

The Impact of Death: An Historical and Archival Reconnaissance into Victorian Ontario

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Archivists and historians are mutually dependent. Although both professions assume the existence of an active ongoing co-operation, they may overlook the fact that they are inextricably linked to the products of earlier practitioners. Much of twentieth century historical methodology and subject specialization is a direct reflection of the nature and emphasis of nineteenth century archival collecting. In like fashion, more recent historical sub-specialities—in business, intellectual or labour history—are necessitating new archival directions and categories for the collecting and organization of relevant documentation. The maintenance of this cyclical pattern of imitation and co-operation—occasionally lubricated by some good-natured grouching about the slowness of workers of either side to conform to new ideas and practices—is critical to the advancement of historical scholarship.

In recent years however, the emergence of a vigorous and spirited attitude toward the writing of social history has presented archivists with a series of perplexing, often expensive, problems. The so-called “new” social history is of course even less monolithic than was its predecessor, the “New History” championed by John Harvey Robinson and his students who became the leading “Progressive Historians” of the 1920’s. It is safe to suggest, however, that a social orientation is now the dominant strain in contemporary historical writing, and that its multivariied methodology poses particular challenges for the archival profession.¹

The “new” social history emphasis implies much more than merely employing the viewpoints and methods of other social sciences. Although this applied approach is still a critical part of developing research, simple-minded borrowing will not alone release us from Trevelyan’s mannered and maligned definition of social history as “history with the politics left out”. As well, the now fashionable lock-step Marxist analysis of labour and class struggle, with its attendant charged and often

1 The observations and conclusions of this article are a direct result of research which was greatly facilitated by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council “Aging Populations” Research grant.

unhistorical presentist picture of social stratification, is only one element (although in Canada possibly the vanguard) of the “new” emphasis. Contemporary social history owes most to the *histoire totale* concept of the French *Annales* school—with its balanced emphasis on social structure, cultural values, and physical environment.²

As their large output has brought them face to face with the implications of these diverse orientations, Canadian social historians have also belatedly introduced computer technology into their research. As was earlier the case in the United States and Britain, these technical changes have sparked much controversy, even amongst those who are comfortable with the machinery—let alone friction between cliometricians and those who practice research without simpler mechanical aids such as typewriter or dictaphone. At times it almost appears that only the photocopier unites the profession—when research dollars and archival policies permit. The advent of computers has both chained and liberated historians, and has again separated modern historical studies into two camps: the methodological behaviourists, who are comparatively narrow and quantitative, and those who may be less committed to the benefits of the technology and who argue (perhaps as a necessary result) that historical truth is best served by an interdisciplinary approach. A third shading has emerged with the developing appeal and authority of structuralism which advises that social history must explore *mentalité*; here again the derivation lies both in recent French scholarship and in a re-examination of early *Annalistses*. Structuralists explain the underpinnings of observed social behaviour both through using quantifiable materials and by imaginatively employing more traditional sources, so that the directing power of language, culture, myths and symbols may explain and evoke earlier societies.³ This “new” social history then has made significant advancements on its “progressive” history predecessor’s claims to disclose the sizable roles of the “lower” layers of the social structure. One suspects that future generations may again think that their predecessors did not escape the history of elites; at least the focus will be on the shop stewards and not just those who were named frequently in the *Labour Gazette* under Mackenzie King’s editorship.

For too much of history, and necessarily therefore in our historiography, most historical players have been mute—their postures, beliefs and activities lost, or else with the development of nation-states, locked anonymously in the records of burgeoning bureaucracies. Modern social historians have attempted to grapple with these voluminous and frequently unmanageable records, but, in so doing, they have also unleashed considerable subject “balkanization”. Fresh labels and categories, the young historian’s delight, often only confuse complex issues for the archivist. For example, as Elizabeth Pleck noted in the *Journal of Social History*, a study of Irish “mill girls” in Massachusetts may be any one of or a combination of: women’s,

2 For a superior and comprehensive discussion of the inter-relationship of archives and historians regarding the new approaches to social history, see Fredric M. Miller “Social History and Archival Practice” in *The American Archivist*, Vol. 44, No. 2, Spring 1981, 113-148. Related Canadian issues are succinctly discussed in David Gagan, “Rediscovering Local History: The Problems of Archival Resources for the ‘New’ History”, in *Communique*, Vol. IV, No. 1, Spring 1980, 14-15.

3 There are important implications for Canadian work in John Blair, “Structuralism, American Studies and the Humanities” in *American Quarterly*, Vol. 30, Summer, 1978, 261-281.

ethnic, labour, religious, quantitative, business, economic or urban history.⁴ The challenges for the archivist are apparent. Which of the current enthusiasms should be emphasized—or downplayed when organizing collections? Should finding aids reflect all of the sub-topics—or rigidly adhere to traditional “neutral” categories? Should components of a collection be broken off and the sacred, rigid rules of *respect des fonds* (introduced to the Public Archives of Canada by Sir Arthur Doughty himself), be violated to serve modern needs—needs which may prove to be permanent or merely passing fashions? Whatever the solution, it is clear that the archivist must be current with evolving methodologies and interests. Tardiness of response to these changes may result not just in lost opportunities for research, but more critically, in the destruction of valuable historical records themselves.

In the summer of 1980, spurred on by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council’s interest in multidisciplinary research into the problems of an aging population, we decided to investigate the impact of death upon an earlier Canadian society. One reason for selecting this theme was our interest in joining forces in order to spark each other’s research over a number of years; we had no illusions about being able to master the field quickly. Our backgrounds had been in mid- and late-Victorian history with an emphasis upon business and intellectual history, but both of us perceived these interests to be shadings—not categories. Death, we soon discovered, was a topic which sparked virtually no Canadian historical literature, and was one in which significant departures had occurred both in other national histories and in other disciplines, especially psychology and sociology.⁵

Much of the British and American literature on the subject examined physical remnants from earlier centuries in order to portray past customs.⁶ Several useful American theses had been produced (especially during the past decade) and considerable literature examined social and theological attitudes in Puritan

4 Elizabeth Pleck, “Two Worlds in One” in *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 10, Winter, 1967, p. 178.

5 There are three excellent bibliographies in English, each of which deals with all aspects of the study of death. See Robert Fulton, *Death, Grief and Bereavement: A Bibliography 1845-1975*, New York, Arno Press, 1977, recently augmented by a second volume, Flton et. a., *Death, Grief and Bereavement II: A Bibliography, 1975-1980*, New York Arno Press, 1981; Martin L. Kutscher et.al., *A Comprehensive Bibliography of the Thanatology Literature*, New York, Mss Information Corporation, 1975; and Albert Jay Miller and Michael James Miller, *Death: A Bibliographical Guide*, Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow Press, 1977. To show the growth of interest in the field, it is worthwhile to note that Fulton’s first bibliography, spanning the years 1845-1975 listed 3,856 entries, whereas the second volume, covering the years 1975-1980 incorporates 2,300 items. For historical purposes Fulton’s work is superior to Kutscher or Miller.

6 For the British example, see Phillis Cunningham and Catherine Lucas, *Costume for Births, Marriages and Deaths*, London, A & C Black, 1972; John Morley, *Death, Heaven and the Victorians*, Pittsburg, University of Pittsburg Press, 1971; James Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, London, Newton, Abbot, David and Charles, 1972; and *A Celebration of Death: An Introduction to the Buildings, Monuments and Settings of Funerary Architecture in the Western European Tradition*, London, Constable, 1980—also composed by Curl. An American example of a similar nature is the highly eclectic Margaret Coffin, *Death in Early America*, New York, Thomas Nelson, 1976. See also Anita Schorsch, *Mourning becomes America*, Clinton, N.J., Main Street Press, 1976.

America.⁷ By far the most complete examinations, however, were the works of the French scholars Michel Vovelle and Philippe Ariès. The latter's *Western Attitudes Towards Death* and *The Hour of Our Death* provided striking evidence of how the *Annales* school's perspective and techniques, although first developed for a Marxist orientation, were also applicable to the interests of a profoundly conservative historian.⁸ Although Ariès' use, and even the nature of his evidence impose disquieting demands upon a skeptical reader, his magisterial portrait of death's transformation from a "tamed" state, when it was communal and public, to the twentieth century's "untamed" death, when it has become private and isolated, is a remarkable historical conclusion to decades of related research.

Another French scholar, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladourie, has argued that the study of death is at the centre of historical interest—"like the graveyard in the middle of the village."⁹ Indeed as the American historian, Robert Nisbet noted, death has generated more rituals than all the other crises of human life because man's social and intellectual experiences, if not instinct itself, have caused him to reject its finality. "The community," he recently commented, "that nourished in life must also nourish in death. Death takes place within the community; death is a wound to the community; death is a departure from the community."¹⁰ For us, the all-encompassing nature of death made it a most suitable topic for exploration.

In nineteenth century Ontario (the focus of our interest) whether city, town, village or township, the cemetery was not physically in the centre of the community. Except for small enclosures around Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, the cemeteries were frequently adjacent to and often even some distance from a municipality's organized limits. As a subject of enquiry, society's effort to cope with death has been even more on the periphery of Canadian scholarship. Our national history necessarily has focussed initially upon the creation of the nation state and its provinces. Even labour history has looked first at particular strikes, union movements and strife in selected cities. Death as an historical topic has received only scant attention in biographies or in local histories. Certainly the idea of using it as a theme to explore *mentalité* has not attracted English Canadian historians. The subject has had to await an examination of more traditional relationships—family, neighbourhood, community, and ethnicity—relationships which until recently have been undervalued units in our national historiography. Now that social historians

7 The American literature is growing very rapidly. Important recent works are David Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death*, New York, Oxford, 1977; James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1980, and Charles O. Jackson, *Passing: the Vision of Death in America*. Neither these American references, nor the British ones cited earlier, particularly focus on demographic work which of course, includes extensive discussions of mortality statistics.

8 Michel Vovelle, *Mourir autrefois: attitudes collectives devant la mort au xviiie et xviiiie siècles*, Paris, 1974, and Philippe Ariès, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, and *The Hour of Our Death*, New York, Knopf, 1980. Other French historical work of interest are F. Lebrun, *Les Hommes et la Mort en Anjou aux xviiie et xviiiie siècles*, Paris, The Hague, 1971; J.N. Biraben, *Les Hommes et la Peste*, Paris, The Hague, 1975, and Pierre Chaunu, *La Mort à Paris: xvie, lviie, xviiiie siècles*, Paris, 1978.

9 Jean Glénisson, "France", in Georg G. Iggers and Harold T. Parker, *International Handbook of Historical Studies: Contemporary Research and Theory*, Westport, Conn., Greenwood Press, 1979, p. 186.

10 Robert Nisbet, "Death in the West", *The New York Times Book Review*, 22 February, 1883, p. 7.

have broached these themes, it seems appropriate to investigate the significance of death—a topic that links them all.¹¹

So convinced was Philippe Ariès of the unique quality of how society coped with death in the nineteenth century, that he devoted four chapters of *The Hour of Our Death*, a clumsy translation of *L'homme Devant la Mort*, to plumbing the Victorian psyche. In our reconnaissance, we too expect to discover in this topic a demonstration of the essential unity of the period, a rounded picture suggesting how the topic embraced Canada's economy, art, literature, politics, music, business enterprise, secret societies, trade unions, and shifts in theology—almost every facet of nineteenth century social activity. Differences in class, denomination, and cultural background all were reflected in bereavement customs. Death was romanticized and sentimentalized but very practically manipulated by business; Canadian poets and newsmen aped better-known English Victorian poets and novelists while Stephen Leacock satirized community and business motives. These intellectual, emotional and practical attitudes toward death attract and sustain our interest, although the importance of mortality studies and other quantifiable approaches has become increasingly obvious as well. Looking at death as a concept, however, permits us to understand how Ontarian Victorians responded to their physical loss while they affirmed their religious beliefs and social values. The stylized celebration of death, we now consider to be an important factor in understanding the period. Those rites provided a strong cement for keeping families together in a time of wide-spread urbanization, industrialization and migration—a cement, incidentally, which was liberally applied by Victorian clergy of all persuasions.

Ontario does not provide a comfortable test case for Ariès' sweeping conclusions about Victorian attitudes. For one thing, although occasioned by the American Revolution, Ontarian society is fundamentally a nineteenth century creation. Ariès' provocative assertions about the pivotal nature of sixteenth century developments must be tested elsewhere (they are of course interesting in terms of Quebec) and his judgments about clinical, "safe", attitudes toward death in the twentieth century are more fully explored by other social science disciplines.¹² So too, in Ontario, or

11 There are some useful Ontarian and Canadian sources. This article is not intended to be bibliographical and is restricted to English sources, but it is worthwhile to note some of the following recent works which deal in whole or in part with death-related themes. The following are certainly deserving of note: David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981; Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West; Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City, Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980; Bryan D. Palmer, *A Cultural in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton Ontario, 1860-1914*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's Press, 1979; H.P. Gundy, "The Family Compact at Work: The Second Heir and Devisee Commission of Upper Canada, 1805-1841" in *Ontario History*, Vol. LXVI, No. 3, September 1974; David B. Knight, *Cemeteries as Living Landscapes*, Ottawa, Ontario Genealogical Society, n.d.; Brian S. Osborne, "The Cemeteries of the Midland District of Upper Canada: A Note on Mortality in a Frontier Society", in *Pioneer America*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1974; C.J. Parr, "The Welcome and the Wake, Attitudes in Canada West toward the Irish Famine Migration" in *Ontario History*, Vol. LXVII, No. 2, 1974; N.L. Patterson, "The Iron Cross and the Trees of Life: German-Alsatian Gravemarkers in Waterloo Region and Bruce County Roman Catholic Cemeteries", in *Ontario History*, Vol. LXVIII, No. 1, 1976.

12 See for example P.E. Irwin, "In the midst of life—death", in *Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 14, June 1963, 7-14; E.S. Shneidman, *Death: Current Perspectives*, Palo Alto, Calif., Mayfield Publishing, 1976; R.J. Kastenbaum, *Death, Society, Human Experience*, St. Louis, C.V. Mosby Co., 1977.

elsewhere in North America, the legal framework must be examined at a national and provincial, not a community level. In Ontario particularly, the legal framework is more a result of developing concern for public health, and relevant regulations must be sought under Boards of Health, the Registrar General's department, the Cemeteries' Act and even the Noxious Weeds Act. Very sizable powers, even of confiscation of cemetery land without recompense, were enacted by the province—powers which in a semi-rural, migratory, religiously fractured community were often not enforceable. The legislation provides an excellent example of Victorian government intervention in the private sector, but one which by no means makes province and community into coterminous entities.

The obvious first steps in our study were the canvassing of archival depositories and collections for useful materials, and through that process, the ordering of our interests into more manageable units. The materials to be culled proved to be in inverse proportion to the slim nature of library listings or the silence of the archival finding-aids. When the death label was used at all, it tended to be merely as an adjunct to theology or moral philosophy. Clearly no one in Canada's major collection institutions had considered Jean Glénisson's conclusions that death "is located at a methodological crossroads, encroaching simultaneously on the traditional spheres of cultural, social and demographic history".¹³ While being introduced to this "crossroads" we soon found that the topic had ample scope for either a cliometric or a more broadly based structuralist approach.

Collections at several depositories, especially those in the Regional Room of the D.B. Weldon Library at the University of Western Ontario, have afforded consideration information about what might be termed "the business of death". Of initial and primary interest are the files of various undertakers and cemetery companies. Access to commercial records in Canada is a problem generally and these records are particularly scarce. For the London area, the community which we are emphasizing, there is only one archive in the public domain, that of the Murdy Funeral Home. Supporting evidence therefore has had to be sought from long-standing private firms still in existence and the private nature of the business understandably makes more of these family firms hesitant to oblige. The Murdy records, however, provide an excellent picture of nineteenth century domestic procedures, services and the costs for the upkeep of plots for the period 1870-1920. The company's registers show the evolution of a complete funeral service, including coffin, flowers, advertisements, cards, notices, and so on, as well as technical advances in embalming, cremation and the increased use of steel vaults. Pauper funerals, paid for by the city and cause of death, are noted as well. Some anomalies, however, occur. "Stillborn" children appear rarely in the company's records, whereas church records of those of the Anglican Woodlawn Cemetery in London suggest that they were a frequent occurrence. Could it be that the body of the "stillborn" child was disposed of without ceremony; was this type of bereavement still conducted from the family home; was the frequency so great that, despite some preparation of the body, the company did not record the details and cost?

13 Jean Glénisson, *op. cit.*

Another aspect of the “business of death” lies with the various cemetery companies which were formed to provide burial plots. Both the Burgoyne Cemetery Company and the Norwich Cemetery Company (whose papers are also in Western’s Regional Room) were joint-stock firms, but the former was a friendly association, existing chiefly for the direct convenience of the shareholders and their families, whereas the latter was strictly a business venture in search of modest profits. To the evidence that these records provide about the considerable, even crippling, costs of conducting funerals and maintaining burial grounds, should be added records of friendly societies such as the Canadian Order of Chosen Friends or voluntary associations such as the Masons. Consulting the records of small businesses is essential. Our research has shown that the Victorian preoccupation with death helped many enterprises to flourish, for example dry goods stores (crepe, mourning clothes), carpenters and cabinet makers (coffins), jewellers, milliners and general stores (funeral jewellery and bonnets), printers (funeral cards, mourning stationery, death notices), photographers (death portraits) and of course masons and stone carvers. Life insurance firms expanded with astonishing speed and florists came into existence because of the extravagant use of flowers in funeral displays and for grave-site decorations. The business of death in Victorian Ontario was not seasonal, was not altered by booms or depressions except in the extravagance of ceremony or memorial, and was certainly not the cause of any squeamish embarrassment for its practitioners. Death was expensive, often very profitable for business, and archival material for its study apparently is fairly abundant.

A subsidiary topic within this area is the Victorian attempt to meld together death and everyday life by making cemeteries into gardens for the living. The Cemetery Beautification Movement predated the “City Beautiful” rage, and Ontario’s equivalents of Glasgow’s Necropolis or London, England’s Highgate include Toronto’s Mount Pleasant, the Necropolis near the Don River or the older Catteraqui cemetery near Kingston. Archival materials detailing aspects of this romanticism extend from photographs, plans, sketches and portraits, to formal drawings of monument and landscape architecture, to cemetery and land company records and public health records. Not only are the records of long-established cemeteries such as London’s Woodlawn or the component parts of the Toronto General Burying Grounds Trust important but so too are private papers. Accounts of funerals and letters of condolences abound; the Strachan and Robinson Papers in Toronto¹⁴ even recount how they gave each other adjoining plots as tokens of affection and status. The Ontario Archives’ Pamphlet Collection is invaluable for this topic. So too Surrogate court files show individual bequests or requests for monuments—often with extensive descriptions as to how the marker should fit into the cemetery’s overall design. The Harcourt Architectural Collection at the Archives of Ontario illustrates types of chapels to be built, such as Fredric Cumberland’s beautiful and picturesque St. James the Less at St. James Cemetery in Toronto. Records regarding the development of war cemeteries and journals relating to architecture and landscape gardening further show Victorian and Edwardian efforts to develop cemeteries as “the lungs of the city”, as arboretums, or as bird sanctuaries.

14 Public Archives of Ontario

Many collections and much legislation provide information about epidemics and violent death, whether murder, suicide, farm or industrial accident. Much of the most accessible material relates how the country handled at considerable cost the care of its war dead during World War One. Since the cholera epidemics have already been chronicled exhaustively by Canadian historians,¹⁵ we have been focussing instead on the Influenza pandemic of 1918-1919—something which we view as the natural conclusion to the late Victorian era as far as the study of death is concerned.¹⁶ It is an elusive subject to trace, let alone to speculate upon in all of its effects. Provincial Board of Health records tend to be incomplete and potentially misleading about the subject, while the papers from local boards of health—especially Toronto's—provide the most accurate and detailed evidence. Consulting Defense records at the Public Archives of Canada and researching Imperial Health and military records in England are essential steps in any effort to describe the disease's spread or governmental attempts to cope with its ravages. So severe were the effects that as many as twenty five million died throughout the world with an estimated Canadian figure of fifty thousand. Insurance claims in Canada in 1918 were 20.95% related to the war and 32.6% related to influenza; a year later the respective figures were 4.64% and 17.69%.

These were some of the themes which archival collections suggested but few of the private collections and government departmental papers will advance historical research of a quantitative or demographic nature. The best source for this work remains the federal censuses, even though mortality data suffers from all the limitations which historians have discovered for other categories. The censuses of 1852, 1861, 1871 and 1881 contain useful material about age, place of birth and religion; the 1852 and 1861 compilations have information about death by sex, but only for the previous year, and the 1861 census tried to uncover age and cause of death. Schedule Two is the most important component of the 1871 census since it encompasses a *Nominal Return of Deaths Within the Last Twelve Months*, giving much more information than previously: name, age, sex, religious denomination, occupation, place of birth, marital status, month and cause of death. The difficulties? Since information was gathered only for the preceding year, to what extent was that year typical? What were the bases for collecting data? How can the evidence be tested against other material? Since the federal government began systematic collection of vital statistics only in 1921, and it was not until 1926 that every province contributed, conclusions based on Victorian census data are likely to remain as impressionistic as those which are based on surviving personal and departmental collections.

15 The most recent, and in our view, successful effort is Geoffrey Belson, *A Darkened House, Cholera in Nineteenth Century Canada*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980.

16 Some important preliminary work has been done on this topic. See the excellent article by Janice P. Dickin McGinnis, "The Impact of Epidemic Influenza: Canada, 1918-1919: in Canadian Historical Association *Historical Papers*, 1977, 121-140 – reprinted in S.E.D. Shortt (ed.), *Medicine in Canada, Historical Perspectives*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1981, 447-477.

More interesting still for Ontario is the case of the provincial Registrar General's *Reports*, published each year under the terms of the 1869 Registration Act which was twice amended in 1875 and 1895. With the assistance of our colleague George Emery, we had those statistics collected in computerized form, for these *Reports* promised to disclose much about age, the location and occupational incidence of mortality. Summary statistics for population sub-groups such as counties, cities and county towns as well as for the province as a whole are an important feature. The *Reports* attempted to tabulate mortality statistics annually by age, sex, and cause of death (admittedly usually using only descriptive terms such as bronchitis or anaemia). Death rates per 1,000 of the population at rural and urban levels over a number of years, marital status, lists of centenarians and percentage increases or decreases of death were also reported. In 1873 occupation was added by age and sex, and by 1891 the format was standardized to report cause of death, sex, nationality, location, social condition, age and month. However, terms and categories shift frequently; population estimates are highly inaccurate and therefore so too are death ratios; data collected under these acts are incomplete and uneven which makes it difficult to factor in indices of error; cohort analysis is prevented by the lack of individual-level data, and as returns became more accurate after 1911, death rates even appear to rise in the years 1899 to 1918. Never did the deaths reported even approximate the rate of returns given by the federal census for the year prior to the decadal inventory.

Professor Emery's detailed work with this data has shown that these statistics are highly misleading. The collection of the material was never comprehensive or systematic for registration of death was casually observed by medical staff and civil servants both, despite the imposition of Estate Taxes in 1892. The enforcement of burial permits in the 1890's began to harden the statistics, but at best the records can only suggest patterns. Then too, all of the material is aggregate in form, without any apparent links either to nominal or any other individual-level data—or for that matter to other traceable documentary evidence in other government files. Historians wishing to use such material will almost certainly have to supplement it from county registers of wills, haphazard as they are, the records of hospitals, mental asylums, gaols, information generated by the armed forces, and business records from organizations such as the Canada Company whose land records contain registers of wills, or notices of transfer of stock upon the occurrence of death.

The effort of discovering manageable themes and key collections in a large area of interest such as death, is a solid lesson to any historian of the importance of archivists to historical work. We were not broadening our focus from papers and issues which we had earlier explored; not for us the friendly chat with a custodian about the implications of a particular letter, about which docket boxes will be required, or about which collections might be "opened". We needed guidance, discussion, close knowledge of particular collections or legislation, and an ability to see the possibilities and weaknesses of long term, sketchy plans. In the four major depositories (Ontario Archives, City of Toronto Archives, Western's Regional Room and The Public Archives of Canada) in which our efforts were concentrated, we received some exemplary assistance.

Discussions with archivists soon uncovered certain patterns. Although they looked forward to discussions with historians about research problems, a greater portion of their time was actually allocated to serving the needs of genealogists. Despite the considerable archival time spent with the wider public, most archivists were well aware that just as they were the principal custodians and preservers of the past, historians and other academics were the interpreters charged with transmitting an understanding of earlier cultures. The lack of knowledge by the teaching profession about evolving user policies, culling practices, or freedom of information legislation was troubling to the archivists; conversely their own unawareness of university course structures, seminar themes, and enrolment problems seemed to us to be equally evident. Our conclusion: archivists and historians reflect too much the personality of their divergent institutions—not that of a common quest.

For many students of social history these natural divergences seem to be of little concern as long as their historical problems are centred on issues drawn from particular collections or archival sections. Social historians, however, whether cliometricians or not, consistently have been straining against the bounds imposed by the nature of traditional archival manuscripts and departmental papers.¹⁷ There is a pronounced need for academically trained historical archivists who are intimately conversant with relevant legislation, aware of the general nature of the holdings of other depositories, and concerned about charting new methodologies. Closer co-operation between historian and archivist and the institutional support to permit and reward more advanced training cannot long remain the luxuries they appear to be at the moment.

A general interest in new methodology has never been the strong point of either of our professions in Canada. To a degree Canadian sources present difficulties not shared by other related national experiences. Parish records, for example, bespoke a community in other jurisdictions—with a degree of religious uniformity, ethnic similarity, social stratification within one communion or, by Victorian times, class divisions reflected by separate congregations. Their institutional nature had the added merit of making records comparable. In Ontario, unlike Quebec, and early Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, there is no such good fortune and although, for example, the records of Anglican or Roman Catholic parishes have the benefit, from our perspective, of containing the most death-related materials, the fact that the parishes are such limited social fragments, diminishes the great advantage of comparability.

The diversity of records in Canada creates unique problems for our professions. To this must be added the considerable output of our multi-layered governments, our regional varieties, our cultural mix. Then, there are the substantial losses of historical material, especially community and court records, because of neglect, fire, flood, even pestilence. Such factors, especially the diversity of records and their rapidly increasing volume, make archival decisions about collecting, microfilming and sampling extremely important. For example a box of collateral

¹⁷ Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

mortgages, if concentrated in a locality, might compose an invaluable addition to business and social history. Yet over a decade they might scarcely be consulted; they might require several dozen transfer cases to store and would be too expensive to film, considering their use. How can they be sampled without asking historical methodological questions; what criteria are being used to select those retained, and are these reasons being explained in the finding aids? Indeed, are there commonly accepted archival procedures for dealing with materials instrumental not only to the “new” history, but to any systematic study of the past?¹⁸

As helpful as we found the needed advice of archivists to be, we could not but notice that mere consultation of finding aids would have left us completely adrift. For some papers, the guides had been prepared when the collection was first organized but never updated as evolving historiography raised new questions and interests. The weakest portions of these aids usually were the introductions which made little attempt to relate the papers to developing historical work or to lead the interested researcher to comparable collections elsewhere. Indeed the lack of general awareness of related material was evident among departments within the larger archives. Just as the writing of history has become splintered into specialties—so it appears has the collecting and storing of historical documents. Archivists, by inclination and department organization may be actually more tightly locked into one defined area than are university lecturers who regularly cope with broad undergraduate courses.

Archivists are the primary people in the historical chain and therefore may have stronger skills at close questioning of documentation than teaching historians who may be better equipped for synthetic or interpretative aspects of Clio's pursuit. To our minds, the important groundwork which Professor Emery, in particular, has been doing with the Registrar General's *Reports* bear out this viewpoint. Part of his time has been devoted to tracing the statistical movement and the legal framework that created and enforced the collection of government data. Mostly, however, he has been explaining the nature of the evidence itself. Surely, as Gordon Dodds of the Manitoba Archives has argued to us, both tasks are precisely the type of research which archivists themselves ideally should perform. Essentially the question is to enquire of the provenance of these statistics. That basic question, which appears to be addressed routinely for personal papers can be extremely complicated for bureaucratic records—worse it is a question which teaching historians do not usually thoroughly explore themselves. As the methodologies of other social sciences come into wider use, archivists, particularly those who are experienced in answering these types of questions, and are familiar with particular collections or department records, may be the people in the historical network who are best suited to test new hypotheses and models.

Our topic evoked surprise and roughly equal amounts of doubt and enthusiasm from archivists. Although the concept had attracted the attention of several

18 Archivists and historians could profit from reading Frank B. Evans et al, A basic Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators and Records Managers” in *American Archivist*, No. 37, July, 1977

historians and sociologists with whom we have conversed, no archivist had ever considered death as a separate subject for study – not even for the period of the first world war. Similarly, none knew of related material history records at local museums or the National Museum of Man. Library, artistic or newspaper sources were thought to be outside the archives' domain and therefore beyond the interest of many archivists. Professionally this sharp demarcation of concern is understandable; intellectually and practically it is not justifiable. We met no Doughty, and although we shudder to picture all that he might do in the 1980s, we regret the apparent passing of his wide vision. Surely a judicious marriage of specialization and a generalist's perspective and interests are required if historians are to have the diffuse and divergent materials needed for the exploration of *mentalité*. Labour history, yes; military history, yes; technological history, yes; municipal history, yes; the emphasis was upon the categorization of social history and the classification of its materials – not upon unifying themes; not upon marrying wide varieties of evidence, only some of which are contained within transfer cases; not upon the broader goals of social history; not upon “totalising” history.

Archivists of course will never be able to trim their directional sails continually to meet current historical enthusiasms. Too many other responsibilities, especially coping with the present needs of government, intercede, but where the two professions do meet, some friction has been evidenced in recent years. The necessary interdependence of archivist and historian has become an intermittent process. Without joint effort and re-education within both professions, present trends will not be reversed.

This educative rethinking must continue. In terms of quality and incidence, archival education must consider the evolving needs of social history; a consistent *modus operandi* for grappling with the burgeoning complex of records must be developed. Historians, in turn, should be encouraged as part of their graduate work to understand the central roles of archives and archivists, to appreciate the philosophical postures and problems connected to records management as well as the practical elements of burrowing into individual collections. Like other professionals such as government medical officers, archivists should have the opportunity to re-train in terms of new approaches and techniques – with paid encouragement of course from the employer. Both professions surely could join in lobbying for this possibility, since it is in everyone's self-interest.

Neither archivists nor historians, through their Societies, are yet doing all that might be done to encourage government and private agencies to preserve all the records which will be needed by social history. The collecting of materials related to technology for example is still the passion of a very few. So too, both professions need to work together to ensure access to various records, particularly those hitherto restricted for unstated “policy” reasons or for the protection of individual privacy, sometimes three and four generations ago. Some records accumulated by governments are deemed to be sensitive and private and therefore are not open to the public; thus important materials on vital statistics collected by the Ontario Registrar General are not thought by that office to compose an archives which

historians might expect to consult.¹⁹ Only when the co-operative requirements of historian and archivist are identified and pursued, will governments and the business community likely recognize and respond to those needs.

Finally, historians need to regard archivists as central to their own function as interpreters of the past. The importance of the archivist's assistance does not just reside in the pragmatic problems of initiating research; archivists have a fundamental intellectual role as well—one which needs greater emphasis and examination by themselves. Our preliminary work into social history through death showed conclusively that it was archivists who really initiated the historical process. They decided what would be preserved or maintained; they assessed the historical value of material through tracing its provenance; they frequently advertised or noted the existence and importance of historical documents. Indeed archivists might be more assertive for they are, co-operatively, in a unique position to advise historians. In our experience, this guidance had to be diligently sought out by the historian. We had expected this, yet, surely, finding aids should publicly reflect and demonstrate this archival awareness and convey its benefits to the anonymous researcher.

More particularly, the "new" social history may be suited to large co-operative ventures in historical intellectual enquiry. Although interesting ventures have been initiated in other Canadian social sciences, this approach has not yet been effectively utilised in Canadian history. Part of the "totalizing" tendency in other countries has seen scholars work in sizable groups to chronicle and portray the past systematically. A good example is the celebrated Philadelphia History Project. Archivists form a big part of these co-operative ventures and their pivotal function is well understood by the historians with whom they closely work. The study of death could fit into a larger co-operative project addressing the nature of nineteenth century Canadian society; certainly mortality could provide historians and archivists, together, an excellent opportunity to pursue *histoire totale*.

19 D.H. Flaherty, "Access to Historic Census Data in Canada: a Comparative Analysis" in *Canadian Public Administration*, Vol. 20, 1977, 481-498.

