

archivists can place on researchers for the specific identification of documents which they have not seen. Can the archivist be expected at the drop of a researcher's request slip, to immediately produce documents that are not easily retrievable in a large unorganized collection or series? If resources are directed to serving researchers then who will be left to organize more recent acquisitions? Should the cost of producing these documents be met by the researcher, the taxpayer, or the institution? It would be all too easy for access demands to determine archivists' priorities. While this may not present immediate problems for description, it could have disastrous consequences if allowed to determine policy on acquisitions and retention since researchers, like fashion designers, tend to have their own fads which govern the content and form of their requests.

Unless controlled, access could become a luxurious burden on our society and archivists will have to consider their liability for the improper release of information. None of these issues are easily resolved but it will do no good for those whose profession makes them most responsible for the implementation of access policy, to hide their heads in documents in the hope that others will resolve these issues or that the storm will blow over.

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University Archives: An Academic Question

In his report on the status of Canadian Studies, which he recently prepared for the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, Professor T.H.B. Symons identified the major problem confronting archives and archivists as a lack of public awareness of their existence and work. Most archivists would heartily agree with this assessment and readily concede that the vast majority of Canadians remain woefully ignorant of the indispensable role that archives and archivists play in preserving this country's most important cultural asset, its historical records. The academic community, to whom Symons' remarks are primarily addressed, might also agree with his statement. It is doubtful, though, whether they would appreciate that they themselves formed a significant segment of those characterized by Symons as archivally unaware.

Nor might it seem surprising if academics do so exempt themselves. After all, the patrons of *public* archives—the only kind of archives that existed for many years—have traditionally been academic historians and political economists. Although patronage of archives has become more broadly based in recent times, academics continue to make up a significant percentage of archives users. Further, members of the historical profession, individually and collectively, have played a leading role in having public archives established in the first place and in ensuring that they were staffed by persons having some familiarity with the principles of historical research. Through associations such as the Learned Societies, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, the Canada Council, the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Council, and Royal Commissions, the academic community has helped to formulate and influence government policy with respect to public archives. Ostensibly, then, the academic community appears to be fully cognizant of the aims and needs of archives and to be fully supportive of them. In reality, things are not as rosy as they appear. In articles written by historians and social scientists in which archives are referred to, in remarks made by historians in panel discussions with archivists, and even in Symons' chapter on archives itself, the impression is given that the academic community does not fully understand the role that archives were intended to play.

The purpose of archives, as perceived by the academic community, is to assemble

research “collections” which can be exploited by scholars—grist for the scholarly mill. In short, to use an expression frequently employed in the past to describe the relationship, the archivist is viewed as “the handmaiden of the historian”. American archival colleagues have speculated on whether this interpretation of the relationship that supposedly exists between historian and the archivist might more aptly be expressed as “pimping for Clio”. The preoccupation of the academic community with archives, stocked in material which they would be interested in exploiting, makes them less concerned or even oblivious to how archives discharge their obligation to administrators by preserving records possessing legal, fiscal and informational value, in addition to the historical. As a result, they are also less concerned about the rigorous adherence by archives to the canons of archival practice—provenance and respect for original order. They are, it seems fair to say, more concerned with the “what” of archives rather than with the “why” and the “how”.

Because they are chiefly interested in archival “merchandise”, they also tend to display a preference for those other hallmarks of modern retailing, centralization of goods and services, convenience of location and ease of access. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that their efforts in respect of archives seem bent on the aggrandisement of the Public Archives of Canada, often at the expense of the local “merchant”.

Unfortunately, the attitude which prompts the academic community to advocate a convenient and well-stocked repository of archival material manifests itself in the sort of archival institution academics themselves have created or would create on their own campuses. Instead of being viewed primarily as agencies for ensuring the systematic selection and preservation of university-related records, official and unofficial, university archives are frequently looked upon as a miniature Public Archives of Canada, whose purpose it is to collect material which supports academic teaching and research programmes. Even Symons, who specifically urges universities to pay greater attention to their indigenous records, advocates a continuation of promiscuous “manuscript” record-gathering. Furthermore, as if to underline his point, he cites as good examples of university archives, two institutions whose reputations were made essentially through “trafficking” in non-university rather than “home-grown” material.

If it persists, the mistaken notion that archives, at whatever level, exist primarily to serve the academic community is one that could do irreparable harm to the development of Canadian archives. It could be especially damaging because of the considerable influence which the academic community continues to exert, not only over university archives’ policies, but also over the policies of archives in the public sector. If the danger is to be averted, it is critically important that academics begin to see archives in a different light, to recognize that they have an administrative function as well as serving the interests of academic research. As offspring of particular governments or institutions, their object is to ensure the survival for administrative and research purposes of the significant records generated by their parent bodies and by persons whose careers have been closely bound up with those bodies. These are records which legitimately belong to the archives of the institution concerned and, consequently, those which can be most readily processed in accordance with the archival principles of provenance and respect for original order.

Within their own educational institutions, where they exert direct influence over archival organization and collecting policies, academics would do well to take a personal interest in the University Archives. They should do their utmost to ensure that there is a university-wide records management programme and that the University Archives, which has a vested interest in all records generated, plays a key role in that programme. They should also consider the University Archives as the most suitable repository for their own private records, especially if they are persons who have been closely associated with the university for many years and their papers reflect the part they have played in the administration of the institution and the contribution they have made to its scholarly reputation.

Their efforts on behalf of the University Archives may not result in a "supermarket" type of archives with shelves amply stocked with goods to satisfy every taste. However, if the academic is prepared to abnegate his or her own self-interest and help the University Archives to claim its legitimate inheritance, all will eventually benefit. In the long run, the interests of both historian and archivist will be served by the accumulation of a comprehensive set of records which document the intellectual history of this country, in a context where they will be best understood. That, as much as any of the schemes propounded by Professor Symons, will truly help us "to know ourselves".

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