edwin was quite active in the formation of the Association of Canadian Archivists, and in 1976 he and I put together the first guidelines towards developing a curriculum for the Master of Archival Studies program at the University of British Columbia. Needless to say, his advice was invaluable on that occasion.

On his retirement in 1989 he was able to continue his researches as an acknowledged authority on the history of nonconformist religion in England. With Monica and their two daughters he retired to Lantzville, British Columbia, with his library of 8,000 volumes and the opportunity for as much sailing as he wished. After a recurring illness he died of multiple myeloma on 9 April 1998.

Hugh Taylor