

total archives idea which Canada is pioneering holds the potential for releasing a much more complete “remembering” than traditional archives. Yet it also contains very real pitfalls that could just as easily narrow society’s memory of human accomplishment and personality.

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“The Lively Archives”

Concern over the archives of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation prompted one of the most interesting sessions at the meeting of the Association of Canadian Archivists in Halifax in 1981. A panel discussion, chaired by Eldon Frost of the Federal Archives Division of the Public Archives of Canada, included Robin Woods of the CBC (and the real pioneer of archives within that institution); Derek Reimer, Head of the Sound and Moving Image Division of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia; and Ernie Dick, Chief of Collections Development for the National Film, Television and Sound Archives at the PAC. In the course of the meeting a great many issues were raised by panel members and informed contributors from the floor and many participants in the session must have gone away acutely aware of the complexities involved in the preservation of the records of the CBC—complexities which have their origin in a wide variety of factors.

The CBC is, and has been, one of the kingpins of this country’s culture. Beleaguered and criticised as it has often been throughout its history, nevertheless, the CBC has been one of the bulwarks of a distinctive Canadian identity ever since its creation in the 1930s. If, at times, the sense of identity on CBC radio and television has seemed insecure and ambiguous, this only reflected the uncertainties of Canadians themselves. The CBC for almost fifty years has intimately associated itself with the vicissitudes and anxieties of Canada’s search for itself. In addition the CBC has been a major employer of Canadian writers, intellectuals and performers, and a foremost source of popular entertainment.

Until recently, however, the fate of the archival documentation of this great Canadian institution was not a particularly happy one. A great deal of priceless historical documentation from the past was lost and destroyed for lack of a coherent archival policy within the CBC. Robin Woods in his talk at Halifax pointed out that this situation had begun to change, and he sketched out the advances that had been made, but he warned that much had still to be done to convince the CBC of the value of a full and complete archival record. Ernie Dick of the NFTA, who examined CBC archives from the researcher viewpoint reiterated this and laid emphasis on the problems and lack of preservation of the CBC records in the regions.

The question of the regional archives of the CBC emerged as one of the key issues at Halifax. The national record, both in radio and television, has been carefully monitored in recent years and the agreement between the Public Archives of Canada and the CBC with regards to national historic documentation has ensured that such material will be adequately protected. The CBC, however, although it is a crown corporation and federal agency, has directed a great deal of its energy and enthusiasm throughout its history towards the enrichment and explanation of Canadian life at the local and provincial level. Contemporary archival fashion tends to favour the regionalisation of archives. Regions understand regional

records best, so the dictum says, and, as far as possible, records should be retained in the locality. This is no less true for radio and television than for any other documentation, but, unfortunately, the scale of modern broadcasting poses enormous problems from the archival viewpoint. Audiovisual material consisting of film, video tape and sound tape presents its own peculiar difficulties from the selection, storage and access viewpoint. In addition, there is the expense involved in providing the technical equipment and expertise necessary to administer the material effectively. With regards to the CBC regional records one possible solution to the problem which has been suggested is a joint program between the CBC and the provincial archives modelled, perhaps, on the agreement between the CBC and the PAC. The Public Archives of Nova Scotia and the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan have come to such arrangements with the CBC. Not all provinces have greeted the idea with enthusiasm, however, and their position was well articulated at Halifax by Derek Reimer.

Reimer pointed out that the Provincial Archives of British Columbia had been negotiating with the CBC since 1974 but no agreement had been reached. There were several reasons for this including: the lack of agreed standards for selection and documentation; concern over the intellectual and physical dispersal of records, in particular the separation of the broadcast material from the administrative and policy files. Derek discussed the various options open to the CBC with regards to its regional material; the CBC could take the entire responsibility itself; the PAC could accept responsibility; the CBC could enter into cost sharing arrangements with regional depositories. He reviewed the pros and cons of each of these options and acknowledged reservations about all of them.

The Halifax session was a stimulating and provocative one. It enlightened and alerted the archival community to the problem, but then what? Airing a problem serves no useful purpose unless there is a move towards a cure. In the case of the CBC regional archives there has been a most impressive commitment towards constructive action in the past year and the most notable aspect of this was a three day national conference and workshop on preserving and accessing the programs and other records of the English Services Division of the CBC held at Oakham House in Toronto from January 19th to the 21st 1982.¹

The meeting, which was entitled "The Lively Archives", was sponsored jointly by the PAC and the CBC and included representatives from various sections of these two institutions together with archivists from the provincial archives of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. There was a delegate also from the Glenbow Institute, and university involvement in the preservation of CBC material was represented by Howard Fink of the Radio Drama Project at Concordia University, Montreal.

The main concern of the conference was to provide an account of what had been accomplished in the preservation of CBC material so far and discuss what could be done about the main area of weakness—capturing the "fall out" of the CBC productions in the regions. The discussions were serious, friendly, and frank. The result was a productive and informative three days, which if the cordiality of the final session was any indication, bodes well for future solutions to one of the more serious challenges facing the archival community today.

The meeting enabled various staff members of the CBC to provide expositions of the ways in which archival problems were being tackled by the Corporation. Delegates heard from representatives of Program Archives (responsible for the preservation of radio), Program Resources (television), and CBC Records Management. The legal and management side of the CBC also had opportunities to speak. The CBC regions were ably represented by Ted

1 A conference on the French Services Division is scheduled for May 1982.

North, Director of Radio for the Alberta Regions and Bill Terry, Assistant Director for T.V. Planning, formerly with the CBC in the Winnipeg area. The cumulative effect of this was immensely impressive. As the CBC personnel discussed the problems of selection, preservation and access of broadcasting materials, those present at the meeting gained an insight into the enormity of the task. At the same time, they responded warmly to the obvious dedication and commitment which many CBC staff members are bringing to the problems.

The PAC's role at the meeting was very much that of an honest broker (or perhaps matchmaker?). Mike Swift, Director General of the Archives Branch of the PAC, spoke of his institution's increasing appreciation and acceptance of the principle of regionalisation in archives. The PAC's position on CBC regional material was non-centralist and, indeed, it was felt that it was now time for the PAC to take a "back seat". Sam Kula, Director of the NFTSA, spoke from the particular perspective of that Division. The NFTSA had become very concerned about the CBC material which did not fall within the PAC's "national" mandate but which the PAC did recognise as worth saving. In pursuit of this the NFTSA, in recent years, had contracted out various projects to do with the identification of existing CBC material in the regions. This had been rather an ad hoc type of development with the NFTSA responding to an urgent need for fear that material might be lost. It had, however, led to misconceptions and false assumptions about the PAC's role. The PAC had no intention of funding massive regional programs and, in the NFTSA's view, the best interests of all Canadians would be served by regional archives taking responsibility and reacting to the situation. The NFTSA, through its various initiatives, had had the objective of stimulating regional programs in the conservation of all broadcasting (not just the CBC) but direct PAC assistance under contract for services would in the future be limited only to the initial survey, identification, and program development phase. Any ongoing PAC support would be in the form of the use of "records management" storage facilities at the seven PAC Records Centres which were designed to hold dormant material until it is selected for permanent retention or scheduled for destruction.

The regional representatives at the Toronto meeting revealed an understandable caution about involving themselves in projects which might prove to be extremely expensive. Again and again, they pointed out that the main responsibilities of provincial archives were the records of provincial governments. They referred to the fact that the CBC was a federal institution and speculated whether it would not be better for one body's archives (the CBC) to be handled by one repository (the PAC). They also showed some anxiety about the CBC's insistence on retaining ownership of material as well as its requirement for the rapid access which broadcasters seem to demand. There was obviously a considerable grass-roots feeling among provincial archivists that taking on the burden of CBC records would threaten to overwhelm budgets and staff members who would have to scurry round to respond to the rapid turnaround demands of insistent broadcasters.

Provincial fears were allayed to some extent by Hugh Taylor's description of his experience in Nova Scotia with the CBC. The Saskatchewan representative, Chris Gebhard, while he revealed some qualms about the way the agreement between his province and the CBC has functioned in the past, was optimistic about the way it would function in the future. Roger Easton, Chief of the Technical Operations Section of the NFTSA, was reassuring about the inexpensive ways by which minimum physical control could be gained over radio and television materials. Both he and Sam Kula repeatedly emphasized the technical advice and assistance which the NFTSA would be prepared to give for material which was badly damaged or recorded in obsolete formats. There was a great emphasis on the fact that, while material for rebroadcast was undoubtedly expensive to preserve, research copies of television programs on the 1/2-inch videotape (6 hr. format) would cost only about \$7 per hour.

All this was both informative and persuasive but perhaps the greatest impact on the meeting was made by the two CBC regional representatives, Ted North and Bill Terry. They both

referred to the problem of educating broadcasters to “think archives” and mentioned some of the programs which they believed could be lost, and had been lost, because action had not been taken. Ted North was particularly eloquent as he reacted to provincial references to the “federal” identity of the CBC. CBC stations in the regions, he said, were committed to their localities and their regions and would be utterly dismayed to be considered in anyway as representative of federal interests. Such stations are oriented towards provincial concerns and identify themselves utterly with their region.

If any remark could have been said to have swung the meeting this was it. The rest of the conference was notable for the constructive attitude betrayed by all participants. Fears were aired and discussed freely, without animosity, against the background of the solid information sessions about CBC selection, cataloguing, and indexing procedures. There were never more than thirty-five people at any session and this provided a somewhat intimate and companionable atmosphere which contributed to the meeting’s productivity. This was illustrated on the final afternoon in a strategy session chaired by Ernie Dick.

In his preliminary remarks Ernie referred to the fact that perhaps it was the “unconverted souls” (those most suspicious of audiovisual archives) who were not present at the Toronto Conference. Those who were present, despite their frequently-voiced criticisms, were open to “sensible” solutions if such could be arrived at.

The first major area of discussion centred on the possibilities and usefulness of a direct approach to the Dominion, Provincial & Territorial Archivists at their annual meeting. It was suggested that Ted North might be the ideal person to put the CBC regional point of view and communicate the state of urgency which exists if priceless material, reflecting local and provincial history, is not to be lost forever. Eventually it was decided to make an informal contact with Alan Ridge, Provincial Archivist of Alberta, requesting that the question of the CBC regional archives be put on the agenda of the next Dominion, Provincial, and Territorial Archivists Meeting.

The next major area of discussion focussed on local programming and how it is to be monitored and preserved. If local programs are surviving it is largely due to the initiatives of individual producers with an historical sense. This has not had particularly satisfactory results up till now, but who is to do the job? There was some considerable discussion as to whether Program Archives should monitor local radio right across the country. This debate developed because Program Archives do, in fact, monitor local Toronto radio, but this is very much the result of convenience. Program Archives collects local Toronto material because Program Archives happens to be based in Toronto. Limitations in financial resources and a lack of knowledge of the locality would make it impossible for Program Archives to do the same for the whole country. In the end it was agreed that it was better to monitor local radio in the regions and that this was best done by local archivists contacting CBC personnel about local CBC line-ups. It was also suggested that the CBC should designate liaison people in the regions to make contacts with provincial archives. A continuing exchange of information would heighten archival consciousness about broadcasting within the CBC and local archival institutions.

Another issue which was thrashed out on the final day was the role of the PAC. The PAC is not a grant giving institution and it was clear from the talk of the previous two days that the PAC can only play a very limited role in collecting CBC regional programming and records. On the hand, the PAC is concerned with the survival of broadcasting and it has, in the past, provided seed money through contracts for services. It was apparent that PAC money will not, henceforth, go beyond the “seeding” stage and any such funded projects will terminate in a few years. In the meantime, however, the general consensus was that any PAC assistance to a region should be used in a way appropriate to the region’s need and should be directed towards providing a preliminary identification of the broadcasting backlogs on which prompt action is imperative.

The next focus of attention was on the possibilities of cooperative information exchange programs. In the course of the conference, Jim Beckman of the CBC described a student employment program which he had managed during the summer of 1981. Through this program, which was supported by federal funds available for student employment, students at five regional centres in St. Johns, Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver and Winnipeg had assisted in the work of identifying and cataloguing regional television programs if funds are made available. The CBC intends to continue the project. Beckman asked the provincial representatives if they wished to be firmly identified with the program. Were the provinces, territories and regions interested in looking at the results of the 1982 student employment program managed by the CBC? All the archivists at the meeting were interested and Beckman promised that details and information resulting from the summer project would be forthcoming when it is completed.

Robin Woods of CBC Management then brought up the question of "phonographies" and videographies". Did the regions wish the CBC archivists and librarians to search their inventories for material of regional significance and provide local archives with a "read out". The CBC would do this at a province's request and as time was available. This was an extremely popular suggestion.

This led on to the whole question of cataloguing of CBC material. The cataloguing procedures of both Program Archives and Program Resources had been most ably described during the meeting, but if any arrangement between the CBC and provincial archives is to be effective, then compatibility of cataloguing systems between all institutions is essential. Certainly this has been an important role of discussion in the CBC/PAC cooperation. With regards to cataloguing, the large "front end" job is that of listening and viewing. Enthusiasm at this final session was such that there was a general feeling that, in the future, it might be possible for the listening and monitoring of broadcasting to be done by local archives and then a preliminary report fed back in the CBC for union cataloguing. It was noted that a panel discussion on cataloguing entitled "Towards a Union Catalogue of Broadcasting" is scheduled for the ASCRT conference in May in Toronto and that this discussion at the conference should move the concept closer to reality.

Conservation was the next topic on the agenda. The PAC has made a significant financial investment in equipment in recent years to deal with obsolete as well as current broadcasting formats. The NFTSA reiterated its willingness to aid regional archives especially with regards to the conversion of obsolete formats. The PAC also hopes to negotiate with the major tape companies for special deals on tape and equipment for archival purposes which would be applicable to smaller archives as well as the PAC. The PAC also referred to a series of technical bulletins which it hopes to produce to help smaller institutions with their technical queries. With regards to cooperative public service, the ideal, it was agreed, would be exchange programs between provincial and regional archives as well as the CBC and the PAC. The CBC indicated its willingness to make programs available on loan for research purposes at regional archives.

Finally, the conference decided that a digest of its proceedings should be prepared for ASCRT together with an update of developments in the provinces. Over the coming months information would be fed to ASCRT and the *ACA Bulletin* to keep all those archivists interested in broadcasting informed of developments in the regions. It was with a definite feeling of commitment and optimism in the air that Ernie Dick then called the conference to a close.

We must now wait upon events. No one would suggest that the task ahead is easy but the combination of the CBC commitment and the frank, open discussions between concerned archivists and CBC staff members (most of whom sat the whole three day meeting through) bodes well for the future survival of the CBC records. When all is said and done, and the

jurisdictional and economic problems are allowed for, what is at issue is the archival documentation of this country's greatest and most influential cultural institution. Canada's own ambivalence towards its national identity must not be permitted to endanger priceless archival documentation. It is the CBC in its regional and provincial role which has often had the greatest impact on most Canadians. To let this disappear would be a real Canadian tragedy.

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