

Canadian University Archives

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It is tempting to refer to university archivists in Canada as the archivists who have not come in from the cold. University archives are the largest single class of non-governmental repositories in Canada, yet the life of the university archivist can be relatively lonely. Given the size of the country and the tidy sprinkling of universities in various urban centres, opportunities for contact amongst them are few. Even the largest of the university archives employs fewer than five professional staff, and all in terms of facilities, conservation and records programmes, and budgets are dwarfed by the federal and provincial repositories. The federal and provincial archives operate or participate in the records management programmes of their respective governments and engage in the gathering of "total archives": seeking private papers, business and union records, records of local government, pictures, sound tapes and any other form of archival material which may be construed as documenting the history of their jurisdictions. The operations of most university archives seem less systematic and puny by comparison. Indeed, one provincial archivist recently questioned whether those university archives without functioning records management programmes deserve the name *archives*.²

In dealing with Canadian university archives, generalizations are difficult and potentially misleading as conditions rapidly change. Each university has its own character and self-image, produced by a blend of tradition, faculty or curricular interests and goals, and alumni spirit. This diversity is reflected in the extent of the resources, in the mandate allotted the archivist and in the defined balance between university records and private manuscripts. None of these archives are large and, indeed, many of the archivists maintain rather lonely vigils, invigorated by the close contact

1 The substance of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists in September 1975, and basically reflects developments to that date.

2 D.F. McOuat, "Comments on University Surveys," *Archives Bulletin*, January 1974, p. 18.

with faculty and students but seldom content with the portion of limited university resources allocated to archival service. Few universities have articulated archival goals and the advancement or decline of their archival programmes is a clear indicator of the effectiveness of their archivists in stimulating archival awareness. Much depends on the resourcefulness and initiative of these archivists in adapting to shifting circumstances. In some universities, the archival programme can be viewed as an extension of the archivist's personality.

Despite the hazards of generalization in such a diverse and sometimes personal field, Canadian university archives share a number of concerns, and experience similar pressures within the university setting. Some survey information is available concerning the growth of university archives during the past fifteen years, providing a suitable framework for the consideration of a number of fundamental issues related to the development of these archives: the administrative position of the archives within the university administration; the applicability of records management systems to the university environment; and the involvement of university archives in general manuscript acquisition programmes.

Professionally staffed and recognized university archives are relatively recent phenomena in Canada. Prior to 1960, there was no Canadian university archivist, a fact which has added significance when it is recalled that the Public Archives of Canada was founded in 1872 and several of the provincial archives programmes date from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Before 1960, university records received only the attention of the scholarly librarian, who gathered them in a treasure room, or of the official historian commissioned to prepare a suitable volume for a special anniversary. Only in the early 1960s did some of the older universities—McGill, Queen's, Toronto, the Université de Montréal, Laval and the University of Alberta—begin to appoint archivists to care for the accumulating mass of documents. The 1966 survey of college and university archives compiled by the Society of American Archivists contacted forty-five institutions in Canada. Of these, eighteen responded with the frank admission that they maintained no formal archives. The remaining twenty-seven claimed some form of archival programme but of these, only seven had a full-time archivist concerned with university records. In most cases, such records were cared for by a librarian spending a minimal amount of time securing often only theses and university publications.³

By 1971, the seven universities with full-time archivists had increased to fifteen. *The Directory of Canadian Archival Repositories*⁴ published in

3 Society of American Archivists, *College and University Archives in the United States and Canada* (Ann Arbor, 1966).

4 Archives Section, Canadian Historical Association, *The Directory of Canadian Archival Repositories*, (Toronto, 1971).

that year indicated the different directions in which these repositories were developing by stating the collecting policies of each. The Université de Moncton and the University of Western Ontario omitted any reference to university records, but specialized in Acadian and regional archives respectively. At six universities the archives were responsible both for university records and for the acquisition and maintenance of general manuscript collections.⁵ The remaining seven restricted their archives to university records and related manuscripts of faculty, leaving in several instances the control of more general manuscript collections to library special collections departments.

In the past two years, several detailed surveys have been undertaken on a regional basis in the Maritimes, Quebec and Ontario.⁶ The results indicate that the lip service many of the universities have hitherto paid to the importance of their records is being translated into action. For these three regions, fully twenty-three universities now have full-time archivists, and only three of these are not interested in the records of their institutions.⁷ Fourteen of the university archives are responsible for preserving both university-related materials and general external manuscript collections. Only four restrict their acquisitions to university records. The remaining two have been established in the past year and policy has yet to be defined. In brief, the situation is confusing. The author of the Ontario survey found that only six of Ontario's fifteen universities had more than a minimal commitment (one person or more) to archives. The variations in size, jurisdiction, authority and collecting policy shown within Ontario universities, a group which is being pressed toward more uniform systems, are suggestive of the diversity found in university archives across the country.

These surveys, supplemented by information solicited from colleagues in the summer of 1975, provide reliable data concerning twenty-seven established university archives in Canada. Perhaps the most striking pattern which emerges is that only seven have developed formal, recognizable records management programmes, and it is only these seven which are administratively independent of the university library. In each of the seven universities, archival approval must be sought for the disposal of official records, the archives is actively involved in preparing records schedules and the archivist is directly responsible to a vice-president in administration or to the *secrétaire général* of the university. In most

5 Dalhousie, Acadia, Mount Allison, University of New Brunswick, Queen's, and Trent.

6 Valerie M. Cowan, "Report on Maritime University Archives," June 1975, mimeographed; François Beaudin, "Les Archives Universitaires au Québec (1962-1974)," mimeographed; Kenneth Johnson, "University Archives Survey", *Archives Bulletin*, January 1974, pp. 17-18.

7 Memorial University, Université de Moncton, Université de Québec à Chicoutimi.

instances, the university has an archives committee of faculty and administrators advising on records schedules. The pattern is even more revealing when it is noticed that five of the seven are French-Canadian universities: the Université de Montréal, Université d'Ottawa, Université de Québec à Québec, Université de Québec à Montréal and Université de Québec à Trois Rivières. The two others are McGill University in Montreal and the University of Alberta in Edmonton. These two reflect special circumstances, with the McGill Archives owing its administrative separation from the library largely to a chief librarian who himself had been a provincial archivist and whose study of Canadian archival development is the basic reference work on the subject.⁸ The University of Alberta Archives separated from the library administration in April 1975, and has derived its impetus from a lively university archivist supported by another former provincial archivist in the department of history. It is largely in the French-Canadian universities where the administrative importance of a functioning records management programme has been recognized and on several of the campuses of the relatively new Université de Québec, archives were established solely for this purpose.

The pattern is even further revealing when it is observed that of the remaining twenty university archives, all administratively subordinate to the library, three have no interest in official university records, twelve are responsible for both university records and general manuscripts and only five concentrate solely on university-related materials. The pattern appears to be clear and definite: the inclusion of archives within university libraries militates against the development of full records programmes; and to conform with library priorities and goals, many university archives become involved in broader research manuscript programmes, often at the expense of their responsibilities to university records.

Discouragement and frustration for archivists are inherent in their relationship with university libraries. Collections of historical university records have grown in most university libraries as librarians have recognized the research and cultural importance of such accumulations. Some appointed archivists in the 1960s to care for these collections. However, attempts by archivists at that time to implement more systematic records programmes foundered on matters of authority, space or staff. Certainly, many have been able to secure the interest and cooperation of administrative offices and have explored the limits of the informal approach to records selection and acquisition. But certain basic issues constantly arise. An archivist must be able to ensure the confidentiality of records under his control and must have sufficient administrative standing to deal with all university officials, from the board of governors and the

8 John H. Archer, "A Study of Archival Institutions in Canada," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (Queen's University, 1969).

senate to the president. Such authority and status can only derive directly from the university's chief executive officer or his deputy. Placing the archivist below the chief librarian, and in some instances, several levels below the chief librarian, is not sufficient and rightfully leads other administrators to question the ability of the archivist to fulfil his good intentions. The library is not always the most respected or best liked institution on campus, by either faculty or administration, and some draft records policy statements have been viewed as unwarranted interference by the library or have been ignored.

Within the library, archivists also experience difficulty in securing approval for budget and space requests. Most university libraries define their priorities in terms, first, of service to teaching programmes, and second, of service to research. While there are long-term research benefits in the careful preservation of university records, records management is initially an administrative service and receives little consideration in library space planning or budgeting. Most libraries are hard pressed for space simply to house the printed results of the information explosion and cannot provide the quantity or type of space needed for records storage. Working from high-cost library space, often with inefficient library shelving, archives cannot provide an intermediate records centre and seemingly cannot secure the necessary low-cost space elsewhere on campus. Records management also suffers in library budgeting. With inflation of twenty per cent to thirty per cent making inroads on library monograph and serial budgets, universities are pressing their libraries to reduce staff in an effort to maintain acquisition levels. Records management requires staff time, not purchase funds, but as the high number of university archives engaged in general research manuscript acquisitions suggests, it is easier to obtain funding in a library for acquisitions than for staff.

University archives, endeavouring to place the preservation of the records of their institution on a more systematic basis, are essentially incompatible with university libraries. This incompatibility may be masked by an understanding chief librarian or a forceful archivist, but periods of budget stringency reveal the differing objectives and procedures of the two. Various compromises have been attempted. The Archivist of the University of Alberta has one of the best solutions through the device of a University Archives Committee to which he is responsible. His right of direct access to all members of the university community is written into his policy statement. The recent administrative separation of the archives and library there is the logical extension of this policy. The Archivist of the University of Toronto, with one of the largest of the university archives devoted to university records, also has the right of access to all levels of the university written into a formally approved policy statement. The University of Toronto Archives has recently been removed from the

control of the Rare Books Department but still forms part of the library. At Queen's University, the Archivist was appointed in 1970 with the understanding that for matters concerning university records he was responsible to and derived his authority from the Principal. Each of these devices to circumvent the inherent difficulties of an archives in a library has its advantages. With such expedients, university archives have been able to accomplish a great deal in preserving records but in every case, continue to fall short of a full records management programme. Archives have been recognized as being different from other library departments. New lines of responsibility and authority are being developed, but formal reporting in consideration of budgets, space and staff remains within and through the library. Until such matters are judged and evaluated on the basis of archival or even administrative priorities rather than library priorities, university records management programmes will remain haphazard, informal and inefficient.

The deficiencies in records management programmes in Canadian universities cannot be attributed solely to the problems of the relationship between archives and libraries. The informality and lack of management sophistication is in fact a reflection of the state of university administration. Various excellent articles have appeared concerning the implementation of records programmes in universities.⁹ Each shows how records scheduling, record transferral, reference service and so on are applicable to the university setting. Most begin with the premise that an effective records management programme must have certain administrative support and authority. The experience of governments and businesses confirms this necessity. In the Canadian federal government, for example, the Royal Commission on Public Records in 1912 outlined the need, basic principles and techniques of a modern records system. Yet, not until 1966 when the Public Archives of Canada secured the backing of the Treasury Board, the government's central financial authority, did recalcitrant departments begin to pay heed to the regulations regarding the disposal of records. A records management system assumes both authority and the power to enforce that authority. Yet, where in the university does such authority and power lie? The hierarchy normally found in governments and businesses is often lacking in universities. Power and authority are diffused and vaguely divided amongst permanent administrators, ever-changing faculty committees, and strong, influential personalities. At the top, most Canadian universities operate on an "assumed separation of powers with the lay board of governors ostensibly confining its attentions to fiscal matters while giving the necessary *pro forma* legal approval to educational policies

9 See William Saffady, "A University Archives and Records Management Program: Some Operational Guidelines," *College & Research Libraries*, vol. 35, no. 3 (May 1974) pp. 204-205; William F. Schmidt and Sarah J. Wilson, "A Practical Approach to University Records Management," *American Archivist*, vol. 31, no. 3 (July 1968).

coming up from a Senate which is theoretically representative of academic interests.’’¹⁰ The president serves as the chief executive officer and the link between board and senate. Yet, his powers are as circumscribed as those of any diplomat. As one prominent Canadian educator has noted:

Much of the substance of power in the university has been taken out of the president’s office and away from the board of governors. The members of the academic staff now have what has been taken out, and they have nearly a veto on the use of what is left. They may find this hard to believe, but it is true. That battle is over. But those who have newly won power are not exercising what they have.¹¹

Universities may be amongst the few institutions left where administrative inefficiency is prized. University administrators are doubly cautious. Universities, like businesses, have their fair share of those who cling to old habits, but in universities the administrators are also cautious lest their proposals for change be interpreted as a conspiracy to augment their power at the expense of faculty.¹² A basic report on Canadian university government specifically warns administrators that they should not appear to be “powerful figures, controlling large parts of the academic realm from the privileged sanctuary of the ‘world of business’.”¹³ Administrators and faculty who will cooperate with the archivist on an informal one to one basis balk at any attempt to define in writing the authority and powers required for a more systematic, campus-wide programme. The decentralized planning system common to most Canadian universities, the endeavour to consult as widely as possible within the university community in decision making, the uneasy relationship between administrators and faculty, and a general almost inherent suspicion of management systems combine to erect a major hurdle for inaugurating a university records management programme. Once over this initial hurdle—once the basis is accepted—such a programme can operate as smoothly in the university environment as in any other organization. But overcoming this hurdle from within a university library verges on the impossible.

A discussion of the present state and problems of Canadian university archives cannot avoid the controversial involvement of most of the university archives in soliciting and acquiring the private papers and records of individuals or organizations not directly connected with the universities. These acquisition programmes are defined by exceedingly vague, perhaps opportunistic terms, from solely regional interests to papers of national or even international figures. Fully twenty of the

10 Sir James Duff and Robert O. Berdahl, *University Government in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966) p. 5.

11 J.A. Corry, *Farewell the Ivory Tower* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1970) pp. 111-112.

12 See F.L. Rourke and G.E. Brooks, *The Managerial Revolution in Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966) pp. 3, 11-13.

13 Duff & Berdahl, *University Government*, p. 46.

twenty-seven Canadian university archives, sixteen of them within libraries, are responsible for these general research manuscript programmes. Only seven of the twenty-seven Canadian universities surveyed assign this duty to a Special Collections department. Of course, it may be questioned whether such programmes are properly the concern of traditionally defined archives. However, the combining of official records and general manuscripts is the traditional Canadian pattern, applying the "total archives" concept propounded by successive Dominion Archivists. Given the lack of education about the care of manuscript materials available in Canadian library schools, combining the two functions under the university archivist is undoubtedly the best and most efficient solution. Of greater concern for archivists is the real danger that the university archives in libraries will lose sight of their first responsibility, university records, in attempting to adapt to library priorities. In many instances, library budgets with their current stress on acquisitions rather than manpower make it infinitely easier to run a prestigious programme to acquire political or literary manuscripts than to service university records. The point is difficult to prove, but it seems likely that the support, encouragement and good will garnered by several of our larger university archives in acquiring external research collections justify the entire archives programme and permit archivists to indulge themselves with the less visible task of preserving university records. For these repositories, the external role has become predominant and threatens to overwhelm the archivists' main task.

The existence and growth of general manuscript collections within the universities, and, indeed, in institutions like the Glenbow-Alberta Foundation, the Metropolitan Toronto Public Library and the New Brunswick Museum have been matters of concern for those in the federal or provincial archives.¹⁴ Such institutions do not conform to an orderly division of collecting areas, with materials of national importance assembled in Ottawa and those of provincial significance in the provincial capitals. In the federal-provincial discussions concerning the Systematic National Acquisition Programme (SNAP) of the Public Archives of Canada, a consensus on collecting policies has developed. The archivists responsible for other collections were not consulted and little consideration was evidently given to their programmes or to the reasons these programmes exist and prosper. As reported,

The SNAP has recognized the right of libraries and other private repositories to develop and augment specialized collections for which important segments are already in their custody. . . . Prior right should be conceded to university archives

14 See R.S. Gordon, "The Protocol of S.N.A.P.: Demarcation of Acquisition Fields," *The Canadian Archivist/L'Archiviste Canadien*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1973) pp. 48-54, and "Acquisitions Policy: Competition or Co-operation?", *The Canadian Archivist/L'Archiviste Canadien*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1970) pp. 21-43.

or libraries to collect the papers of academics and administrators they employ, but the inclusion in this category of papers of the alumni is less defensible.¹⁵

Aside from the assumption that the federal and provincial archives have some form of divine mandate in the field of private manuscripts, the argument against the proliferation of manuscript repositories is two-fold. First, the dispersal of historical manuscripts to a variety of locations inconveniences researchers and makes certain types of research prohibitively expensive without adequate travel grants. Second, smaller repositories seldom can afford the preservative equipment, adequate descriptive controls, or reference service expected and required of modern archives.¹⁶

The reasons for the existence and growth of a variety of manuscript repositories in universities are considerably more complex. The universities began collecting these records for much the same reasons that the federal and provincial archives departed from accepted European and American practices to collect private papers as well as official government records. All recognized the research significance of such collections and the necessity of taking action to preserve them in a society otherwise bereft of the tradition, inclination or facilities to care for such documents. Professors were amongst the main protagonists for the establishment of the federal and the provincial archives and became for many years their prime users and supporters. This is evident from the mutually beneficial relationship which existed between Arthur Doughty, Dominion Archivist, 1904 to 1935, and numerous professors at Toronto, Queen's, McGill, and later Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.¹⁷ Similarly, several of the provincial archives owe their origins directly to the actions of historians at the provincial universities. In fact, the tie is so strong that several of the provincial archives are situated directly on the campus of the provincial university. By encouraging and fostering such arrangements, the university faculty were leading the provincial governments to give adequate recognition to the broad cultural importance of preserving the records of the provincial heritage while also providing unique resources directly on campus for research and teaching. Not all universities are in the federal or provincial capitals and the same research and cultural interests which prompted the faculty to press for government archives prompted a similar response in universities remote from the capitals.

Many factors have played a direct part in the growth of university manuscript collections. The circumstances at each university and of the arrival of each collection vary. Some material was acquired in a desperate

¹⁵ R.S. Gordon, "The Protocol of S.N.A.P.," p. 54.

¹⁶ See D.F. McOuat, "Acquisitions Policy: Competition or Co-operation?," *The Canadian Archivist/L'Archiviste Canadien*, vol 2, no. 1 (1970) pp. 24-28.

¹⁷ See Ian E. Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty: The Cultural Role of the Public Archives of Canada, 1904-1935," *The Canadian Archivist/L'Archiviste Canadien*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1973) pp. 4-25.

bid to rescue important documents from destruction. Others were acquired in times past when the federal or provincial archives were not sufficiently interested or perhaps able to house them. Many university manuscript collections have a regional focus, reflecting close ties with surrounding communities, and assisting local research by preserving more detailed documentation than would be warranted by provincial selection criteria. Universities owe much to the generosity of graduates and benefactors, and housing their papers suitably combines good public relations and intelligent self-interest. In some instances, university faculty have developed research interests in new types of documents—documents in which the traditional archives may not have yet developed an interest. On occasion, too, donors have preferred to entrust their papers, the unique personal record of lifelong work, to a smaller university archives closely associated with professors and researchers rather than add them to larger, perhaps less personal repositories. Some feel that they have contributed enough to government and prefer to have their papers distant from governments or political influence. All of these factors and undoubtedly many more personal considerations have influenced donors, be they politicians, civil servants, businessmen, journalists or writers. All have validity. All undermine any attempt by archivists to develop rational schemes assigning collections to particular repositories.

There is excellent justification for the universities to participate in general archival programmes and for such programmes to have a place in national archival strategy. This is best done by archivists coordinating and giving due balance to both university records and manuscript programmes. However, the continued administrative subordination of many university archives to libraries develops a further source of tension in dealing with a research manuscript collection. As soon as an archives or a library accepts material from outside the university, the repository becomes to some extent public. The responsibilities thereby incurred are no longer *internal*, within the university, but are to a broader community. Access, efficient reference service, and proper facilities must be provided to those beyond the university. The distinction in objectives between a public archives and a university library is real; and as is the case in implementing a records management programme, the archives budget must be judged by archival rather than by library priorities.

The number of Canadian university archives has expanded rapidly in the past fifteen years and their problems are perhaps growing pains. All of the provincial archives have now been divorced from the provincial libraries and gradually this separation of function is spreading to the universities. As financial constraints are felt by universities, libraries are clarifying their objectives and priorities and are beginning to recognize differences inherent between archives and libraries. The universities themselves are improving their management systems, attempting to make

the best use of decreasing resources. Information systems and centralized administrative services are being accepted and more systematic records programmes will follow. The general manuscript acquisition efforts of university archivists have maintained a stimulating and not entirely unwelcome tension in government archival programmes. As the provincial archives recognize legitimate regional interests and the impossibility of centralizing all historically valuable records in one location, regional archival networks will evolve in cooperation with university archival colleagues. The university archivists are becoming more numerous and more visible on and off campus. They have accomplished much with little but confidence and perseverance, gaining acceptance and understanding in the university community. Some attempt to maintain the tradition of archivist as scholar at a time when larger archives are becoming increasingly bureaucratic. There are warm spots in the cold.

Résumé

Après avoir brossé un tableau général de la situation des archives universitaires canadiennes, l'auteur s'attache à décrire les difficultés d'implantation de programmes de gestion de documents en milieu universitaire. Après avoir constaté que les services d'archives dépendant administrativement d'une bibliothèque universitaire sont de qualité inférieure aux autres, il s'attache à exposer les principales raisons expliquant cet état de choses: faiblesse administrative générale de l'université, confusion dans les politiques d'acquisitions, difficulté de concilier objectifs et politiques d'un service de bibliothèque et d'un service d'archives. Il conclut, sur une note plus optimiste, que les récentes contractions budgétaires subies par les universités les obligeront probablement à rationaliser leurs systèmes administratifs et à mettre en marche des programmes plus systématiques de gestion de documents.