

Records of Dubious Research Value: Developing and Implementing Acquisition Policy for the Records of Non-Profit Organizations at Library and Archives Canada

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RÉSUMÉ Pour répondre à des compressions budgétaires draconiennes, Bibliothèque et Archives Canada a introduit une politique d'acquisition limitée pour les archives privées en 1995 dans le but de restreindre de façon significative les activités d'acquisition. Un aspect de cette nouvelle politique exige que les organismes à buts non-lucratifs fournissent des ressources – monétaires ou humaines – pour le classement et la description de leurs documents avant que ceux-ci ne soient acquis par BAC. Cette contribution peut se situer n'importe où entre le financement complet du traitement et l'aide dans le classement et la description préliminaire des documents. L'adoption de cette politique d'acquisition reflète un nouveau courant qui présente les fonds des organisations comme ayant une moins grande valeur archivistique que les fonds des individus et, par la force des choses, diminue la priorité de l'acquisition de ces documents par BAC. Ce texte examine le contexte théorique – les débats et les présomptions – dans la communauté archivistique canadienne et à BAC qui a précédé cette décision. Ensuite, il examine l'expérience de BAC dans la mise en oeuvre de cette politique dans les dix années qui ont suivi, en analysant sept études de cas d'organisations sur lesquelles elle a eu un impact. L'auteur termine en considérant les leçons tirées à partir de cette expérience pratique, ainsi que par des réflexions de nature générale sur les documents archivistiques des organisations à buts non-lucratifs.

ABSTRACT In response to severe budget cuts, Library and Archives Canada introduced a strict acquisition policy for private archives in 1995 designed to significantly reduce acquisition activity. Part of the new policy required non-profit organizations to contribute resources, human or monetary, toward the arrangement and description of their records as a prerequisite to acquisition by LAC. This contribution could range anywhere from full-funding to assistance in preliminary arrangement and description. The adoption of this acquisition policy reflected an emerging view that the fonds of organizations held less archival value than those of individuals and, in effect, downgraded the records of organizations at LAC as a priority for acquisition. This article examines the theoretical environment – the debates and assumptions – in the Canadian archival community and within LAC leading up to this decision, and examines LAC's experience of implementing this policy over ten years through seven case studies of organizations upon which it had an impact. It concludes with a discussion of the lessons learned through this practical experience and some more general reflections on the archival record of non-profit organizations.

Declining funding for the archival community in the 1980s and 1990s ironically coincided with Canadian society's creation of an increasingly abundant archival record. This environment of financial scarcity and documentary plenty compelled Library and Archives Canada¹ (LAC) to find new approaches to the acquisition and preservation of private-sector fonds. The institution had long acquired the records of non-profit organizations as part of its mandate to document all facets of Canadian society but, after intense discussion and debate, determined that the records of organizations had less archival value than other fonds of private provenance. In direct response to budget cuts, LAC formally adopted a strict acquisition policy which greatly reduced its commitment to the acquisition of records of organizations.²

As of 1995, self-sustaining non-profit organizations would have to contribute to the selection and arrangement of their fonds as a precondition to acquisition by the LAC. By "self-sustaining" the authors of the policy meant organizations that were ongoing or continued to exist and function; the new policy did not apply to defunct or moribund associations.³ The experience over a decade of the development and application of this acquisition policy for self-sustaining organizations has cast in sharp relief its advantages and drawbacks. Its successes, though not unqualified, have surprised many and LAC's approach is worthy of consideration by the archival community. More recent developments in LAC tentatively reflect a modest revival in the appreciation of the archival value inherent in the records of non-profit organizations for documenting Canadian society.

Rethinking the Acquisition of Private Fonds

Budget cutbacks hit Library and Archives Canada hard in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The heady days of growth and expansion ended abruptly. The federal government cut the institution's annual budget by twenty-five percent between 1994 and 1998, and during the decade the number of staff fell from 803 to 609.⁴ Government departments and the private sector, however, contin-

1 I use the current name of the institution for simplicity in the article although for most of the period covered it was the National Archives of Canada. Quotations and citations use the form of the name used in the original. Note that statistics for the pre-LAC period do not include figures for the National Library of Canada.

2 National Archives of Canada, *Private Sector Acquisition: Orientation 1995–2000* (20 November 1995); and National Archives of Canada, *1995–96 Estimates*, Part III, Expenditure Plan (Ottawa, 1995).

3 Private-sector records creators include corporate bodies and individuals. Corporate bodies include both for-profit businesses and non-profit organizations but it is this latter group with which this paper is primarily concerned. Business archives are excluded from this study although they suffered a fate perhaps even more severe than that of non-profit organizations.

4 National Archives of Canada, *Annual Review 1996–1997* (Ottawa, 1997), p. 66; National Archives of Canada, *Annual Report of the National Archives of Canada 1988–1989* (Ottawa,

ued to create an enormous quantity of records, leading archivists to speak of an age of documentary abundance.⁵ Even before the cutbacks of the 1990s, LAC had placed a temporary moratorium on the acquisition of records in 1988 because of the lack of storage space for an increasingly voluminous archival record.⁶

The dichotomy between resources and mandate at LAC produced an era of archival introspection and innovation. The most innovative response came from the Government Archives Division where Terry Cook and others, developed macro-appraisal theory to address the new records-creating environment.⁷ But in the domain of private archives with its smaller-sized fonds, the challenge posed by records abundance did not seem insuperable or to call for radical new departures, yet. The legislative framework appeared to offer the Manuscript Division ample room to manoeuvre. Though the *National Archives of Canada Act* of 1987 had declared that “The objects and functions of the National Archives of Canada are to conserve private and public records of national significance ...”,⁸ this new legislation had provided remarkably little guidance in how the institution would undertake the acquisition of private fonds of national significance. Nor did it offer a definition of the pivotal concept of “national significance.” The Act had affirmed the “total archives” approach embracing, at its core, a commitment to document Canadian society fully through the acquisition of records of public and private provenance in all media.⁹ But the legislation left the mandate for private fonds vague and subject to broad interpretation. In contrast, the Act had prescribed in several para-

1989), p. 109; and National Archives of Canada, *Performance Report for the Period Ending March 31, 2001* (Ottawa, 2001), p. 38. The National Archives had 609 full-time equivalent positions in 2000–2001, down from 803 in 1988–1989.

5 See for example, Timothy L. Ericson, “At the ‘Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction’: Archivists and Acquisition Development,” *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991–92), p. 72; or David Brown, Richard Brown, and Peter Robertson, “Acquisition Strategy Research Plan” (National Archives of Canada, 31 October 1990), p. 1.

6 Myron Momryk, “National Significance: The Evolution and Development of Acquisition Strategies in the Manuscript Division, National Archives of Canada,” *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001), p. 159.

7 See for example, Terry Cook, “Mind Over Matter: Toward a New Theory of Appraisal,” in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 38–70; and Richard Brown, “Macro-Appraisal Theory and the Context of the Public Records Creator,” *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp. 121–72.

8 *National Archives of Canada Act* (1987, c. 1, assented to 25 March 1987).

9 Laura Millar, “Discharging our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada,” *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998), pp. 103–46. Millar’s superb article discusses the evolution of the total archives concept in Canada, and situates the important role of LAC within that evolution. For an insider view, see also Wilfrid I. Smith, “Total Archives: The Canadian Experience,” in Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archives and the Rediscovery of Provenance* (Metuchen, NJ, 1994), pp. 133–50.

graphs the institution's role in preserving the documentary record of the Government of Canada.¹⁰

With this flexibility to manoeuvre in the realm of private archives, revising acquisition policy appeared the simplest and best solution to the new environment; a wholesale abandonment of past principles and practices did not seem necessary, or even advisable. The Systematic National Acquisition Program (SNAP) had guided LAC's acquisition of fonds of private provenance, largely unaltered in concept, since its introduction in 1968. Through SNAP, the institution attempted to document Canadian society comprehensively by identifying and targeting records creators, especially those in non-traditional areas of acquisition.¹¹ Influenced by developments in the social sciences and the new social history in the 1960s, SNAP had broadened the Manuscript Division's acquisition focus beyond political, military, and religious fonds to include labour, science, medicine, sports, literature, multiculturalism, and other fonds in a host of fields which reflected the richness and diversity of Canadian society.¹²

Efforts to shape and define the concept of "national significance," as used in the 1987 Act, necessarily preceded the attempt to revise or fine-tune the Manuscript Division's venerable acquisition program. As the key principle governing the acquisition of both government and private records, LAC devised a broad and inclusive definition for national significance in its *Acquisition Policy* (1988):

Records of national significance are those which document the Canadian experience. They record the efforts and experiences of individuals, groups, institutions, corporate bodies, and other organizations which have become nationally or internationally recognized. They also document the physical environment in Canada, as well as events and trends (cultural, political, economic, social, demographic, scientific, and religious) having a broad, national scope. They may also reveal, in a notable way, typically Canadian experiences.¹³

This definition covered the varieties of fonds created by the private sector in a comprehensive way – but it cried out for a sharper focus to guide the daily work of archivists and managers.

Much effort over the next few years went into finding a working definition

10 *National Archives of Canada Act*, notably in sections 5 and 6.

11 Judi Cumming, "Beyond Intrinsic Value Towards the Development of Acquisition Strategies in the Private Sector: the Experience of the Manuscript Division, National Archives of Canada," *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994), p. 234.

12 Millar, "Discharging our Debt," p. 117. For additional context, see also Michael D. Swift, "The Canadian Archival Scene in the 1970s: Current Developments and Trends," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–1983), p. 48; and Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898 and the Future Paradigm Shift," *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997), pp. 33–34.

13 National Archives of Canada, *Acquisition Policy* (8 March 1988).

of “national significance” and adapting acquisition policies for the new environment. In Myron Momryk’s article on the evolution of this concept from the 1960s to the 1990s, he describes the debate over what constituted national significance that aimed to craft an effective acquisition strategy for the private sector in the years following the adoption of the 1987 Act. Task forces and working groups abounded in the Manuscript Division and Visual and Sound Archives Division, the two divisions with primary responsibility for the acquisition of private fonds. Names like Foucault and McLuhan were bandied about.¹⁴ This era of extensive debate at least ensured that LAC could not be accused of what Timothy Ericson has identified as the most serious failing of archives acquiring private sector fonds: “we have not taken the time to conceptualize adequately why we are saving the records which we have chosen to acquire.”¹⁵ But it also revealed that every archivist had their own interpretation of the meaning of national significance.

Thinking about national significance in the early 1990s occurred against the backdrop of looming budget cuts, developments in government archives, and recognition that the Canadian archival landscape had undergone profound transformation since 1968. A consensus coalesced around the need for LAC to adopt a more exclusive approach that ruled out certain types of fonds, or ascribed graduated levels of value within the collecting environment. In essence, archivists wished to devise a strategy that would direct resources toward the best, or most “nationally significant” fonds.¹⁶ As Ericson observed about the same time in the more general context of private fonds acquisition,

... we must move beyond the unconscious assumptions of the age of scarcity which still distort our thinking ... Just as our professional forebears began to use appraisal to help limit their intake of records at the fonds level, so must we begin to use acquisition policies to limit our intake at the repository level.¹⁷

Among the ideas that took shape and form in the discussions after 1990 was the conviction that the records of nationally-significant non-profit organizations held less value in relative terms than the fonds of nationally-significant individuals.¹⁸ This idea, controversial at first, was never universally accepted by archivists within the Manuscript Division. Those who did consider that the records of organizations had less inherent value would have been hard-pressed to ground this conviction in any specific archival theory; it had instead arisen

14 Momryk, “National Significance,” pp. 158–65.

15 Ericson, “At the Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction,” p. 69.

16 Momryk, “National Significance,” pp. 164–69.

17 Ericson, “At the Rim of Creative Dissatisfaction,” p. 72.

18 In referring to the slippery concept of “archival value,” my primary meaning is Schellenberg’s secondary or informational value.

from long practical experience gained in acquisition, arrangement, and providing reference service to all types of private fonds. This distinction in value emerged slowly in the discussions, perhaps because the concept of applying gradations of value to provenance, rather than records themselves, threatened a basic tenet of total archives, deeply entrenched in LAC thinking during the 1970s and 1980s. Momryk describes well the reluctance of managers in these years to move away from formal adherence to total archives.¹⁹

It would require the severe budget cuts of the mid-1990s ultimately to crystallize its expression in an acquisition policy that distinguished between the records of organizations and other private fonds. Prior to these cuts, the Manuscript Division was unwilling to formally assign secondary priority to organizations. In 1989 the Acquisition Strategy Committee of the Manuscript Division had still stated that fonds of national significance included “national organizations and their executives; organizations active in more than one province; [and] national umbrella organizations.” The department-wide *Acquisition Strategy: A Development Plan, 1989–1993* (December 1989) reaffirmed its commitment to acquire “records created by individuals, organizations and corporations in the private sector.”²⁰ In 1991, the Social and Cultural Archives section of the Manuscript Division still identified its priorities for acquisition as “individuals or organizations representing major cultural trends or artistic excellence; individuals or organizations involved in major social movements and activities; national ethno-cultural organizations and community leaders,” and interdenominational clergy and organizations.²¹ All of these attempts to define what constituted national significance with greater precision still on the surface put the records of organizations on a theoretical par with those of individuals.

But these broad statements of acquisition priorities cloaked the emergence of the idea that the records of nationally-significant organizations held less archival value than those of individuals. In large part this was due to the tendency of organizations to produce voluminous fonds that had less “bang for the box” than the more compact documentary record created by an individual. Some archivists would claim that personal fonds had more vitality, more colour, and better answered the needs of researchers. The records of organizations seemed, in contrast, less interesting to the archivists working with them and in less demand by the research community. The collecting environment at the national level also influenced in a subtle manner the emergence of this impression. Nationally-significant individuals and their fonds are few and far between, and easier to identify, while any organization with the word “national” or “Cana-

19 Momryk, “National Significance,” pp. 151–74; and Millar, “Discharging our Debt,” pp. 117–18.

20 Momryk, “National Significance,” pp. 161–62.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

dian” in its title could claim to be national in scope. Arguing for the national significance of a personal fonds is more difficult. It could be said that the acquisition environment was tilted in favour of according national significance to organizations, whereas the hands-on experience of archivists showed them that the actual records of these organizations seldom justified this lofty status.

In coming to this judgment of the relative merit of the two principal types of provenance within private fonds, the division was expressing knowledge accumulated over two or more decades of experience of acquiring, arranging, describing, and providing reference service to the fonds of organizations. But it still had difficulty expressing this concept coherently within the realm of total archives. Judi Cumming, who had worked in the Manuscript Division since the 1960s, reflected on this change in the perception of value of the records of organizations in 1994:

Moreover, the term *national significance* often meant national in scope only (not necessarily significance). Thus, many organizations that were national in scope made long-term agreements with the division to preserve successive accruals of their corporate records. Of the nearly five-hundred fonds of post-confederation societies and associations acquired by the division, the vast majority of them were acquired after 1969. With no common appraisal criteria to guide the archivist in selecting archival material of lasting historical value, the division acquired some corporate records of dubious research value.²²

While specific examples of such records with “dubious research value” are not provided, Cumming’s statement is evidence of the growing concern within the division about the problems associated with the acquisition of organizational records.

Past agreements had handcuffed the institution to an ongoing commitment to work with organizations to preserve their corporate records over an indeterminate period. In the first flush of excitement over the acquisition of the fonds of an important national association, archivists did not fully appreciate that the same association would return in five to ten years, and every five to ten years afterward, with a new accrual of records for selection, arrangement, and description. By 1995, the Manuscript Division had acquired a total of about 700 fonds of non-profit organizations (excluding local church or parish records) of which about 550 were acquired after 1969. The rate of acquisition between 1970 and 1995 averaged about twenty-two new organizations per year. If just five percent of these 550 organizations approached LAC in a given year with an accrual of records for their fonds, that would make about twenty-seven accessions to be processed.²³ Responsibility for most of these

22 Cumming, “Beyond Intrinsic Value,” p. 234. Italics in original.

23 Reliable statistics are hard to find for organizational records because the LAC descriptive

organizational funds fell within the acquisition programs of six archivists, all of which also included responsibility for personal funds in those fields.²⁴ This level of acquisition clearly could not be sustained without creating an ever-mounting backlog of unprocessed accessions, which is exactly what had happened in the Manuscript Division since the early 1980s. By 1992, the accession backlog had grown to 6,300 linear metres of textual records; or about 160 metres per person in the division.²⁵

Perceptions of the inferior value or problematic nature of the records of organizations were not confined to LAC. Other Canadian archivists were beginning to ascribe lower value to organizational funds and even question the appropriateness of acquiring these records in an era of scarce resources. In a call to withdraw from collecting private-sector funds, Christopher Hives argued that the shrinking funding for public archives compelled a new approach to the records of corporate bodies:

Instead, large organizations such as labour unions, businesses, voluntary associations, school boards, and colleges must be persuaded to assume a greater financial responsibility for their own records. This could take a number of forms including the establishment of in-house archival programmes, the development of cooperative or cost-shared arrangements with other organizations, or partnerships with existing repositories to help defray the cost of maintaining the records.²⁶

Although his call to retreat from the acquisition of private funds was anathema to archivists in the Manuscript Division, whose very existence depended on such a mandate, discussions in the division echoed his remarks about the need for a new approach to the records of organizations and the growing feeling that such institutions should take greater responsibility for their own records.

database was not designed with aggregate statistics foremost in mind, making it difficult to distinguish between types of creators of private funds. Most organizational funds at LAC were assigned to MG 17 (religious archives) and MG 28 (post-Confederation corporate bodies). MG 28 was divided into five sections: (I) societies and associations; (II) financial institutions; (III) businesses; (IV) political parties; and (V) ethnocultural associations. Only MG 28 sections I and V, and MG 17 are included in the statistics cited above for funds of non-profit organizations.

24 The lion's share of funds of non-profit organizations in 1996 were acquired by archivists with program responsibilities for multiculturalism, social action and public policy, intellectual life and scholarship, labour unions, literature and the arts, and science and technology.

25 National Archives of Canada, Canadian Archives Branch, *Report on Backlogs* (11 February 2002).

26 Christopher Hives, "Thinking Globally, Acting Locally," *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994), pp. 159–60.

The Impact of Budget Cuts on Acquisition Policy

The catalyst for action at LAC ultimately was a twenty-five percent reduction in funding in 1995 phased in over four years under the rubric of “Program Review.” Against the backdrop of these harsh cuts, discussion and debate about acquisition priorities and strategy culminated in the creation of two policy statements which gave substance to this critical thinking.²⁷ *Acquisition Strategy Framework: Private Sector*²⁸ (September 1994) set the broad parameters of collecting activity while *Private Sector Acquisition: Orientation 1995–2000* (November 1995) charted its course with precision for the next five years. Perception of the limited value of the records of organizations crystallized into formal expression in *Orientation 1995–2000*. If acquisition activity had to be cut, then the records of organizations would bear the brunt of the axe. *Orientation 1995–2000* outlined specific priorities and targets for acquisition for the next five years; or, perhaps more accurately, identified records that would no longer be acquired. Sweeping cuts, designed to reduce acquisition activity by twenty-five percent, targeted the following theme or subject-based areas where acquisition would be severely curtailed: business archives, political archives, religious archives, military archives, records of academic associations and university faculty, sports archives, journalism archives, records of professional associations, and records of ethno-cultural groups that were already well-represented in LAC holdings. While limited acquisition would continue in these areas, LAC introduced a two-tier approach that assigned lower priority to the fonds of organizations than those of individuals. Previously all fonds of private provenance had to meet the test of national significance, but now LAC stipulated stricter requirements crafted to further limit the acquisition of the records of organizations.²⁹

Orientation 1995–2000 prescribed a uniform approach to the fonds of non-profit organizations: “In principle self-sustaining organizations should establish their own archives.” Hives certainly would have approved of this principle. *Orientation 1995–2000* qualified this approach to say that if an organization’s records met the test of national significance, and it agreed to

27 Momryk, “National Significance,” pp. 166–68, and Cumming, “Beyond Intrinsic Value,” pp. 235–38. Momryk describes the emergence of these ideas with the benefit of five years’ hindsight while Cumming offers a view of the thinking in the division while these ideas developed.

28 National Archives of Canada, *Acquisition Strategy Framework: Private Sector* (27 September 1994). The *Acquisition Strategy Framework* identifies ten key themes of national significance, to one or more of which every fonds should relate, and nine questions to test the appropriateness of any acquisition. But it did not differentiate between organizations and individuals – that came in *Orientation 1995–2000*.

29 National Archives of Canada, *Private Sector Acquisition: Orientation 1995–2000*; and National Archives of Canada, *1995–96 Estimates*.

commit human or financial resources to the arrangement and description of its fonds, then:

The National Archives could acquire such records, given commensurate support from the organization, ranging from full-funding to assistance in preliminary arrangement and description of records. The Archives may re-examine existing commitments to self-sustaining organizations based on this approach ... The change now requires that all organizations whose records are to be acquired by the Archives must contribute, through a range of options, to the care of those records.³⁰

Though it did not close the door completely on organizations, it enshrined the position put forth by Hives: self-sustaining organizations must take financial responsibility for the long-term preservation of their archival record.³¹

An argument could be made that *Orientation 1995–2000* marked LAC's first significant retreat from the basic tenets of the Systematic National Acquisition Program. Acquisition of private fonds by the Manuscript Division henceforth could not be described as either systematic or national. Certainly the new policy signified a radical change from the approach under SNAP in 1971, when LAC representatives had attended the annual meetings of the national umbrella federations in the social sciences and humanities to solicit donations of the records of their member associations and circulate to them a fact sheet outlining the services provided by LAC.³² Total archives was a little less "total" in the new environment at LAC, at least within the spectrum of private-sector acquisition. Laura Millar has illustrated how this process of making total archives less than total played out at the national level in the changing environment of the Canadian archival system.³³

While *Orientation 1995–2000* stipulated conditions for the acquisition of fonds at the macro level, it also demanded a stricter adherence to selection criteria for records at the micro level. "The firm application of appraisal or selection criteria to records before or upon their receipt" would reduce the quantity of records acquired and release human resources for work on the more valuable material within the fonds. Its emphasis on the need to develop "more refined appraisal/selection criteria" specifically for the records of organiza-

30 National Archives of Canada, *Private Sector Acquisition: Orientation 1995–2000*.

31 Hives, "Thinking Globally," pp. 159–60.

32 Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Social Science Research Council of Canada, 21 October 1971, LAC, MG 28, I 81, vol. 118; and Minutes of the Council Meeting of the Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2 December 1971, MG 28, I 82, Accession 1977/0337.

33 Millar, "Discharging our Debt," pp. 122–38. Millar emphasizes the implications of the split between government records and private archives, rather than the distinction between the fonds of organizations and individuals within the realm of private archives, which is my focus in this paper.

tions reflected Cumming's observation that organizational fonds contained a higher percentage of records of marginal or no research value. In this regard, however, *Orientation 1995–2000* left the refinement or specific definition of said criteria to interpretation by archivists in the field or future development by the acquiring division. Though it was vague on the details, its explicit intent was to reduce the size of fonds: "The need for criteria for records of particular kinds of organizations has been identified as a priority. These appraisal criteria will be developed and applied as an essential ingredient to reducing acquisition activity."³⁴ But the time for discussion and debate was over. Relatively little work was done in developing formal selection or appraisal criteria; it was left largely to the discretion of the archivist. It was time to test the new approach by implementing it in practice over the course of its five-year mandate. In the event, LAC left the policy toward organizations largely unchanged in the revised *Orientation 2000–2005*, so it has been in effect for ten years.³⁵

Implementing the New Acquisition Policy: Case Studies

Non-profit organizations now would have to contribute in whole or in part to the care and preservation of their records, as a pre-condition to acquisition by Library and Archives Canada. How would we implement this new approach to the records of self-sustaining organizations? In effect, the adoption of the new policy meant that archivists would have to persuade organizations to play an active role in the archival process. More specifically, it meant convincing the executives of non-profit organizations to commit money and human resources toward the selection and arrangement of their records. The following case studies rely heavily on my personal experience implementing this approach in the social and cultural sector. Though LAC acquires the fonds of political parties, labour unions, and scientific organizations, the fonds of social and cultural organizations account for the largest share of organizational records. Defined broadly at LAC, the social and cultural sector encompasses national organizations in education, scholarship, professional life, ethno-cultural communities, religion, social activism, the women's movement, the environment, literature, and the arts, among many other fields.

It became quickly apparent that in an era of budgetary restraint most of LAC's effort would be devoted to dealing with organizations from which it had already acquired records in the past. By having such an active acquisition

34 National Archives of Canada, *Private Sector Acquisition: Orientation 1995–2000*; and Cumming, "Beyond Intrinsic Value," p. 234.

35 National Archives of Canada, *Private Sector Acquisition: Orientation 2000–2005* (31 March 2000). This document did not materially alter the approach: "All organizations whose records are to be acquired by the National Archives must contribute to the care of those records through a range of options from full-funding to assistance in preliminary arrangement and description of the records."

program in the 1970s and 1980s, LAC had acquired the fonds of so many national organizations that simply responding to offers of accruals from past donors entailed a considerable amount of acquisition activity in its own right. Thus, implementing the new policy meant communicating new expectations to old donors. We challenged donor organizations to help us preserve their records. We asked “Why should Canadians pay to preserve the history of your organization if you are not willing to contribute yourself?” Their responses frequently surprised us, casting in stark relief the broad spectrum of non-profit organizations. But almost all of our past donors were willing to work with us to find solutions to ensure the long-term preservation of their archival records.

Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

One of the first contacts came from the newly-merged Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. As the national federation of learned societies, it lobbied the federal government on behalf of its members and administered grants in aid of research and publication. At the time of contact, it had about fifteen to twenty staff and occupied a small suite of offices in downtown Ottawa with an annual budget of about \$2 million. It was best known for administering the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program and organizing the annual conference of learned societies.

Its records met the dual test of being national in scope and in significance “through its vital role in promoting scholarship and its status as the umbrella organization for the individual disciplines in the social sciences and humanities.” Its records had perhaps even grown in importance because of LAC’s reduced capacity to acquire the fonds of its constituent associations.³⁶ The federation offered a means of documenting a broad sweep of scholarly activity in one fonds. Much of its records, however, were restricted for a long term because of the sensitive process of peer review used to evaluate manuscripts for publication and worthiness of applications for research grants. Still these files would become available eventually and offered invaluable documentation on the types of research supported by Canadian society.

Library and Archives Canada already had received thirteen accruals of some forty metres of records between 1968 and 1988 from the two predecessor federations. Given that we had only arranged and described about half of this material, we had not excelled in our delivery of service to them. The federation had hired an archivist on contract on our suggestion to do the selection and arrangement. The records were now ready for LAC. They presented us with a *fait accompli*. An archivist went to their head office in Ottawa to find thirty metres of records – “archives-ready.”

36 Manuscript Division Acquisition Proposal, 13 February 1997, LAC, Acquisition file, Social Science Federation of Canada.

The records had been refiled in acid-free folders, titled and listed, all to respectable archival standards, but not always corresponding precisely with LAC practices and standards. We had no idea what criteria had been used for selection at the item and file level. The series arrangement did not correspond exactly to the existing series arrangement in the two fonds already in our holdings, nor did the finding aid correspond to our format. But careful examination showed that the work was done well. The cost of redoing it to correspond with our practices would have been prohibitive, so we accepted the results.

The federation had another fifty metres of records of the Aid to Scholarly Publications Program that it wished to donate. It agreed to hire the same archivist again, but this time we provided instruction at the outset, supplying archival boxes, acid-free folders and a template for our finding aid format, and negotiating selection criteria. The organization had a strong sense of its history and mission, and argued for an inclusive interpretation of the selection criteria, wishing to preserve more documentation rather than less. Given their willingness to pay for the work, we acquiesced in their wishes. During the first few weeks, an archivist visited their office frequently to make sure the project started smoothly. It was easier to come to a common understanding, answer questions as they arose, and correct mistakes, at the beginning of the project rather than at the end. The results were superb. We received some forty metres of well-arranged and described records for a relatively modest investment of time and money for supplies. The records went seamlessly from the loading dock to the storage vaults where they could be accessed by researchers. It was a remarkable success for the new approach.³⁷

Canadian Home and School Federation

The historian of the Canadian Home and School Federation contacted the Manuscript Division in 1997 to offer us an accrual of about eight metres of textual records. We had acquired 3.4 metres of records from the federation in 1989 so we had an existing relationship. Unfortunately we had never completed the arrangement and description of this fonds. To avoid simply adding more material to the backlog of unprocessed records, we re-evaluated the federation in the light of our new approach.

The Canadian Home and School Federation had been formed in 1927 as a federation of the few existing provincial federations and the more numerous local parent–teacher associations. By the 1950s it had over 300,000 members, making it the largest voluntary association in Canada, due in large part to the baby boom. By 1997, it represented ten provincial federations and through them over 12,000 local parent–teacher associations. Its head office was small,

³⁷ LAC, Acquisition files, Social Science Federation of Canada and Canadian Federation for the Humanities.

however, with just two or three staff. In terms of our acquisition policy it was clearly national in scope, but was it national in significance too? Education is a provincial, not a federal responsibility in Canada. The Federation's primary purpose is to lobby the federal government and national media to promote "excellence in public education as well as the social well being of children and youth." If the records reflected its impact in the achievement of this mission they would certainly fulfil the requirements of national significance.

But would it be willing to contribute to the preservation of its archives? With a modest budget and few staff, it did not wish to hire an archivist on contract. Their historian however volunteered to do the selection and arrangement of the records in her home with our archival supplies and guidance. Her thorough knowledge of the Federation's history and familiarity with its records, proved of great value in the arrangement and description of the fonds. We readily agreed on the selection criteria which she applied rigorously, weeding out extraneous material and non-essential records to leave a tight, compact record of the Federation's history and most significant projects and programs.

Working with a volunteer without formal archival education did mean some additional informal training had to take place. We had a long discussion about series and sub-series and hierarchical structure of the fonds. The federation's records had been organized chronologically with all of the files for one year kept together. Rather than slavishly following the existing physical/chronological order of the records, we discussed the federation's broad mission and record-creating activities. Drawing together into one series the files of its campaign against tobacco use by children in 1980 with those of similar campaigns in later years, for example, was a novel concept at first to the volunteer. But ultimately a "Child health and safety" series took shape which embraced the records of its programs over many years pertaining to tobacco and alcohol use, drug abuse, AIDS awareness, child abuse and neglect, fitness, and nutrition. In the end, we received 3.8 metres of well-arranged and described records, documenting the impact of a significant national organization on Canadian public life. Volunteers do work at their own speed, however. It took about two years to complete the project. But from our point of view there was no hurry because the records were not in our custody and the benefit of receiving them fully arranged and described was well worth the wait. After all, the original donation of 1989 was still waiting.³⁸

Canadian Association of University Teachers

In 2000, the Canadian Association of University Teachers wished to transfer a large accrual of records to their fonds at LAC. We had received an initial donation of records from them and four subsequent accruals in the 1970s and

38 LAC, Acquisition file, Canadian Home and School Federation.

1980s. The fonds already comprised eighty metres of textual records, making it one of the largest fonds of non-profit organizations in the LAC collection. We had only processed about fifty metres, which left a large block of records in our accession backlog. The national scope and significance of the association was not in question. Formed in 1951, the Canadian Association of University Teachers represented 48,000 university teachers, librarians, and academic researchers across Canada for the purposes of collective bargaining and defence of the principles of academic freedom and tenure. In effect, it is a labour union for university faculty, but a labour union which has played an influential role in Canada's intellectual life through its tenacious defence of the rights of scholars to intellectual freedom. It was a relatively large organization with some thirty full-time staff and a budget of about \$3 million. But were they willing to contribute to the preservation of their fonds?

We began with a site visit to examine the records and inform them of our new approach and expectations. Their archives, located in the basement of their building in the west-end of Ottawa, was very well-organized. It held some sixty metres of records, colour-coded, and arranged by series which corresponded closely to those already in our holdings. The largest series consisted of its files on academic freedom and tenure, relations with governments, and local and provincial faculty associations. Its mission, structure, and record-keeping practices had remained surprisingly stable over many years. In our discussions, I said bluntly that we would not be able to acquire such a large quantity of records without them contributing to the selection and arrangement prior to transfer to LAC. They offered twenty percent of the time of an administrative assistant and to hire a student on contract for four months to kick-start the project. We would provide archival supplies and instruction in the fine art of selection and arrangement.³⁹

In our negotiations, the association argued against an extensive removal of documents from certain series by which they wished to preserve a more complete record of their activities. In light of their willingness to pay the costs of processing, we relaxed our selection criteria to allow a more thorough than usual documentation of their activities in defence of academic freedom and tenure, and relations with governments. In part, they had convinced the archivist of the importance of this series, but the archivist also came to realize and accept that aspects of appraisal would be under the control of the association which, after all, paid the staff doing the work and provided the space for the project. Negotiations with donors would involve more give and take now that responsibility had devolved to the creator. This case also raised a potential contradiction inherent in *Orientation 1995–2000*, which had insisted that

39 Manuscript Division Acquisition Proposal, 27 October 1998, LAC, Acquisition file, Canadian Association of University Teachers.

LAC apply more stringent selection/appraisal criteria, all the while placing the day-to-day control of this work in the hands of the organization.

The project progressed well but ran out of steam when the student returned to school. In the end, we received twenty-five metres of fully-arranged textual records, comprising three main series. Still another six smaller series of about twenty metres had not been done. Those records remain to this day in the basement although the association has started a new project to complete the selection and arrangement of this material.⁴⁰

Canadian Federation of University Women

Library and Archives Canada also had a long relationship with the Canadian Federation of University Women, having acquired four accruals of twenty-two metres of records between 1974 and 1993. Two-thirds of this extent had been processed. The Federation contacted us again in late 1997 with a proposal to undertake retrospective work on the fonds in our custody. We also discussed our backlog and the possible transfer of records still in its custody.

As a national federation that was formed in 1919 to promote and defend the interests of women in higher education, it had played a vital role in extending and defending the rights of women in Canadian universities. By the late 1990s, it had 120 clubs across the country with over 10,000 members and a small head office in Ottawa with two or three full-time staff. Its national scope and significance did not appear in dispute though in negotiations we did sense that it had an aging membership and its relevance on campuses today had declined in the wake of its very real achievements in breaking down barriers to women.

The Federation had a strong commitment to its history and had long had an official archivist position filled on a voluntary basis. Their volunteer archivist had taken archival training courses provided by the Archives Association of Ontario and had a good understanding of basic principles and practices. We tried to steer the project towards addressing the unprocessed records in backlog but their specific concern was the oldest and most historical documents that they felt, with some justification, had not received adequate treatment from LAC. Thinking that any commitment by an organization to the preservation of its archives should be encouraged, we approved the project and provided space and supplies. Having the project on site allowed for frequent consultation to discuss potential deaccessioning of items and the best preventive conservation measures. In the end, the project produced good results over a two-year time frame, improving the care and condition of the oldest records.

The Canadian Federation of University Women contacted us again in 2002 with the news that it had hired an archivist on contract to sort through their

40 LAC, Acquisition file, Canadian Association of University Teachers.

overflowing files and identify inactive records for transfer to LAC. In the ensuing negotiations we insisted that the contract archivist would have to complete the selection and arrangement of the records to our standards prior to any transfer to our custody. The Executive Director agreed to devote much of the contractor's time to this work provided that we supervised it and furnished supplies. We worked together closely to develop selection criteria and an arrangement plan. She surveyed the records, organized them by series, removed duplicates and non-archival material, and refiled the documents in acid-free folders. At the conclusion of the project, we received an accrual of seven metres of well-arranged and described "archives-ready" records.⁴¹

Though in many respects it was a "textbook" case of how the original crafters of *Orientation 1995–2000* envisaged the new approach to organizations would work, it was not without some unexpected challenges. Reconciling the existing series structure of the fonds at LAC with the newer records at the head office proved problematic. In the existing fonds, for example, files of local club correspondence and reports had been subsumed in a "subject files" series with other various records arranged alphabetically. In the new arrangement, club correspondence and reports, an integral record of communications between local clubs and the national executive, became a series in its own right. Similarly, for the records of its Annual General Meetings, Board of Directors, and committees, which formerly had been organized roughly by form into "minutes" and "correspondence" series, we created new series based on governance and administrative structure. Changing trends in archival practice often affect the arrangement and description because many organizations do not have consistent record-keeping practices – especially those with few or no staff. The archivist must impose a rational order on the records, or draw an order out of a confusing jumble of files, which may differ significantly from the arrangement used in previous accruals. Practical decisions must be made about harmonizing series arrangement over successive accruals and rewriting earlier descriptions to account for new material. A consistent or theoretically pure arrangement is seldom found when acquiring accruals of records of organizations over many years.⁴²

Canadian Council of Churches

Contact with the Canadian Council of Churches in 1998 led to a proposal for a shared-cost project to prepare its fonds for archival preservation. LAC's past handling of this fonds illustrated many of the problems in our old approach to

41 Manuscript Division Acquisition Proposal, 7 October 2002, and related documentation, LAC, Acquisition file, Canadian Federation of University Women.

42 Arrangement Plan, Canadian Federation of University Women, 28 January 2003, LAC, Control file, Canadian Federation of University Women.

the records of organizations, while the efforts to launch this shared-cost project demonstrate the present challenge of engaging non-profit organizations in the care of their archives.

LAC had acquired over 100 metres of records in five separate accruals between 1975 and 1993 of which we had only processed about one-fifth. The archivist responsible for religious records estimated that arrangement and description of the fonds would require one to two years of staff time. With responsibility for a full portfolio, she could ill afford to devote this amount of time. With the budget situation of the late 1980s and 1990s funds were never available to engage an archivist on contract to do the work. Some small projects were undertaken but even these suffered because the sheer size of the fonds, and lack of physical space available for processing at LAC meant the work had to proceed in piecemeal fashion. Still, about twenty metres of the General Secretariat and minutes of the Council's major committees had been partially processed. It now wished to donate another twenty-one metres.⁴³

The national significance and scope of the Canadian Council of Churches was not in question. In fact, it was one of the very few organizations mentioned by name in *Orientation 1995–2000*: "Limited acquisition of records of national inter-denominational organizations such as the Canadian Council of Churches ... will continue. Such acquisition would be in accordance with the approach relating to organizations."⁴⁴ So we had clear marching orders: we could acquire its records but it would have to contribute to their care in some form. We were fortunate to have Terry Reilly, then Archivist of the Anglican Diocese of Toronto, to act as an intermediary for us. She was well-known to the Canadian Council of Churches and was in Toronto where its head office was located.

Reilly arranged for LAC representatives to make a presentation to the governing board of the Council to discuss the significance of its records and explain the impact of funding cutbacks at LAC on acquisition policy. The governing board responded well to the presentation which sparked vigorous debate about the Council's history and the value of its archival record.⁴⁵ It agreed to form an archives and heritage committee chaired by a professor of theology active in the Council. The committee would raise funds with a goal of \$30,000 to be put toward a shared-cost project with LAC for the preservation of its fonds. We prepared a memorandum of understanding, which identified the responsibilities of each partner and the objective of the project:

43 Antonio Lechasseur and Robert Fisher, "The Archives of the Canadian Council of Churches at the National Archives of Canada," presentation to the governing board, 13 November 1998, LAC, Acquisition file, Canadian Council of Churches.

44 National Archives of Canada, *Private Sector Acquisition: Orientation 1995–2000*.

45 LAC, Acquisition file, Canadian Council of Churches.

... to complete the processing of the Canadian Council of Churches collection. It will involve the refiling and reorganization of the records in volumes 233 to 521 and the preparation of the descriptions and finding aids necessary to make this material accessible to researchers. Conservation work and segregation of sensitive or confidential documents will be done as required.⁴⁶

But the promise of this encouraging start was not realized. The Council's archives and heritage committee did not succeed in raising the foreseen funds. Interest and enthusiasm waned after the initial presentation to the governing board, and perhaps too our willingness to pick up and store the additional twenty-one metres of records in the meantime removed some of the urgency to the archival question from the perspective of the head office. In short, the project never started; the memorandum of understanding was never signed. LAC forged ahead however by completing the processing of volumes 1 to 219, making about one-third of the fonds available for research, and fulfilling the commitments on our side of the memorandum of understanding. But without further resources forthcoming from the Council, LAC choose not to invest any more effort in the fonds. The twenty-one metres transferred in 1998, along with the earlier accessions still unprocessed, remain at LAC in the backlog.⁴⁷

Heritage Canada Foundation

In contrast to these previous examples, LAC did not have an existing relationship with Heritage Canada Foundation when they contacted us in 1996 about placing their records in our care. Never having acquired records from them in the past, we had a blank slate with which to work. Heritage Canada Foundation was relatively large and well-funded in comparison with many of the non-profit organizations with which we collaborated. The federal government had established the foundation in 1973 with an endowment and mandate to work for the preservation of Canada's built heritage. By 1996, it had an annual budget of about \$10 million and a staff of about thirty employees located in a heritage building in downtown Ottawa. The foundation was perhaps best known for its magazine *Canadian Heritage* and its "Main Street" program, which revitalized small towns through the restoration of historic buildings in their downtown cores. It certainly met the definition of national scope and significance.

At storage facilities outside of Ottawa, two archivists examined some 500 banker's boxes of records in varying states of disarray. Box lists and labelling

46 Draft Memorandum of Understanding, National Archives of Canada and Canadian Council of Churches, 4 November 1999, in LAC, Acquisition file, Canadian Council of Churches.

47 LAC, Acquisition file, Canadian Council of Churches. Since the original writing of this article, the CCC has revived its efforts to raise funds to complete the processing of its archives.

were incomplete. Working in cramped conditions, the archivists identified valuable records including minutes of the Board of Directors and Annual General Meetings, and 50,000 slides comprising a complete survey of heritage buildings in Canada. But a vast quantity of less than stellar material filled hundreds of boxes: accounts payable, duplicate correspondence, and publications, among much else.

Heritage Canada Foundation, as a large, self-sustaining organization with stable funding and a strong sense of its history and heritage, appeared to be a textbook case under our new approach. We informed them of our principle that self-sustaining organizations should preserve their own archives where possible and recommended the hiring of an archivist on contract to survey their records, identify those with lasting value, and prepare them for donation to an archival repository or preservation by the foundation itself. We offered to supervise this work and provide archival supplies if they wished to donate their fonds to LAC. We never heard from them again. Heritage Canada had apparently decided to manage their archives themselves or at that time could not afford an outlay of funds for its archives. Implicit in the implementation of this approach by LAC was a willingness to forgo the acquisition of a nationally-significant fonds if the donor did not wish to contribute resources to the preservation of its records. Systematic national acquisition this was not!⁴⁸

Association of Canadian Archivists

Library and Archives Canada is also home to the fonds of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA). How would this professional organization representing archivists respond to our new approach? Would the ACA respond to the challenge of taking responsibility for its records or would its records, like the proverbial shoemaker's child, go barefoot? A medium-sized organization with 600 members and an annual budget of \$340,000, it presently has two permanent staff but has only just recently moved into its own office space. As a result, like many small academic associations and learned societies, its records have been held in the hands of members of its executive throughout its history. This normally creates a disjointed record with large gaps for some periods and over-documentation for others. Some officers keep the records, others pass them to their successors, while still others deposit them in an archival institution – and not necessarily the same one.

LAC had received ten separate transfers of records comprising nine metres between 1986 and 1991. With ten accruals in five years, deposited by nine different individuals who had served in the executive of the ACA, it might

48 Memorandum re: Heritage Canada Foundation, Robert Fisher to Eldon Frost and Chuck MacKinnon, 24 October 1996, and related documentation, LAC, Acquisition file, Heritage Canada Foundation.

appear on the surface that the association had little concept of records management. In reality, it reflected its close relationship with LAC. Many LAC staff had been active in the association, making for an informal records-transfer process. Donating records meant simply walking down the hall, files in hand, to the responsible archivist. In turn, the archival handling of the fonds left much to be desired, following the same informal approach. Records were accessioned into the fonds as they arrived as series in their own right. As a result, there are three series with the same unhelpful title as the fonds itself: "Association of Canadian Archivists." This surely makes it a candidate for an "ugliest description" award.

The "shoemakers" in the ACA recognized that they had to do better. They created a records management committee to oversee the collection and management of its records. In 1993, the committee produced a short document, titled "Procedure for Depositing ACA Archives at the National Archives," which outlined seven steps to be followed by the executive in identifying and forwarding archivally valuable records to Library and Archives Canada. Somewhat surprisingly, after the association adopted this formal procedure, LAC received no further transfers of records!⁴⁹ The implementation of our new acquisition policy for the records of organizations in 1995 complicated the issue of transfer because the ACA's formal procedural document presupposed that LAC would do the final selection and arrangement. Rumours have abounded that the Manuscript Division had rejected further accruals of ACA records as not having national significance. These rumours appear unfounded, at least from the documentary evidence.

The Manuscript Division did recommend in the mid-1990s the rejection of the fonds of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists on these grounds, perhaps to test senior management's commitment to applying the new policy for the records of organizations. *Orientation 1995–2000* explicitly stated that LAC would curtail the acquisition of records of professional associations, "in carefully considering the overall impact of individual associations on Canadian society." If the division considered that the Bureau of Canadian Archivists had insufficient impact on Canadian society to warrant acquisition, National Archivist Jean-Pierre Wallot begged to differ. He rejected its recommendation outright, insisting instead upon the national significance of the Bureau's records and asking pointedly, "What kind of profession is it that thinks its national bodies are not of national significance, yet complain of its lack of visibility, etc. in society?" Though it would be easy to consider valuing the professional records of archival organizations more highly than those of other professions as applying a double-standard, this case did reflect some of the controversy inherent in adopting the new approach and the difficulty in mov-

49 LAC, Acquisition file, Association of Canadian Archivists. The ACA also devised a more detailed disposition authority but never formally approved it or forwarded it to LAC.

ing from the development of acquisition policy to its consistent application in practice.⁵⁰

Still, the selection and arrangement of the ACA fonds was not high on anyone's agenda in the late 1990s. More recently, the accumulation of records that moved with the association into its new office space in 2004 instigated new discussions about a project to identify and arrange records for donation to LAC. Not surprisingly, it found some volunteers. Terry Cook prepared a macroappraisal authority for the records of the journal *Archivaria* and Jay Atherton appraised the records of its other functions. In 2005, the ACA allocated funds to hire an archivist to complete the essential hands-on work of selection and arrangement.⁵¹

Lessons Learned in Negotiating with Organizations

While other organizations have contributed to the long-term care of their archives during the past ten years, these examples illustrate many of the challenges posed by the implementation of this strict acquisition policy to traditional archival theory and practice. They also point to some lessons learned and best practices in terms of both acquisition and selection, and arrangement for an archival institution considering such an approach.

The acquisition environment undergoes fundamental change when an archival institution demands a financial commitment from a donor. Every non-profit organization is unique and will respond in its own way; each organization exists for a specific purpose, which is its top priority. It can be a challenge to persuade an executive to divert funds away from its primary mission toward the preservation of its archival record. The size of their budget and belief in the importance of their history and heritage will have a tremendous impact on their ability and willingness to contribute to the care of their records. While the archivist operates within the fixed constraints of the mandate and resources of an archival institution, the donor organization is itself a variable. Donors respond in surprising ways to proposals from an archivist who must adopt a flexible posture in this environment, being willing to move away from rigid adherence to archival theory.

The archivist should recognize that acquiring the fonds of a self-sustaining organization will entail an ongoing commitment. Unless the organization is defunct, the archival institution has entered into a partnership; it is not just acquiring records but a future workload. It must ensure that the fonds fits within its long-term collecting policy, and if it will not wish to acquire future donations from the organization, the archivist should inform the organization

50 LAC, Acquisition file, Bureau of Canadian Archivists; and National Archives of Canada, *Private Sector Acquisition: Orientation 1995–2000*.

51 LAC, Acquisition file, Association of Canadian Archivists.

of this fact during negotiations. The donor may request the archival institution to sign a Memorandum of Understanding before it commits monetary or human resources to its records, to ensure that its archival partners understand and live up to their obligations. In this respect, Library and Archives Canada found it necessary to adapt its procedures by which it authorized an acquisition to go forward. In the traditional approach, the archivist completed an acquisition proposal after the records had arrived on-site at LAC. In the new approach, the archivist submitted acquisition proposals for approval before the donor committed time and money to the project, usually while the records were still in the organization's custody. The necessity of this advance approval introduces an element of uncertainty about the exact contents of the eventual donation.

Smaller organizations or those without dedicated office space present special problems due lack of continuity and a physically-fragmented record. An archivist should establish a single point of contact within the organization to avoid having to liaise with various officers past and present. Designating one officer to coordinate the gathering of records ensures that they do not arrive piecemeal from a variety of sources with no guard against duplicate content. Members of the executive of an association at one point began carbon-copying me on all of their internal e-mails so that LAC would have an enduring record of these important exchanges. I gently dissuaded them from continuing this practice, recommending instead that the Secretary-Treasurer keep the formal record of these electronic communications together as a block for subsequent donation to LAC.

An archivist's most powerful bargaining chip is his or her willingness to refuse an acquisition and walk away from negotiations if an organization is not willing to invest in the care of its records. In this case, the organization must take responsibility for the preservation or disposition of its own records or initiate discussions with another archival repository. The power of the word "no" should not be underestimated. An organization that understands that the archivist means "no" will often find the money or resources to do the work or to at least meet them part way. The corollary is that if the fonds is keenly desired by the archival repository, as a prestigious fonds to be added to its collection, then such brinkmanship could well jeopardize delicate acquisition negotiations. In the case of a prestigious fonds, the archivist can still request an offer of financial or human resources from the organization but must be prepared to move forward with the acquisition without such a contribution.

Selection and arrangement absorbs the largest share of financial resources invested in acquiring and preserving an organizational fonds. It is also an area where the archivist sacrifices a significant amount of control in deciding the critical archival question of just which records at the file or document level make it into their holdings. Archival theory since Schellenberg has ascribed tremendous significance to the selection of documents for permanent reten-

tion. To many archivists appraisal or selection is an inherently *archival* activity, even the profession's "noblest function," and to relinquish control of it goes against the grain of archival thinking and training.⁵² Yet surrendering a certain level of control of this function is implicit in devolving responsibility for it to the organization.

There are steps to follow which ensure the archivist still determines largely what is acquired. Negotiating in advance the selection criteria will prevent future misunderstandings. Explain the archival reasons behind selection criteria and listen to the organization's concerns; they know their mission, history, successes, and failures better than the archivist who parachutes into their world. Ensure that expectations are aligned about what records are to be kept and what is to be discarded before work begins. Recognize that the archival institution is giving up some day-to-day control over the application of selection criteria. Investing heavily in time at the front end in training a volunteer or guiding an archivist on contract will pay dividends down the road. Work closely with them at the beginning to ensure that they understand the standard expected for selection and physical preservation. This is an archival variant of a "stitch in time saves nine"; it is easier to correct bad habits after two boxes than two hundred! The archivist should not bring the records into the archival repository until the work of selection and arrangement is completed. Keep the records on-site with the donor organization if at all possible. Non-profit organizations generally call an archives when they have space or storage problems, or are moving offices. Leaving the records with them gives the archivist leverage to negotiate. Interest, enthusiasm, and, more importantly, funding, wane when the records are out of their space and into the custody of the archival institution. If this sounds like a Machiavellian approach to archival acquisition, remember that it is all in service of the long-term preservation of the fonds.

Reflections on the Records of Organizations

This discussion of lessons learned or best practices in involving an organization in the long-term care of its fonds still leaves some very large unanswered questions raised by the implementation of this approach. Foremost among them are questions relating to whether this approach embodies the most effective allocation of declining resources in an era of records abundance. Has Library and Archives Canada used its resources more efficiently by insisting that organizations contribute to the preservation of their fonds? Has LAC acquired a better archival record of Canadian society by adopting this approach? Has its application in practice borne out the thinking that preceded

52 See for example, Carol Couture, "Archival Appraisal: A Status Report," *Archivaria* 59 (Spring 2005), p. 107, who has surveyed and analyzed recent and past international thinking on archival appraisal.

it in the 1980s and early 1990s? Have other institutions in the Canadian archival system taken advantage of the opportunity presented to acquire these fonds? What are the larger consequences for the archival record of Canadian society?

It is certain from my experience that we have used our resources more efficiently. Non-profit organizations have done a considerable amount of archival work for Library and Archives Canada, whether through the efforts of volunteers, paid staff, or archivists on contract. Most of their effort has been devoted toward the time-consuming work of selection and arrangement. LAC has not had the resources to perform this work over the past ten years. If it had acquired these accruals without a contribution by the donor, virtually all of these records would still be unprocessed. They would remain in backlog without essential work having been completed: preventive conservation, filing in acid-free folders, removal of non-archival material, segregation and storage of special media, listing in a finding aid, and creation of *RAD*-compliant descriptions. In short, the records would be largely inaccessible to the public, waiting for that unforeseen day in the future when sufficient resources would be available. It is clear that we have gained tremendously in terms of leveraging our human resources by requiring the donor to do this work. Between 1992 and 2001, the overall accession backlog of textual records of private provenance declined from 6,300 metres to 4,700 metres, certainly attributable in part to the adoption of this strict acquisition policy for the records of non-profit organizations.⁵³

It is difficult to tell, however, whether we have acquired a better archival record of Canadian society. This is a subjective question that is difficult to answer at the best of times. It is complicated too because the new approach pre-supposed that organizations themselves and other institutions in the Canadian archival system would play a greater role in preserving the documentation of this facet of Canadian society, and it is virtually impossible to gauge their progress and participation. The approach also implicitly accorded second-tier status to the records of organizations relative to those of individuals, so the real test is if the value of personal fonds acquired by LAC from this realignment of effort outweighed the value of organizational records lost. Success also could be judged if the decline in the “net” archival value of private records acquired annually since the adoption of the approach in the mid-1990s had been significantly less in percentage terms than the original twenty-five percent cut in monetary resources. Qualitative measurements of this type are virtually impossible in the archival environment.

If we step back from this question to look at the fonds of organizations acquired by LAC, some tentative conclusions are possible. With this approach we have been able to continue to acquire accruals from organizations with

53 National Archives of Canada, *Report on Backlogs*, p. 5.

which we had made past commitments, and whose records continued to meet the definition of national significance. Organizations which have been turned away are those which have been more suitable for another repository, did not meet the test of national significance, or which were not willing to contribute to the preservation of their fonds. Only in the latter case has the archival record suffered, and only then if the organization has chosen not to preserve its records itself but rather dispose of them. Destroying such historical records is, of course, its prerogative as creator and legal owner.

No doubt we have lost some fonds with records of national significance because of our adoption of this restrictive posture. But it does not seem that the worst fears of Robert Macdonald, who prophesied that most organizations would not have the resources to contribute and their records would be destroyed, have been borne out, at least at the national level.⁵⁴ To our surprise, there has often been a community of interest between the archival institution, which possesses expertise but scarce resources, and the organization, which has some financial resources but no archival expertise. An organization which is intimidated by the seeming mountain of records and its lack of archival knowledge, discovers that with a small financial commitment and the expert advice of a professional archivist, they can solve their space problems and ensure the survival of their corporate memory.

The simple fact of having the selection and arrangement of the records *done* has ensured that the accruals are smaller in extent than they otherwise would be if added to the backlog without culling. Selection at the file and item level has allowed the acquisition of a tighter, more compact record that is arguably of better quality. The gains in this department are perhaps not quite as large as they might have been because non-profit organizations have tended to opt for a more inclusive interpretation of selection criteria in performing this task. LAC has undoubtedly continued to acquire too extensive a record of organizations, including much of those records, which under the old regime, Judi Cumming called “corporate records of dubious research value.”⁵⁵

In fact, this approach revealed in practice a subtle contradiction inherent in *Orientation 1995–2000*, which required an organization to commit to the selection and arrangement of its fonds to meet the basic pre-condition for acquisition, but which also required LAC to apply strict selection criteria to the records within the fonds. A difficult feat to achieve when the day-to-day selection is left in the hands of the organization! Still, the purpose in applying “more refined” selection or appraisal criteria was “reducing acquisition activity.”⁵⁶ In this respect, *Orientation 1995–2000* succeeded if this reduction in

54 Robert A.J. Macdonald, “Acquiring and Preserving Private Records: Cultural versus Administrative Perspectives,” *Archivaria* 38 (Fall 1994), pp. 162–63.

55 Cumming, “Beyond Intrinsic Value,” p. 234.

56 National Archives of Canada, *Private Sector Acquisition: Orientation 1995–2000*.

activity is defined in terms of LAC's human resources invested in acquisition and processing. If it is defined primarily in terms of the quantity of records acquired and cost of long-term storage, then it achieved much more modest success, but success nonetheless. What is implicit in adopting the approach of *Orientation 1995–2000* is delegating control of selection decisions on a daily basis to the organization. The wishes and desires of the donor are always a dynamic variable in the realm of private archives, which is perhaps why so much appraisal theory with its emphasis on planned approaches, defined targets, and carefully thought out strategies is unsatisfactory when applied to private sector acquisition. It is all very well to say we will acquire records A and B but not C or D, but the donor may respond that if the archival institution does not take C it is not getting A or B either. The delicate dance of negotiation between donor and archival institution requires sound judgment and flexibility on the part of the archivist, not strict adherence to policy. When the donor calls the shot in selection, the ensuing record may be more or less than the archivist wishes. There is the risk that the organization will weed out records that reflect controversy or would damage its reputation. But then, this is an ever-present possibility in the realm of private archives where the donors own their records and have no legal obligation to donate them to an archival institution. Ultimately, the advantage for the archives is that the documentary record is more accessible – fully described and user-ready on arrival – rather than simply added to a growing backlog of unprocessed, inaccessible records. If we cannot prove that we have acquired a better archival record under the terms of our acquisition policy, then we can at least argue the record is no worse and much more accessible to the public.

This surrendering of some level of appraisal or selection decision-making to the organization reveals the mental shift required of the archivist in accepting the consequences of this devolution of responsibility. The organization is now much more than a passive donor of records but instead an active partner in the archival process. While in philosophical terms the 1995 acquisition policy may be viewed as a retreat from total archives at the institutional level, whereby LAC itself had assumed the role of documenting Canadian society, it could also be viewed more positively as an expanded vision of total archives envisaging a shared responsibility of the Canadian archival community (including LAC) and corporate records creators. In this broader vision, archival repositories, non-profit organizations, and for-profit businesses all have a role to play in documenting Canadian society. Does this mark a retreat from the philosophy of total archives, or simply a broadening of its vision to include the creators of corporate records as archival partners? Does LAC's devolution of responsibility for the records of organizations to creators and other archival institutions reflect a profound shift in thinking or simply an overdue recognition of the transformation in the archival landscape since the 1950s and 1960s, when the Public Archives of Can-

ada dominated the Canadian archival scene in an era of comparative records scarcity?

This devolution of responsibility for the records of organizations at LAC was mirrored in the Canadian archival community by a more general abdication of responsibility for private archives, which led Laura Millar to question the community's continued commitment to total archives. Millar is sceptical of the prospects of this broader vision of the Canadian archival system, fearing it is really just a positive spin on what is really "every man for himself."⁵⁷ While this may be true of the archival community as a whole, it is clear that in adopting this acquisition policy for the records of organizations, LAC still believed that publicly-funded archives should play a leading role in documenting Canadian society. It remained committed to acquiring personal fonds and the records of organizations to the extent that a department-wide twenty-five percent reduction in budget would allow. Other areas of acquisition suffered comparable cuts. As the institution's annual review asserted: "As we approach the turn of this century, a renewed commitment to private-sector acquisition by all such institutions may be the most important contribution that we can make to Canada's archival heritage"; these were words of strategic retrenchment, not philosophical retreat.⁵⁸

After five years of experience in implementing the new acquisition policy, LAC adopted a revised version of its five-year strategy, *Private Sector Acquisition: Orientation 2000–2005*, without making any appreciable change in the approach toward the records of non-profit organizations. Since then, however, there are some signs of softening in this hard-line approach and a greater recognition within LAC of the importance of certain types of organizational records. The identification of aboriginal and multicultural communities as departmental priorities by the Department of Canadian Heritage has increased the profile within LAC of the records of aboriginal and multicultural organizations as priorities for acquisition. It is unlikely that targeted organizations in these areas of acquisition would be refused for being unwilling to contribute resources to the selection and arrangement of their fonds.⁵⁹ Similarly, there has been a greater understanding that a flexible approach is required if the institution wishes to acquire the fonds of more prestigious organizations. Acquiring the fonds of Greenpeace Canada or the World Council of Indigenous Peoples may not have been possible without willingness to relinquish a request for a commitment of resources from them.

57 Millar, "Discharging our Debt," pp. 136–39.

58 National Archives of Canada, *Annual Review 1996–1997* (Ottawa, 1997), p. 36.

59 National Library of Canada and National Archives of Canada, *2004–2005 Estimates: Part III, Report on Plans and Priorities* (Ottawa, 2004), "It is important that Aboriginal and multicultural communities see themselves and their heritage in the collection. To make this happen, we will strengthen our collecting emphasis to ensure that the documentary heritage of these communities and their experience in Canadian society is better represented."

Outside of LAC, the publication of the International Council on Archives' guide to preserving the records of non-governmental organizations and articles like those of Bruce Montgomery underlining the value of the fonds of human rights organizations, perhaps reflect a revival of interest in the records of organizations.⁶⁰ The federal government's increased emphasis of accountability in its dealings has also turned greater attention to the record-keeping practices and requirements of non-profit organizations that benefit from federal grants or status as charitable societies, which in the future may enhance awareness of archival records and responsibilities within these organizations.

The *Library and Archives of Canada Act* of 2004 has altered the internal acquisition environment by dispensing with the term "national significance" in favour of the new concept of "records of interest to Canadians" – a much more open concept that may well defy specific definition for some time and which does not necessarily prescribe a narrow or restrictive approach to acquisition. Nor do LAC's "key directions" for 2005–2010, which are outlined in its new "Collection Development Framework," differentiate between individual and organizational records creators. LAC has in effect opted not to enshrine the approach of assigning secondary status to the fonds of non-profit organizations in this high-level acquisition policy statement.⁶¹

The LAC experience shows that it is feasible to ask self-sustaining organizations to contribute to the selection and arrangement of their records. If an archival institution is willing to relinquish some control over the application of selection criteria, it can realize substantial savings in financial or human resources and make its holdings more accessible to the public. The archival institution's acquisition mandate and resources, and the needs of donor organizations ultimately will determine the effectiveness or appropriateness of this approach.

60 Armelle Le Goff, *The Records of NGOs: Memory...To Be Shared, a Practical Guide in 60 Questions* (Paris, 2004); and Bruce Montgomery, "The Iraqi Secret Police Files: A Documentary Record of the Anfal Genocide," *Archivaria* 52 (Fall 2001), pp. 69–99; and "Fact-Finding by Human Rights Non-Governmental Organizations: Challenges, Strategies, and the Shaping of Archival Evidence," *Archivaria* 58 (Fall 2004), pp. 21–50.

61 *Library and Archives of Canada Act* (2004, c. 11, assented to 22 April 2004); and Elizabeth Martin and Bruce Walton, "Collection Development Framework for Library and Archives Canada" (March 2005).

