

turn closet them, but rather so we can ensure their survival and best use. Furthermore, archivists have a duty to ensure that valued papers remain in, or are returned to, their area of origin if proper facilities exist for their care. The Gowan Papers belong in Simcoe County for he was, after all, our very own circuit riding, politicking, patronizing judge, senator and knight.

Peter Moran
Simcoe County Archives

Appraisal of Collections and Individual Documents

I would like to comment on the article by Bernard Amtmann in which he states “that no market exists for a collection like the Gowan Papers” by outlining the principles and methodology of appraising archival documents. A basic distinction must be made between appraisal of *individual* documents—single diaries, discrete literary manuscripts and letters, maps, prints, drawings, rare books and similar archival and library records—and *large collections* of papers of prominent individuals and corporate entities. Different types of expertise and techniques are required to properly evaluate the two categories of materials.

Professional dealers are most proficient in appraising individual documents. Individual documents are often sold at auctions, through catalogues and over the counter, and the records of these transactions provide a valid guide in arriving at the fair market value of similar individual documents.

The appraisal of collections of papers requires a quite different approach. Very few collections are traded on the open market, as private collectors and investors are seldom interested in acquiring large quantities of papers. Those who do buy collections do so to acquire a few prestige documents which they preserve; the remaining items are often destroyed. The chief buyers of collections are archives, libraries and similar institutions who purchase material for its *research value*. Herein is the crux of the problem. No established market values exist for research collections. To translate the research value of a collection into a monetary market value demands an expertise usually beyond that of a professional dealer; a specialist of the subject of the collection and a curatorial specialist are required. The specialist in the subject of the collection might be a historian, a geographer, a cartographer, a demographer, or a literature specialist. Members of the academic community and such other professionals as genealogists, photographers, architects, archaeologists, meteorologists and palaeographers are often required as well. A collection of medical prescriptions, for example, may not strike the dealer as having a market value, but a historian of medical science can quickly decide if researchers might find such a collection of assistance. I question the ability of a dealer, no matter how knowledgeable in his trade, to determine the full value of a collection without comprehending its full research potential.

Equally important is the expertise of a curator. Curatorial specialists alone can determine the means and resources necessary to make the collection fully accessible for research. Few collections come to the archives with proper organization and appropriate finding aids. Without these the collections are virtually useless for research. Therefore, an unprocessed collection (that is, one requiring organizing, boxing and indexing) appraised at \$100,000 by a dealer might have a true value of only \$75,000 once the costs of making it ready for research are subtracted. The curator will also view the collection in terms of the repairs and restoration, including the conservation that may

be required, and the cost of this work may result in another deduction from the dealer's market value.

Even more important is the accessibility of the collection for public research. If the donor insists that the collection, or parts of it, be closed for several years, another reduction in market value must be made. Copyright, literary property and publication rights are equally important and again, the curator must weigh the value of these rights, if transferred with the collection, in assessing monetary worth.

Another factor which affects the research value, and therefore the market value, of a collection is the exposure it has already had. This is perhaps the most difficult area in which to make a value judgement. A collection, regardless of how valuable the component autographs might be, may be virtually worthless for research purposes if the information has been "mined out" by being copied, quoted, cited, paraphrased or published. If a collection has been extensively used for research and publication, and its contents are well known, its value to a research institution is often limited to occasional reference. Such may be the case of the Sir James Robert Gowan Papers. The extent to which the information contained in the Gowan Papers may have already been utilized affects the willingness of institutions to bid on the collection, and consequently reduces its market value. Again, only curators and subject-area specialists possess the necessary knowledge to make a rational judgement on how this factor affects the market value. Professional dealers, too, are aware of the potential loss of market value of documents which have been copied and diffused, and are generally reluctant to provide potential buyers with extensive reproductions.

The dealer alone cannot arrive at the fair market value of a collection. He must do it in concert with a historian (or other specialist) and a curator. Only when all relevant factors affecting the research value of the collection have been considered can the fair market value be determined.

It may be of interest that this is the principle that the Canadian Historical Association adopted when it constituted the National Archival Appraisal Board. The appraisals this Board performs are conducted by committees of at least three specialists: a dealer, an expert historian (or other specialist in subject matter) and a curator (usually an archivist). This method guarantees that the collection is given a thorough examination and that full consideration is taken of all relevant circumstances.

R.S. Gordon
Manuscript Division
Public Archives of Canada