

If she will admit that the Western Ontario Library School was not training archivists in 1948, I will agree that my grey hairs do not give me any additional right to criticize archival training.

In a more serious vein I would like to reiterate that my article was not intended as a scathing attack on any Canadian institution, but rather was an attempt to show that the problems we face in training here are very similar to those in other countries with similar cultural backgrounds. The article suggested that we could learn not only from the successes of other archivists, but also and especially from their failures. Often at ACA meetings I suffer from an attack of *déjà vu* — “Twenty years ago British archivists made this same decision with disastrous consequences. Can we not avoid this mistake?” At the time I forget that Cassandra is never a welcome visitor at any meeting.

My comments on archival education in library schools were related to England and Australia as much as to Canada, and should be so understood. I hope that we are all agreed that since librarians inevitably handle manuscripts and archives, they should have some training in the field. On both sides of the Atlantic I have tried to help librarians to understand my own work. However, I cannot agree that archivists should be trained in this way and I do not think that either commentator would agree. As long as we in Canada have several library schools training librarians in archival science and no institution training archivists as archivists, it will be difficult to maintain that we have separate professions. Archivists have a responsibility to the community to keep the records of the past securely. Unless we insist on adequate training for all archivists, we are not discharging this responsibility.

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## **ACA Annual Meeting, 1977: A Personal View**

Another year, another city, another opportunity to demonstrate to each other and a sceptical world that our profession is growing up. This year it was Fredericton, a treat for the walking visitor whose enjoyment was only slightly marred by the incessant rain. The wetness, however was more than offset by the splendidly complete local arrangements made by Mike Swift and his colleagues. But on leaving Fredericton after three days of good company and stimulating conversation, I felt a certain dissatisfaction with what had ultimately been achieved.

There are three main purposes for our annual meeting: to develop a sense of a national archival community, to exchange professional information and ideas, and to debate, reach conclusions and make decisions concerning the advancement of the profession within the wider national community. Personally I have been more than satisfied on the first count, less than happy on the second and not happy at all on the third.

Most of my positive feelings about the ACA are the direct result of personal relationships made possible by attendance at the annual meeting. To discover that the archival profession has attracted in large numbers the kind of people with whom I enjoy spending time is a stimulating experience most conducive to the development of a real sense of community, and alone is sufficient justification for our annual meeting. Contrary to the popular stereotype, I have found most archivists to be both gregarious and enthusiastic, qualities present at least since the Kingston meeting in 1973 when the inevitability of independence from the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) was clearly sensed. We must be very careful not to allow this spirit to dissipate. I was gratified to see con-

firmed at Fredericton the return of the "Old Guard." It had appeared at Edmonton in 1975 that the majority of those archivists who had carried the professional banner since the Archives Section of the CHA was formed in 1956 viewed the formation of the ACA as a "Young Turk" operation and withdrew to the sidelines. While a few did indeed make it quite clear that they hoped to see the infant organization fall flat on its face, many in fact simply retired gracefully to allow impatient youth the privilege of realizing its vision. Emotions were running high in 1975, and there seemed to be a distinct possibility that the ACA's unilingual character and the implied change in the relationship of archivists with the historical profession might drive some to start a rival national organization. Such fears proved groundless and, two years later, there is no doubt that the ACA represents the interests of English-speaking Canadian archivists. A national archival community exists.

I am less happy about the way we communicate. It is not that we do not address each other about our professional concerns; it is that, how ever much we talk, we so frequently fail to *communicate*. After six years of attending these annual meetings I still see archivists displaying an appalling lack of understanding of the nature of the archival community. Many of us are guilty of assuming that what we do as archivists is what all archivists do and that if others do not do what we do then *ipso facto* they are not really archivists. Some are more guilty than others. I believe that there is reluctance among many who work at the archives of federal and provincial governments to accord professional status, motives and competence to those who are employed by other organizations. Much of this imagined superiority seems usually to stem from the greater age, size or mandate of the institutions. There will be no professional archival community in Canada as long as archivists are measured by their employer rather than their ability to perform archival functions. Curiously enough, the "total archives" concept espoused by the "senior" institutions is an archival aberration and has obscured the fact that the fundamental business of being a professional archivist has to do with administering the permanently valuable records of the parent institution, whatever its size, age or mandate.

I also noted at Fredericton the disturbing appearance of the popular misconception that the primary purpose of archival activity is to preserve material for the use of researchers. As Ian Wilson suggested in one of several attempts to challenge fundamental archival assumptions, the value accorded by society to such cultural pursuits is subject to great fluctuation and even total eradication. One can imagine a society which feels able to dispense with the writing and study of history. *Horribile dictu!* But why should this affect the archivist?

The development of archives is greatly facilitated by the present age, which treasures as it does the pursuit of self-knowledge, the search for national identity and the almost desperate clutching at the straws of the familiar and comforting in the face of an increasingly frightening future. If, as I believe, this is merely a phase, then with it will pass those institutions which grew in response and which justified their existence in terms of its needs. Archivists should seize the opportunities presented by prevailing circumstances to improve their relative position in society. But whereas those archives which have developed as integral parts of their institutions' administrative machinery will grow strong, the rest will flourish and decay according to society's interests and preoccupations.

The interest of record-creating agencies in their records of permanent value is, by definition, permanent. The professional whose task it is to identify, maintain and preserve these records is the archivist. Thus the archivist does not depend for his existence on the priorities accorded by society to the study of history or anything else. Let us be sure to identify correctly our masters if we are indeed interested in the growth and survival of the archival profession and not simply in our own personal status.

What I am least happy about is our inability, when we meet, to identify, debate and resolve our problems. The Fredericton conference, employing as its theme "National Strategies," swiftly degenerated into an unfocussed discussion of anything and everything connected with being an archivist. This was inevitable after the charming and urbane Professor Symons, whose report *To Know Ourselves* inspired the conference theme, disarmed his critics by claiming that the significance of his remarks about archives lay not in any particular statement or recommendation, but rather in the fact that the concept of archives had for the first time been brought forcibly to the attention of university authorities. For the next two days, effectively deprived of a target, our archival marksmen fired aimlessly — and harmlessly — demonstrating that we are indeed, in Professor Symons' unintentionally patronizing phrase, "an incipient profession."

As an incipient profession, the ACA would do well to take full advantage of the presence in one place at the same time of what is surely a majority of the dedicated professional archivists in English-speaking Canada. Debate on the aims and priorities of the Association resulting in action or clear guidance to the president and executive is essential. And yet the annual general meeting is accorded a mere three hours, a period which barely allows for the presidential address, treasurer's report, hasty summaries — hastily approved — of committee reports and the adoption of a few resolutions, again with debate barely tolerated. There seems to be a feeling that, if members are apprised of issues which require their attention and are provided with mail-in ballots, this is somehow a more democratic method of making decisions. True, the country is very large and not everyone can attend the annual meeting, but consider the disadvantages. The facts provided by mail to the membership are not amenable to alteration or amendment. One is obliged to answer "yes" or "no" to a whole package based only on the information provided. Heaven help the member unable to recognize any of the names on the ballot for Member without Portfolio on the Executive. For that matter, pity the worthy but unknown candidate about whom no more information was provided than his name. Pity also the archivist who agreed with raising the professional membership fee to thirty dollars but could see good reasons for leaving the student fee at five dollars. By the time he had requested more information or a rewording of the question, the deadline for submission of his ballot would have passed.

Two things are clear to me. The first is that insufficient emphasis is placed on the annual general meeting. Surely it is here that we debate the issues and make the decisions that will determine when, and if, we reach professional maturity. Consequently, I would urge that any decision of the membership assembled for this meeting have the force of a decision of the entire membership, its authority deriving from conclusions reached through debate among informed and concerned professionals rather than from a simple majority response to a nation-wide ballot. Interestingly enough, in the case of the fee adjustment, frustration led the delegates to ignore the constitution and to instruct the Executive to follow its wishes and put the new structure into effect. I think it is important to allow the members at the annual general meeting more time to make decisions.

Second, the Executive does not have, or does not exercise, enough executive power in the period between annual general meetings, a situation which hampers our development as an effective force in society as a whole. At a time when everyone is calling for archivists and the ACA to present a higher profile, we find great opportunities being missed because of a propensity for creating committees, mailing questionnaires and arriving at consensus before any public move is made. A case in point is the opportunity provided by the extensive media coverage of the publication of Symons' report. While responses from every other interest affected by the report were appearing in print — *Canadian Forum* devoted the major part of one issue to such responses — the ACA

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

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

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*Editors' note:* The following article is reprinted with permission as published in the Montreal Book Auctions Ltd. Catalogue no. 101 (25 May 1977). Only minor emendations, such as corrections of typographical errors, have been made to the text.

## **A Conspiracy Against the Canadian Identity**

by BERNARD AMTMANN

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

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

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

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

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

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