

## *J.S. Matthews and an Archives for Vancouver, 1951-1972*

by **ROBIN G. KEIRSTEAD\***

Throughout much of 1972 the usually placid atmosphere of Vancouver's Vanier Park was interrupted by more than just the steady hum of traffic on nearby Burrard Bridge. For several months workmen had been busily erecting a new building adjacent to the City Museum. As the structure took shape, it became apparent that its modern design, intended to blend in with the surrounding parkland, would make it a unique addition to the complex of civic buildings on the site. It was, however, to be unique in more than just appearance. When occupied in November by the staff of the City Archives and Records Centre, the Major Matthews Building became the first archives ever specifically constructed by a Canadian municipality and one of only a few such structures in the world. The completion of the archives was an important milestone as it meant that after nearly four decades of sporadic interest the city's commitment to preserving its records was finally assured. Designated as Vancouver's 1971 Provincial Centennial Project, the million dollar building situated in Vanier Park represented the physical manifestation of that commitment.

It was appropriate that the building bore the name of Major James Skitt Matthews, who served as City Archivist from the creation of the position in 1932 until his death in 1970. As colourful as he was controversial, the "major" was intensely dedicated to the care of his historical records. In his history of Vancouver, Alan Morley characterized the archivist as "a stocky, blunt and peppery enthusiast. He has been accused of obstinacy, arrogance, and even of idiocy, when what possessed him was the blazing white fires of selfless dedication. He has wheedled, importuned and bullied mayors, councils, commissioners ... and spent himself and his money, until Vancouver possesses records of its early days unequalled in any other city in the world."<sup>1</sup>

Despite the solid foundation on which the archives rested in 1972, the facility had come into being only after a long and, at times, bitter struggle. The search for a permanent home for the archives spanned some twenty years. During that time its fate, and that of

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1 Alan Morley, *Vancouver: From Milltown to Metropolis*, 3rd ed. (Vancouver, 1974), p. 55.

the records destined to be preserved therein, was caught up in an intense debate which was inextricably linked with the personality of one of Canada's most remarkable archivists and not resolved until after his death.<sup>2</sup> Although the participants may not have realized it, the debate was over more than simply who would pay for the facility and where it would be located. Rather, the controversy turned on differing perceptions of the nature and function of archives in a modern Canadian city. Regrettably, heritage preservation was pitted against administrative efficiency.

In general terms, archives are the official records of any organization or agency which are of sufficient value to be preserved for reference and research purposes. The importance of these records to the originating body is enhanced by the maintenance of official custody which ensures authenticity.<sup>3</sup> A clear distinction can be made between the archival records of official bodies and the manuscripts or other papers produced or collected by private individuals. While it is common practice for the two types of documents to be held in the same repository, they are arranged and described separately.

Today the City of Vancouver Archives is typical of most Canadian repositories. It contains both official city records and private manuscripts from various individuals and organizations, as well as numerous maps, photographs, and other non-textual material. During his life, however, Matthews focussed his attention on items of historical significance for the city and the surrounding region which, while certainly of interest and importance, were not archival as far as the city was concerned. The major's "archives" consisted primarily of his personal accumulation of assorted manuscripts, memorabilia, and ephemera. They did not constitute official records. Indeed, at the time of his death, some five hundred files of city business records, as well as other documents spanning a period of some sixty years, were stored in the vaults at City Hall.<sup>4</sup> These records were never considered part of the archives administered by Matthews.

While a great deal of what he accumulated over the years was of immense value, and has since formed the nucleus of the fine holdings one encounters at the City Archives today, its nature reflected the fact that Matthews was very much a "self-taught, self-styled archivist."<sup>5</sup> As this material did not represent an archives of the city's administrative or operational records, it is surprising that Matthews's collection survived as well as it did over the years. His claims for the utility of his archives were based on the records' significance as sources for historical research and related cultural value. While these were important considerations, his archives had no involvement in records management, the basis on which much modern civic archival endeavour is justified. Matthews had no interest in such activities. This weakened his arguments when he approached city officials for support for the archives. As well, without official city records his archives often could not meet the needs of the very historical researchers he professed to serve. That he was

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2 Just before his death even Matthews thought his efforts had been in vain. City of Vancouver Archives, City Archives Unit Records (hereafter CAU), vol. 5, J.S. Matthews to Ron Basford, M.P., 10 March 1964. As all further archival references are taken from the City of Vancouver Archives, the repository name will not be cited.

3 For specific definitions of archives, see Sir Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, rev. ed. (London, 1937), p. 4; and T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago, 1956), p. 16. The term "archives" can refer to both the records themselves and the repository within which they are stored.

4 Office of the Mayor (hereafter OM), vol. 45-E-2, file 2, R. Latimer to Mayor Tom Campbell, 12 January 1971.

5 *Ibid.*

able to preserve the archives until such time as records management became an active component, an innovation which took place after his death, is a measure of his perseverance.

The operation of a formal archives, particularly one divorced from the administration of official city records, has never been a typical municipal service in Canada. Traditionally, most local governments have not given such matters a high priority in terms of funding or facilities. In the majority of instances where municipal archives have existed, they have usually been considered strictly historical or cultural resources and as a result have operated as adjuncts to libraries or museums. Indeed, in his detailed examination of local government in British Columbia, Professor Robert Bish of the University of Victoria makes no mention of archives, although he does include both libraries and museums.<sup>6</sup> The experience of Vancouver is, therefore, somewhat uncharacteristic, although this is more the result of the personality of Major Matthews, rather than the foresight of the city's leaders.

There were some sporadic attempts to collect records relating to the city in the early years of this century but little real progress was made until 1932.<sup>7</sup> In that year, responding to public concern that Vancouver's historical records be preserved, City Council appointed Major Matthews as City Archivist. After initial arrangements with the Public Library Board proved unsatisfactory, his position was established within the civic administration. The archives was provided with Room 1016 in the Holden Building, the temporary City Hall. Into this space Matthews moved much of the historical collection he had personally amassed in his home, first as a hobby and later on a full-time basis.

Throughout his life, and indeed until some time after his death, there was a continual debate over the actual ownership of the material in the major's collection. He always contended that any agreements which had been signed, in which he "allegedly" turned the material over to the city, had been obtained "by threat, intimidation and duress."<sup>8</sup> When direction of the archives was given to a Board of Trustees in 1938 there was no one else to act as custodian and so he remained in effective control. This, as Eric Nicol accurately observed, made "his *de facto* status entirely *status quo*." Furthermore, "it was to remain *status quo* while trustees chosen to outlive the major followed one another to the grave."<sup>9</sup> When, late in life, Matthews attempted to will his collection to the province there was no consensus as to how much of the material in the archives he actually owned. Despite the legal niceties, however, the archives was always really "his."

In 1936 the archives moved to the new City Hall. This was the site the major always preferred, close to the seat of power, readily available for reference use by civic officials and members of the general public. He believed his archives would become the showpiece of the new building as it represented in a single location the sum of Vancouver's heritage. Although invariably at odds with some official over some matter, Matthews was satisfied with his accommodation and the role he had established for himself.

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6 Robert L. Bish, *Local Government in British Columbia* (Victoria, 1984), pp. 174-78.

7 CAU, Preliminary Inventory, p. 1. Unless otherwise stated, all details of the early period of the archives (1932-1950) are taken from this source.

8 *Ibid.*, vol. 5, J.S. Matthews, "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of Trustees, Archives of Vancouver," 15 November 1960, p. 6.

9 Eric Nicol, *Vancouver* (Toronto, 1970), p. 186.

As the years passed, the archives expanded, as did the rest of the civic bureaucracy. Space in City Hall was soon at a premium. As early as 1951, a plan to move the archives to the Public Library was considered, although Matthews was apparently never contacted. In a letter to an associate he observed that "one of the odd things about our City Council is that, when they want information on City Archives administration they always ask someone who knows nothing about it; they have *never* consulted the one who knows the most; that's me. And I never offer it." As for any proposed move to the library, he believed that if it happened then "goodbye to the City Archives.... I am convinced that to be an adjunct to another institution would be fatal. We want our own building."<sup>10</sup> Matthews's conclusion is noteworthy as it may well represent the first recorded instance of anyone considering a separate archives facility for Vancouver. Indeed, the major himself usually favoured remaining in the City Hall complex. In any event, the rumour of the move proved premature, but not incorrect.

In 1956 Vancouver's bureaucracy was reorganized with the creation of a three-man Board of Administration. It was soon apparent that planners charged with the modernization and streamlining of City Hall had designs on the space occupied by Matthews and his documents. The major was justifiably perturbed when he read in a morning paper that City Comptroller W.G. Taylor had indicated that the archives might be moved into the new library building on Burrard Street.<sup>11</sup> Never one to be shy of negotiating through the press, Matthews publicly responded in characteristic fashion: "I will not be moved out of City Hall, and I would like to see anybody try to move me out." He succeeded in forcing an unnamed official to admit the relocation proposal was "merely tentative and extremely long range."<sup>12</sup>

Nonetheless, Matthews was all too aware that the archives was beginning to suffer under the severe space limitations imposed on it. Concerned lest he be accused of negligence in this regard, he contacted Mayor F.J. Hume and the members of council, graphically describing the conditions under which he and his patrons operated:

As things stand now the continuous stream of visitors squeeze in through a narrow passage-way, jamb [*sic*] themselves between tables, desks and filing cabinets, until, finally, they reach the only pane of glass through which they can view the City below and the mountains beyond. We explain to them that the confusion is due to the growing-pains of a great city; that it is an expedient desiring commendation rather than condemnation; that we have actually saved our historical material from destruction; and that presently we shall erect a building worthy of a metropolis. It is a lame sort of an excuse.... It presents the appearance more of a storage warehouse than of a record office of a great community.<sup>13</sup>

Although he pleaded for adequate accommodation, Matthews did not consider a move to the Public Library a viable alternative. In a subsequent meeting with the mayor he reiterated his stand that as far as he was concerned, "the City Archives is not moving from City Hall." Despite his defiant stance, the feisty archivist may have sensed that his days in City Hall were numbered. He offered the mayor the use of his personal property beside

10 CAU, vol. 4, Matthews to Robert R. Maitland, 20 August 1951.

11 *Ibid.*, Matthews to W.G. Taylor, 22 November 1956.

12 "Move Me? Just Try It, Says Major," *Vancouver Sun* (hereafter *Sun*), 23 November 1956.

13 CAU, vol. 4, Matthews to Mayor Hume and City Council, 17 May 1957.

Kitsilano Beach if the city would build a proper archives building on that site. Mayor Hume's response is not recorded.<sup>14</sup>

Matthews's concern over the future location of the archives intensified as it became apparent that a move was imminent. The growth of civic administration had continued to the point where those departments believed to be most able to act independently, Electrical, Health, and Archives, were designated to leave City Hall. At the 13 August 1958 meeting of the Archives Society, the body which had replaced the Board of Trustees in 1948 when the archives was incorporated, Mayor Hume announced a proposal to move the archives to either the Western Drugs warehouse or the top floor of the Bicycle Registry building. Both buildings were located on Broadway. Matthews retorted that he would rather close the archives, a recurrent threat in such situations, rather than relegate the "soul of Vancouver" to a building which looked like (and in one case was) a warehouse. He would only consent to move into temporary quarters if he received a written guarantee of a permanent archives building. His reluctance reflected the general concern of the Archives Society that the city might view any temporary relocation as permanent. In response to a suggestion that money be voted for the erection of an archives, Mayor Hume indicated that he could put this before the next meeting of council. Ever skeptical, Matthews told Hume, "I will buy you a crown of gold if you will get me a By-Law to build a new building."<sup>15</sup> In Vancouver, in 1958, the mayor knew his money was safe. It would have taken a concerted effort to persuade council to earmark money for a facility that was of interest to only a small segment of the population and which provided no perceptible service to the city. Indeed, there is no evidence that the matter of an archives building was ever raised in council.

The Archives Society meeting adjourned with a suggestion that, in lieu of the locations suggested by the city, one of the RCAF buildings on the Kitsilano Indian Reserve might prove suitable. The next day several members visited the Air Station and met with the Minister of National Defence, and fellow-Vancouverite, General G.R. Pearkes. The delegation, which included Matthews, was impressed with the facilities but after several months of negotiation Pearkes advised the city that all existing buildings, including those currently vacant, were part of the operational defence requirements on the West Coast and were therefore not available.<sup>16</sup> While these discussions were still in progress, Matthews investigated a variety of other options, including space in the soon to be completed Maritime Museum and an entire floor in the proposed addition to City Hall. None of these possibilities proved feasible. It was apparent that a home for the archives was not of sufficient concern to warrant any major expenditure on the part of the city.

The question of a home for the archives reappeared on the agenda of the first meeting of the Archives Society for 1959. Newly installed Mayor A.T. Alsbury indicated that both he and the members of City Council appreciated the value of the archives and were "most desirous of seeing that the Archives are properly housed and maintained." Following the mayor's remarks it was suggested by a member of the Society that the archives co-locate with the City Museum. Perhaps as a result of the enthusiastic reaction that

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14 *Ibid.*, Matthews to Col. T.G. Norris, 19 June 1958. In this letter to a fellow member of the Archives Society, Matthews recounted the events of his previous meeting with Mayor Hume.

15 *Ibid.*, Archives Society of Vancouver, draft minutes, 13 August 1958.

16 "Archives still need a home," *Vancouver Province* (hereafter *Province*), 14 August 1958; and CAU, vol. 4, Pearkes to Matthews, 4 September, Matthews to Pearkes, 5 December; and Pearkes to Matthews, 22 December 1958.

greeted this plan, another member rather naively contended that an archives building might attract as many visitors as the Stanley Park Aquarium! One of the senior trustees, General V.W. Odium, cautioned those present that the archives was not an entertainment facility, but rather a place of reference which should be near the mayor, the individual who most needed access to the records. Mayor Alsbury agreed, stating that if a proposed City Hall expansion was approved before the Western Drug building lease was signed he would favour the inclusion of the archives in the new wing. When asked to what extent previous chief executives had used the archives' facilities, Matthews responded that the mayor's staff was constantly asking for information and referring to the records. In addition, at the request of the mayor's secretary he had written a number of speeches for various civic officials over the years.<sup>17</sup> While the archives provided the mayor with historical information about certain events, the official records which documented past civic policies and activities remained scattered in the originating offices or in various, often inadequate, storage facilities. In reality, for the everyday administrative and operational reference needs of city officials, as well as those of researchers interested in documenting the city's past, the mayor's archives was of little practical value.

In the wake of this meeting, the Archives Society officially petitioned City Council requesting that the archives remain in City Hall on a permanent basis. To alleviate crowding, it suggested that the non-archival artifacts, a number of which Matthews had collected over the years, be removed for temporary display in the City Museum.<sup>18</sup> A week later, on 10 February, the executive of the society addressed council and persuaded the aldermen to refer the matter to the Board of Administration. The board was instructed to prepare a report with a view to the retention of the archives proper within City Hall.<sup>19</sup> This motion was not obtained without disagreement. The Deputy Chairman of the Board of Administration indicated that he did not think the matter merited such attention. "A few people might take an interest in archives," he was overheard to remark, "but the mass of people do not."<sup>20</sup> While upsetting to the supporters of the archives, the assertion was probably accurate. Although Matthews's personality made the archives more newsworthy than would normally have been the case, it is still doubtful that more than a small minority of citizens was aware that the archives even existed, let alone was concerned about its location or well-being. More importantly, this sentiment reflected the view of many city officials. While the mayor's staff made some use of Matthews's collection for historical research, because the archives contained few civic records it was of little apparent value to the majority of city employees. In their eyes, historical and cultural needs could best be served by a museum or library. This seemed to be particularly true for the members of the Board of Administration. As well as advising council, the board handled much of the management of the city and, since its establishment in 1956, its commissioners had been gradually gaining power at the expense of the elected officials.<sup>21</sup> To be opposed by the Board of Administration was to face an almost certain defeat, as the Archives Society was soon to discover.

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17 CAU, vol. 4, Archives Society, minutes, 29 January 1959.

18 *Ibid.*, Gen. Odium to Mayor Alsbury, 2 February 1959.

19 Office of the City Clerk (hereafter OCC), Series 2: Minutes of Council, vol. 70, microfilm, reel MCR-1-73, 10 February 1959.

20 CAU, vol. 4, Archives Society to Alsbury, 26 February 1959.

21 Donald Gutstein, "Vancouver," in Warren Magnusson and Andrew Sancton, eds., *City Politics in Canada* (Toronto, 1983), p. 199.

At the 24 February meeting of Council the Board of Administration presented its report on the archives situation. Concluding that it was essential for the space occupied by the archives to be used for other purposes, the board asserted: "A review of the use of the Archives indicates that possibly 95% of the use made of the Archives is by business, industry, newspapers, radio, schools, etc., with not more than 5% of the use pertaining to civic departments. This appears to justify the view that the location of the Archives in the City Hall is not necessarily the ideal location for the Archives."<sup>22</sup>

Measured against the impersonal yardstick of administrative efficiency, the archives had been found wanting. While it acted unfairly in downplaying the total contribution of the archives, the board was nonetheless accurate in pointing out that it did not make a major contribution to the city's day-to-day operations. It was with some justification that it recommended that the archives be moved to either the upper floor of the Bicycle Registry at Broadway and Yukon (only three blocks from City Hall) or the new Public Library on Burrard. Council accepted the report and decided to wait and see which option the Archives Society found most favourable.

As the Bicycle Registry building had never been acceptable to Matthews, attention was focussed on the library. Although it was smaller than was desired, the space on the third floor of the new structure appeared to meet the needs of the archives. After visiting the facility the day after council's decision, General Odlum voiced his approval, telling the major that "I feel sure we will all like it." He also concluded that "to move into it would be to get away from the confusion and internal politics of the city hall to an atmosphere which, I am certain, will be much nearer the thing we want."<sup>23</sup> Odlum was satisfied, but the major had yet to be persuaded.

Matthews remained adamant that City Hall was the proper home for the archives. He firmly believed that all efforts should be focussed on finding a suitable location therein. He was also extremely critical of the way in which decisions about the future of the archives were being made, particularly by the Board of Administration. In his view, the Board lacked any real knowledge or understanding of archives. Replying to General Odlum, he charged that no member of the Board had set foot in his archives in the past twenty years. It was therefore inconceivable that any such report could have been prepared without consultation with him. As for the actual operation of the archives under civic administration, Matthews asserted that it should be completely divorced from the jurisdiction of City Hall:

Assuming that we became a department of city administration on January 1st, 1958, then our experience since has been one long series of disturbances which have so interfered with archival progress as largely to eliminate the effectiveness of our effort. Our strength is devoted to keeping up the system regardless as to whether we produce anything of archival nature .... It is assumed in the City Hall that we are a department of civic administration. No meeting of the Trustees of the Archives was ever held to authorise such a transfer .... I decline to acknowledge that the City Archives is a department, although for the sake of peace I am conforming.<sup>24</sup>

In many ways, Matthews wanted to have his cake and eat it too as far as the archives was concerned. He contended that the rightful place of the archives was attached or

<sup>22</sup> OCC, minutes, vol. 70, reel MCR-1-73, 24 February 1959.

<sup>23</sup> CAU, vol. 4, Odlum to Matthews, 25 February 1959.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Matthews to Odlum, 3 March 1959.

adjacent to City Hall, where it would function as a reference source for the civic administration. At the same time, he did not want to participate in that administration. A tenuous line of reasoning at best, it was not one designed to persuade the city fathers to provide a new home for his archives. The major's position was further eroded by the fact that his archives contained few of the records to which officials would require reference. Now that it was obvious that the powerful Board of Administration had a low opinion of the archives' overall importance, his chances of success in his battle with council were slight.

Undaunted, Matthews advanced a series of alternatives to the city's recommendations, including sites on the Kitsilano Indian Reserve and the park opposite the Seaforth Armoury. He again offered the city his own land, as well as the rest of his personal collection of records and papers, if a building would be provided. As for the Public Library plan, he considered it little more than a five-year stopgap arrangement, after which time he would be asked to move. As was often the case, the major was not far off the mark. Despite his misgivings, however, the Archives Society finally agreed to the proposed move. Responding to council, the trustees emphasized that this acceptance was conditional on the space being available for a minimum of five years and, more importantly, that the archives "be required to make no further move until a special building for them is designed, acceptable to the Archives Society, [and] is erected and available to them for occupancy."<sup>25</sup> Reacting to this latest development, and in all likelihood in an attempt to lay the matter of a new archives building to rest for the time being, Mayor Alsbury indicated to Matthews that such a structure "can not be considered at the present time and can only be a matter for discussion with the Council of the day when space is no longer available in the Central Library for the Archives."<sup>26</sup> Despite the lack of a commitment from the mayor for a new building in the future, the plans for the move went ahead.

With the decision made, the major and his staff began preparations for the arduous task of transporting his now extensive collection to the third floor of the library. As far as Matthews was concerned, however, the issue was not quite dead. One last salvo was fired through the press. On 21 March the citizens of Vancouver were doubtless surprised to read in the *Province* that a million dollar archives was planned. This proposal, which Matthews had prepared for consideration by the Archives Society, called for construction to take place opposite the Seaforth Armoury. Such a building, the report continued, would eventually be necessary as the City Archivist confidently expected to be told to leave the library within five years. When asked about the source of the necessary funds, Matthews retorted that "the money can be raised by wealthy citizens and the Canada Council."<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, nothing came of this latest scheme.

This incident notwithstanding, the move to the library was completed without further serious confrontation, and soon Matthews had, in Eric Nicol's words, "consolidated a position as impregnable as ever."<sup>28</sup> Despite being forced out of City Hall, he had again succeeded in placing his archives, warts and all, in both the public and administrative forums of Vancouver city politics. He was now biding his time before launching another operation designed to secure an acceptable home for his collection. The following year he told a gathering of the trustees of the Archives Society that the operation of his archives,

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25 *Ibid.*, Archives Society to mayor and council, March 1959.

26 OM, vol. 36-B-6, file 7, Alsbury to Matthews, 16 March 1959.

27 "\$1,000,000 archives building is planned," *Province*, 21 March 1959.

28 Nicol, *Vancouver*, p. 232.



which he characterized as being national in its service, depended upon two things: "First: A proper building with offices, show rooms, work rooms, and vaults. Second: A devoted staff who never look at a clock."<sup>29</sup> With the major in charge the latter was already assured; it remained to be seen what he could do about the former.

For all practical purposes the issue of a permanent home for the archives lay dormant for nearly two years after the move to the library. When it resurfaced it did so with an unexpected twist. On 11 April 1961 the *Province* informed Vancouverites that an anonymous donor had pledged a quarter of a million dollars to finance the construction of a new archives building. In return, the city was asked to provide the necessary land and undertake the annual maintenance costs of the structure. Ten days later the mysterious benefactor was identified as P.A. Woodward, honorary vice-president of Woodward Stores and a trustee of the archives.<sup>30</sup>

The formal offer of an archives building represented the culmination of several months' worth of quiet preparation. Although the initial details remain somewhat sketchy owing to the secrecy involved at the time, sometime in 1960 Matthews and Woodward began preliminary discussions on the future of the archives. At one point, Woodward was reported to have asked the major bluntly "would \$250,000 build it?" The latter responded that he thought it would.<sup>31</sup> The proposal was put before the Archives Society for consideration in November of that year. The reaction was favourable and a committee was established to prepare a brief to City Council. Before meeting with the aldermen a great deal of preparatory work was undertaken by Woodward and his associates. As just one example, architect W.G. Leithead was sent to Ottawa and then to England to meet with various officials and to investigate repository design before drafting a proposal for council. While a general mood of optimism prevailed, Matthews sounded a note of warning. He said that "if prompt attention is not given to matters as they arise, it will end up in a confused crisis."<sup>32</sup> He had dealt with the city for too long to take anything for granted.

At the 11 April meeting at City Hall a delegation officially presented council with a fourteen page brief outlining both the general terms of the donation and the technical specifications of the proposed building. The aldermen dealt with the offer two days later, thanking the as yet unidentified donor and asking for more details.<sup>33</sup> The overall reaction of council was evidently notable for its lack of enthusiasm, as it was reported in the press that "the city does not actually seem to be too interested in the offer of a building." The request for more details, for example, came as a surprise to George F. Buscombe who, with Leithead, was representing Woodward. When interviewed, he revealed that a copy of the brief had been submitted a week earlier, "but when we got to council ... no one seemed to know what we were talking about." He indicated that if the offer was declined, the donor was prepared to build an archives on the campus of the University of British Columbia.<sup>34</sup>

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29 CAU, vol. 5, Matthews, "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of Trustees," 15 November 1960, p. 7.

30 "\$250,000 donation to archives," *Province*, 11 April 1961; and "Archives donor identified," *Province*, 21 April 1961.

31 CAU, vol. 5, Matthews to Woodward, 26 July; Woodward to Matthews, 29 July; and Matthews to Woodward, 12 August 1960. The details of the specific conversation noted in the text are found in *Ibid.*, Matthews to Hon. Howard Green, M.P. 16 December 1960.

32 *Ibid.*, Matthews to C.E. Thompson, 23 January 1961.

33 OCC, minutes, vol. 76, reel MCR-1-79, 11 and 13 April 1961.

34 "City could lose offer of archives," *Province*, 14 April 1961.

If council was merely hesitant, other interested parties were decidedly negative about the offer. The day after the initial announcement, the Chairman of the Library Board, W.T. Brown, contacted Mayor Alsbury to express his opposition to the scheme. As the library and archives were both research institutions, the Library Board believed it was essential for the convenience of the public that they be kept together. Denying that the library was seeking to take over the archives, Brown argued that if in the future it was decided to place the two agencies under a single jurisdiction, this would be made difficult if the archives was located in a separate building.<sup>35</sup> Given the library's subsequent attitude toward the archives, one cannot help but speculate that this appeal was motivated at least in part by an element of jealousy over the donation and the attention it was focussing on the archives. In many ways the two institutions were rivals, in part as a result of their different orientation, but mainly because of Matthews's often abrasive personality. Brown's appeal also had the effect of reinforcing civic officials' perceptions of the archives as a research institution of little practical value to the city.

The other body actively involved in the response to the Woodward offer was the Board of Administration. On 17 April, City Clerk Ron Thompson informed Board Commissioner Gerald Sutton Brown of council's wish to "place the appropriate City officials," in other words the board, at Leithead's disposal to assist in preparing a written proposal concerning the archives.<sup>36</sup> Sutton Brown has been characterized by urban planner and author Donald Gutstein as "the most powerful person at City Hall, his power verging on the absolute."<sup>37</sup> With few exceptions, what he and his colleague, John Oliver, recommended to council came to pass. Once again the archives' bid for a new building had to bear scrutiny by the Board of Administration. The next day Oliver and Leithead met to discuss what the former termed the "whole problem of the Archives." Rather than dealing with the proposed donation, it is evident that much of the deliberation focussed on the possibility of the archives being "handled" by either the Public Library or the City Museum. Leithead agreed to forward copies of his report to the Librarian and Museum Director but he reminded the commissioner that he was tied by the terms of the donor's gift. Oliver later reported that the architect told him "that the donor will be content if he knows that the matter is being actively considered."<sup>38</sup> It remained to be seen just how long that contentment would last.

The behind-the-scenes negotiations continued for some time, with the supporters of the plan growing impatient, and not without justification. On 16 May, Commissioner Oliver appeared before council and advised those present of the progress to date. The minutes of that meeting are frustratingly vague. They record only that "The Commissioner reported [that] various matters in connection therewith have been discussed both with these principals and with the officials concerned and proceeded to relate details of the discussions. Various members of Council made suggestions with respect to an Archives building. The whole question was deferred for later decision."<sup>39</sup>

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35 OM, vol. 36-D-1, file 7, W. Tom Brown to Alsbury, 12 April 1961.

36 *Ibid.*, copy of Board of Administration correspondence, Ron Thompson to G. Sutton Brown, 17 April 1961.

37 Gutstein, "Vancouver," p. 199.

38 OM, vol. 36-D-1, file 7, copy of Board of Administration file memo, signed by John Oliver, 19 April 1961.

39 *Ibid.*, text of council minutes, dated 16 May, in confidential letter, Deputy City Clerk R.H. Little to Alsbury, 18 May 1961.

Although the issue was evidently discussed again, an examination of council minutes for the period in question suggests that a final decision was never publicly made. By mid-summer, however, it was clear that the offer was not being favourably received, and it was subsequently withdrawn.<sup>40</sup>

The exact basis on which council reached its decision is not clear, particularly as the minutes do not appear to indicate the final Board of Administration findings. However, when the matter of an archives building resurfaced in 1969, Leithead reflected that eight years earlier the council of the day had decided that the city could not afford the continuing maintenance and operating costs of an archives building, and had rejected Woodward's offer on that basis.<sup>41</sup> While it is tempting to search for more convoluted motives behind the decision, this was most likely the case. The costs would have been sizable and without the archives playing an active part in civic administration, such as the basis of a records management programme, there was no practical benefit to be realized. While an archives would have pleased Matthews and his supporters, it was not a priority for council nor, one suspects, for most ratepayers. Perhaps the only unfortunate aspect of the entire episode was the manner with which council handled the Woodward offer.

As for the plan to build the archives at the University of British Columbia, the major privately opposed it on the grounds that it would be too far away from the city center. He was also afraid that such an archives would become a "mere adjunct" to the university.<sup>42</sup> Autonomy was always one of his primary concerns. Thus nothing ever came of the Woodward-financed archives, although the money eventually did find its way to UBC in the form of the Woodward Instructional Resources Center and Biomedical Library.

In the aftermath of this debacle, Matthews was incensed; he was convinced that "without the slightest knowledge of the facts" council had rebuffed a devoted servant.<sup>43</sup> Yet he was not very surprised. In a lengthy letter to G. S. Gibson, Deputy Agent General at B.C. House in London, he confided: "The withdrawal of Mr. P.A. Woodward's offer to erect an archival building was not a shock to me, for the reason that I am now shockproof. When I heard that the City Council had treated Mr. Woodward's offer with scant courtesy, amounting almost to disdain, I began to wonder 'what next', but was in no way disturbed."<sup>44</sup>

As for the future of his archives, he decided to offer all of the collection to which he held legal title, in or out of the archives, to the province. He had come to the conclusion that Vancouver's historical records should not be left under the control of what he viewed as "the uncertain vagaries" of council. In his estimation, over the past thirty years that body had proven to be "a very unsatisfactory and, at times, irresponsible administrator and custodian."<sup>45</sup>

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40 CAU, vol. 5, Matthews to A.H. Hall, 8 February 1963. Reflecting on the events of the summer of 1961, Matthews concluded that the plan "received such a cool reception from the City Council that Mr. Woodward withdrew his offer."

41 Vancouver Historical Society (hereafter VHS), Add. MSS. 478, vol. 3, file 6, Leithead to J.C. Lawrence, 2 December 1969.

42 CAU, vol. 5, Matthews to George Buscombe, ca. 14 April; and Matthews to G.S. Gibson, 29 September 1961.

43 *Ibid.*, Matthews to Leithead, 18 July 1961.

44 *Ibid.*, Matthews to Gibson, 29 September 1961.

45 *Ibid.*

Matthews held the conviction that the city was not the proper caretaker for his collection for the rest of his life. While the legal debates over ownership, and the various attempts to have the major removed or retired, are not within the direct scope of this paper, they nonetheless reflect the typically confrontational attitude that existed between Matthews and successive slates of aldermen. As Bud Elsie remarked in a 1964 *Province* article aptly entitled "Another battle brewing?," the major "has always made clear his views on ... decisions with which he disagreed. He's lost few battles with council."<sup>46</sup> During these conflicts the recalcitrant archivist reiterated his conviction that if left to Vancouver's elected representatives and their advisors, the fate of the archives would be its destruction.<sup>47</sup> In such an atmosphere, for which Matthews was, as always, at least partly responsible, an archives building was not a probable development. He could be, and often was, his own worst enemy, hindering, by the nature of his insistence, the very goal he sought to achieve.

By early 1964 the archives was approaching the end of its five-year tenure at the Public Library and, as Matthews had predicted, the Library Board wanted to take back the third floor. In a submission to council, the board argued that the public was making little use of the archives, that much of the space was occupied by museum artifacts rather than archives (evidently in violation of the 1959 agreement), and, finally, that the library could make better use of the space.<sup>48</sup> It is ironic that the organization which just three years earlier had lobbied strenuously and effectively for the retention of the archives now wanted it out. In characteristic fashion, Matthews retorted that "the sooner they get me out of this dump the better." As for council's expected review of the matter, he said he would be pleased "if the city would divorce itself entirely of the archives."<sup>49</sup>

That a City Archivist could make such a statement is clear evidence of how far removed the major's collection was from a true municipal archives. This incident also emphasized the inherent contradictions of Matthew's position *vis-à-vis* his archives and the city. He wanted his archives to be situated in or near City Hall, and yet he refused to function as part of the administration and he would brook no interference from civic officials. In addition, while he encouraged these same civic officials and members of the public to use his collection, his archives did contain the official records which could be of most value. To collect these records in any systematic fashion Matthews would have had to become involved in at least some basic form of records management. Given his determination to remain apart from civic administration, such an eventuality was all but impossible.

While some aldermen might have agreed with the major's suggestion that the city divest itself of responsibility for the archives, council grudgingly turned its attention back to the issue of a location for the archives. Having met with the Library Board, the Civic Government Committee reported that the request to terminate the existing agreement was valid and recommended that action be taken to "acquire other premises" for the archives. Council instructed the Board of Administration to investigate the availability and potential cost of such facilities. In the meantime, the archives would continue to use

46 Bud Elsie, "Another battle brewing?" *Province*, 22 January 1964.

47 See CAU, vol. 5, Matthews to W.D. Black, Provincial Secretary, 18 February 1962; Matthews to Major R.H. Tupper, 30 July 1962; and Matthews to L.J. Wallace, Deputy Provincial Secretary, 7 January 1963.

48 OCC, minutes, vol. 86, reel MCR-1-89, discussion of 16 April Library Board submission, 7 July 1964.

49 "Get out? It's major's pleasure," *Province*, 25 June 1964.

its present accommodation.<sup>50</sup> As events unfolded, this proved to be a significant decision. The archives was destined to remain in the Public Library for another eight years.

While the archives situation was subjected to yet another examination, matters remained generally quiet until the next year. In May 1965 a report commissioned by the Museums Board proposed, among other things, that an archives and local history pavilion be included as part of the new City Museum. The author of the report, T.A. Heinrich, suggested that "it would be highly appropriate to name this pavilion for the only begetter of of the Archives, Major Matthews."<sup>51</sup> A month later, Alderman Tom Campbell made a formal recommendation to this effect. The Matthews Pavilion would form part of the museum complex which was to be the city's Centennial Project, commemorating the union of Vancouver Island with the mainland in 1866 and Confederation a year later. Matthews responded to the announcement that "of course I'm pleased with the suggestion, but I don't give a dam [*sic*] what they call it as long as it gets built."<sup>52</sup> His caution was again justified. Despite further activity, including several meetings between aldermen and museum officials, the plan foundered. When details of the one and a half million dollar complex in Vanier Park were finalized, the archives was missing. As the new archives had been proposed as merely an adjunct to the museum, it was in all likelihood removed from the plan on the basis of cost. It is nonetheless worthy of comment that something had been added to the museum — a planetarium — but only because of an anonymous donation of a half million dollars!<sup>53</sup>

With the failure of this latest plan, Matthews and his archives remained firmly ensconced in the cramped library quarters, despite the Library Board's efforts to evict him. He continued to badger council about a more suitable location and by 1967 he succeeded in forcing a reopening of the discussion. The major pressed for accommodation nearer to City Hall, preferably in its proposed annex, although two other locations, a new wing on the Centennial Museum and the old City Museum at Hastings and Main, were also discussed. While a decision was again deferred, it was becoming apparent that the issue of a proper home for the archives was gaining a measure of public credibility, particularly when the local situation was compared with Calgary and Victoria, where staff and budget allocations exceeded those of Vancouver.<sup>54</sup> This growing sentiment was clearly expressed in mid-June of that year by a newspaper article which contended that "surely a city that chose a museum as its major centennial project must be sufficiently conscious of history to want its official records properly displayed and readily available to Vancouverites and visitors."<sup>55</sup> The fact that the major's archives contained few, if any, official city records was evidently not recognized.

This growing support for the archives was gratifying for Matthews and his supporters, but its comparison with the museum revealed that the true nature and potential of a city archives was still not generally understood. While not a major area of activity, museums have traditionally received some financial support from municipal governments in British

50 OCC, minutes, vol. 86, reel MCR-1-89, 7 July 1964.

51 Theodore Allen Heinrich, *The Vancouver Museums: A Report on Their Situation and Possible Developments* (Vancouver, 15 May 1965), p. 6. This copy was located in CAU, vol. 5.

52 "Major duly flattered: 'Now build archives,'" *Province*, 17 June 1965.

53 The financial details of both structures are taken from OM, vol. 45-B-5, file 7, Vancouver Centennial Committee, financial statement, 17 August 1966. The anonymous donor was later identified as H.R. Macmillan, after whom the planetarium was named. See Nicol, *Vancouver*, p. 241.

54 "Major's 30-year war on archives near end?" *Province*, 14 June 1967.

55 "Archives: A Major victory," *Province*, 16 June 1967.

Columbia.<sup>56</sup> Archives have some of the same characteristics of museums, in the areas of public interest and service, but their appeal is to a much smaller audience. Funding has therefore not been so readily attainable. As a result, requests for support for archives have to focus clearly on the real benefits associated with them, such as the acquisition and preservation of official records for reference use. When viewed as simply an outgrowth of an existing institution, in this case a museum, such appeals have seldom had much effect.

There was little chance of a new archives receiving serious consideration while the Centennial Museum was still under construction, but by early August 1968 the question of a building to honour Major Matthews was again raised. Responding to a suggestion to that effect from Dr. Archibald Key, a noted museum consultant who was visiting Vancouver, Alderman Marianne Linnell indicated her support for the idea, but she also acknowledged that it would be up to a private citizen or a member of council to take the lead in this regard.<sup>57</sup> On the thirteenth of the month, council itself seized the initiative and set up a committee, composed of Aldermen Linnell and Wilson, to investigate "the future handling and housing of our archives and to recommend a suitable way of honouring our first Archivist, Major Matthews."<sup>58</sup> Approaching his ninetieth birthday, Matthews appeared genuinely touched by this latest gesture and, perhaps reflecting a final lessening of tensions between himself and council, he wrote Mayor Campbell stating that the motion of 13 August was "welcomed and treasured."<sup>59</sup>

While consideration of a home for the Matthews collection continued, other events began to influence the city's attitude towards the retention and storage of civic records. As indicated earlier, Vancouver's official records were outside the purview of the major's archives. Indeed, as Barry Broadfoot observed a few years later, Matthews "never really recognized the existence of a Supreme Body, except God and each current reigning English monarch, [and so] City Council and administrators, in turn, never would allow any vital or routine documents to fall into the major's hands."<sup>60</sup>

Official records believed to be of long-term significance were housed in City Hall vaults. However, as there was no systematic form of records management, the appraisal and transfer of these records from the various offices proved to be a hit-and-miss arrangement. By the late sixties the volume of records generated by the civic bureaucracy had increased to the point where the arrangement was proving to be more miss than hit! This situation came to public attention in dramatic fashion in October 1969 when two youths discovered a large number of city records which had been dumped as land fill on an empty lot in neighbouring Burnaby.<sup>61</sup> These records, which documented aspects of the early history of Vancouver, had probably been discarded in order to save space in some department office. The records were immediately retrieved by an embarrassed city administration.

The Community Arts Council and the Vancouver Historical Association were among the many groups and individuals shocked by this revelation. Both organizations had been concerned about the fate of the city's archives for some time. In the wake of the Burnaby

56 Bish, *Local Government*, p. 176.

57 "Archives building supported," *Province*, 3 August 1968.

58 OCC, minutes, vol. 99, reel MCR-1-104, 13 August 1968.

59 OM, vol. 45-C-4, file 4, Matthews to Campbell, 16 August 1968.

60 Barry Broadfoot, "The Major's work: Archives or just collection?" *Sun*, 26 December 1970.

61 VHS, vol. 3, file 6, J.C. Lawrence to the editor of the *Province*, 19 November 1969. The letter was published on 2 December. The incident described took place in mid-October.

incident they took up the cause of both a new home for the archives and the implementation of proper management of records by the city. In a strongly worded letter, the President of the Historical Society, Joseph C. Lawrence, reminded City Council that formal records management had been advocated in a submission by the society in March 1964, and even earlier by the report of a management consulting firm commissioned by the city itself. City Clerk Thompson replied that council had recently empowered the Board of Administration to contact the Public Archives in Ottawa and the "Research [sic] Management Sections" of major cities to enquire about records scheduling and disposal procedures. As for the 1964 proposals, he admitted that the matter had been considered by council but rejected on the recommendation of the Civic Government Committee. No reason for this decision was given.<sup>62</sup>

Not easily put off, the Vancouver Historical Society pursued the matter of a proper archives and records center. It was contacted by W.G. Leithead, who recounted the details of the ill-fated 1961 Woodward offer. Lawrence, on behalf of the society, replied to Leithead and inquired whether, as Council was "certain to object to our plans on the basis of the cost," the Woodward family might still be a willing benefactor for the archives.<sup>63</sup> There is no evidence that this possibility was investigated further and, given the response of the city in 1961, it is difficult to believe a similar offer would have been forthcoming from the family. Nonetheless, one cannot help but speculate that the Woodward plan, rejected on the basis of cost, might have received a more favourable reception had the records storage problem of 1969 existed eight years earlier.

While public debate on the archives and records situation continued, council was negotiating with the Permanent Records Department of UBC with regard to possible record storage. In 1968 the university had offered to take some records in order to alleviate crowding in City Hall. In return, it was suggested that these records be made available for research. At that time Mayor Campbell responded that "most members of council felt the records should stay in the custody of the city *until we establish proper archives.*"<sup>64</sup> What the mayor meant by "proper archives," and their relationship to the mayor's collection, remains unclear. A year later, however, the situation was sufficiently serious to impel council to reconsider the UBC offer to classify and store a portion of the mayor's files which were considered worthy of archival retention. The terms of the arrangement were finalized in early 1970.<sup>65</sup> This agreement represented a tacit admission by the City of Vancouver that the records storage problem had become unmanageable, that it merited serious consideration, and that some permanent solution was required. This realization, perhaps more than all previous lobbying on behalf of the archives, had an impact on council. Yet it remained to be seen whether records management and its attendant benefits would succeed in justifying a proper archives building where Matthews and his supporters had thus far failed.

It was in this atmosphere that progress was achieved, albeit gradually. In June 1970, in response to a suggestion from Langara College that the archives be placed there, council appointed yet another committee to meet with the City Clerk and report on the current

62 *Ibid.*, Lawrence to Mayor Campbell and Council, 20 November; and Thompson to Lawrence, 26 November 1969.

63 *Ibid.*, Leithead to Lawrence, 2 December 1969; and Lawrence to Leithead, n.d.

64 "U.B.C. wants city records," *Sun*, 28 February 1968. Emphasis added.

65 OCC, minutes (in camera), vol. 121-E-3, 6 December 1969; OM, vol. 45-D-3, file 3, Thompson to Campbell, 12 December 1969; and *ibid.*, vol. 45-D-6, file 3, Campbell to UBC, Permanent Records Department, 6 February 1970.

archives situation. Aldermen Harwick and Linnell were still conducting their investigation when, on 1 October, Major Matthews died in a local nursing home. He was ninety-two.

In death the major generated almost as much attention as in life. There was an immediate flurry of activity as private individuals, members of the press, and city officials endeavoured to place his admittedly enormous contribution into perspective. Council received a number of communications endorsing the commemoration of his service in, as one citizen phrased it, "some concrete form." Various locations for an archives, including an addition to the City Museum, were advocated. Despite the initial reaction to the archivist's death, sentimentality did not translate into action. Mayor Campbell soon made it clear that while the suggestions were appreciated, there were still no immediate plans for a new archives building.<sup>66</sup>

On 3 November Alderman Linnell gave a preliminary statement to council on the progress of the Special Committee's investigation, although the "in camera" minutes do not record the details. Later, however, after the final report was tabled, fellow committee member Hardwick publicly admitted that the archives was in what he called a "desperate and chaotic situation." At the same time, an anonymous former civic official reported that it had been so long since an inventory had been done in the archives that nobody really knew what was on the third floor of the library. This official believed an archives should document "the year by year, step by step, decision by decision, development of a city." As there had never been any exchange of material between the city and the major, the basis on which any archives should be built, he concluded "there is no City of Vancouver Archives."<sup>67</sup> This was among the first of the public admissions that under Matthews's direction the archives had not been the official repository of government records. Of greater significance, this revelation underlined the fact that, despite the existence of an archives since 1932, Vancouver's official records had never been properly cared for.

The findings of the Special Committee were submitted to City Council on 21 December. In the wake of the major's death, when the condition of the archives was revealed, the two aldermen had deemed it necessary to widen their investigation to include the general future of the archives as a branch of civic administration. After meeting with various interested parties, including the Community Arts Council, and reviewing a detailed report from Dr. W. Kaye Lamb, former Provincial Archivist and recently retired Dominion Archivist, the aldermen made a series of five recommendations which were destined to alter forever the nature of the city archives.

The Special Committee proposed broadening the functions of the City Clerk to include records disposal and archives; hiring of a person competent in both records management and archives to fill the vacant position of City Archivist; construction of an archives building as part of the complex of city buildings at Vanier Park; consultation of all department heads with the City Clerk before destroying documents; and establishment of a Records Committee. In summation, it was also suggested that, as the cost was anticipated to be within available funding, an archives building could be designated as Vancouver's Centennial Project for 1971. Such a project, the aldermen concluded, would represent "an effective means of commemorating Mayor [*sic*] J.S. Matthews, City Archivist and would, as well as guaranteeing the continuation of the Archives in suitable

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, Campbell to Geoffrey Traunter, 19 October 1970.

<sup>67</sup> Broadfoot, "The Major's work," *Sun*, 26 December 1970.



quarters, be of significant benefit to the City in meeting the increasing problems of records management.”<sup>68</sup> In addition to recognizing the contribution of Major Matthews, Vancouver was about to change the traditional orientation of its archives and embrace records management in dramatic fashion.

The next day, council passed a series of motions based on the contents of the report. The Board of Administration was ordered to investigate the matter of the Centennial Project in light of the Special Committee recommendations and the other proposals that had been received.<sup>69</sup> In addition, all City Departments were informed that in order to avoid the loss of historical documents, and pending the appointment of a successor for Major Matthews, they were “to cooperate with the City Clerk and consult him before ordering the destruction of City records under their control.”<sup>70</sup> This policy was to take effect immediately. While still in embryonic form, a records management programme focussing on a rejuvenated city archives was at last a reality in Vancouver’s civic administration.

The speed with which these developments took place probably came as a shock to local “archives watchers.” After literally decades of relative inactivity, council had suddenly decided that the time for action had come. To an extent this can be attributed to the serious problems the city was encountering in dealing with its now voluminous records. A formal records management programme was the obvious solution. Beyond that, however, one cannot help but conjecture that the death of Major Matthews finally opened the door for innovation. Throughout his life, the major avoided involvement in anything remotely associated with bureaucratic function. His *raison d’être* was the preservation of the historical record of Vancouver’s past. He would never have participated in any city activity that had, as part of its rationale, the destruction of certain inactive and non-archival records. In his eyes, it was all worthy of retention. Thus, with Matthews at the helm, a modernization of the role of the archives, with both historical concerns and administrative needs being addressed, was all but impossible. It was, as Terry Eastwood, Chairman of the UBC Archival Studies Programme, recently mused, “a curious business: the man who keeps the archives alive prevents its moving forward.”<sup>71</sup> That the city would have acted differently in Matthews’s absence is by no means certain, but his confrontational style and often bombastic demands gave successive slates of aldermen an excuse, if not a reason, for archival inactivity.

In the wake of the council’s decision to move on the archives question, a building project began to gain momentum. In spite of continued suggestions for accommodation within existing facilities, the aldermen proceeded with plans for the construction of a new archives building. In addition, on 19 January 1971, the archives received unanimous approval in principle as Vancouver’s Centennial Project, taking precedence over several other proposals, including a replica of H.M.S. *Discovery* and “an air-supported structure for an unspecified sport facility.”<sup>72</sup> A Special Committee, composed of Aldermen Sweeney, Linnell, and Calder, was established to examine the archives project in detail. The public response was by no means unanimous in its agreement with the city’s elected representatives. One irate ratepayer expressed the view that the decision was “a waste of

68 OM, vol. 45-D-6, file 3, “Report to Council from Special Committee Re: Archives,” 21 December 1970.

69 OCC, minutes, vol. 105, reel MCR-1-110, 22 December 1970.

70 OM, vol. 45-D-6, file 3, City Clerk to Department Heads, 29 December 1970.

71 Terry Eastwood to the author, 22 January 1985.

72 OCC, minutes, vol. 105, reel MCR-1-110, 19 January 1971.

money and reflects poor judgement,” while others were convinced that the money would be better spent on a renovation of an existing structure; the old RCAF Building 14 at Vanier Park was the most popular alternative.<sup>73</sup> Such criticism can be explained in part by the fact that any archives, regardless of its nature, appeals at best to a limited audience. Nonetheless, the general reaction seemed favourable. The Vancouver Historical Society, for one, believed that the building would become a model for others (as indeed it has) and it supported council’s endorsement of the plan.<sup>74</sup>

On 1 February, the Special Committee on the Centennial Project submitted its findings. Noting that the total amount available from the three levels of government was \$1.14 million, the committee advised council that this amount might not provide for the entire three stage project as envisioned. The plan had originally called for the construction of the archives proper, an extension to the Centennial Museum, and a civic display area. Instead, it was recommended that the project be developed in sequence, starting with the archives, to the extent that the funds remained available.<sup>75</sup> Council accepted the report the following day, passing a resolution which gave the archives final approval as the Centennial Project. The aldermen also made formal application for the appropriate federal and provincial grants and called on the project architect to prepare initial plans and estimates.<sup>76</sup> Earlier, on 26 January, the city had appointed the architectural firm of McCarter, Nairne, and Partners. In a gesture that was both appropriate and advisable, this contract was made “on the understanding that Mr. W.G. Leithead will be the member of the firm appointed to carry out this assignment.”<sup>77</sup> While all looked well for the archives building, better in fact than at any point previously, construction had not yet started. As events would soon prove, there would be at least one more hurdle to be cleared.

On 10 March, the Board of Administration advised council that, as previously postulated, the money available from the Centennial grants would not cover all three of the elements contained in the original proposal. Instead, a revised plan, retaining the archives and the museum extension but deleting the civic display area, had been prepared. Even with these changes, the projected cost was still almost \$100,000 over the total grant.<sup>78</sup>

In the wake of this revelation several aldermen experienced a sudden change of heart, and the entire project seemed ready to collapse. At the 16 March session of council this dissension was in evidence. Although the minutes recorded only that the subsequent decision to proceed was made “after due consideration,”<sup>79</sup> the *Province’s* reporters were on hand to record events as they unfolded. Alderman Art Phillips labelled the archives project a “lemon” and, in light of the expected costs and the deletion of the public display area, he argued it should be scrapped. As it was to be “merely an extension” to the museum, which was already losing money, he believed the whole plan should be cancelled. Apparently forgetting the archives’ justification as the basis of the city’s new records

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73 OM, vol. 45-E-2, file 2, E. Brayham to Campbell, n.d.; and file 3, G. Hamilton to Campbell, 27 January 1971.

74 VHS, vol. 3, file 6, Jill Rowland, Chairman of Archives Committee, to mayor and council, 25 January 1971.

75 *Ibid.*, copy of Special Committee on Centennial Project report to Council, 1 February 1971. The total was based on federal and provincial contributions of \$440,000 each and a city contribution of approximately \$250,000.

76 OCC, minutes, vol. 105, reel MCR-1-110, 2 February 1971.

77 *Ibid.*, minutes (in camera), vol. 121-E-3, 26 February 1971.

78 OM, vol. 45-E-2, file 3, Board of Administration report, 10 March 1971.

79 OCC, minutes, vol. 106, reel MCR-1-111, 16 March 1971.

management programme, Phillips failed to grasp the significant difference between the two institutions. Alderman Broome came to defence of the archives; he termed the preceding remarks "stupid" and reminded those present that Phillips had earlier voted for the plan. Alderman Bird echoed this sentiment, calling for additional money for the project.<sup>80</sup> In the end, council authorized the architects to continue with the revised plan, but with the proviso that the cost be kept within the \$1.14 million limit. Despite this, the "revolt" had not yet run its course.

In early April, with Phillips sitting in for the absent Mayor Campbell, the debate continued. This time Phillips was supported in his opposition to the archives by fellow TEAM aldermen Hardwick and Calder. All three had voted in favour of the archives in the 19 January resolution. In addition, Hardwick had chaired the committee which first advanced the idea of an archives to honour Major Matthews, while Calder had served on the Special Committee which subsequently recommended that the project continue in spite of the possible deletion of the display area. Now all three opposed the current plan on the basis of cost. Instead, they proposed that Building 14 be renovated.<sup>81</sup> Despite the minority dissension, City Council held firm.

In a scathing column which appeared in the *Province* the same day, Lorne Parton reported that an unnamed individual, rumoured to have designs on the vacant position of Museum Director, had dismissed the archives as "a one-million dollar filing cabinet." After recounting the latest details of the controversy, Parton added some invective of his own on the subject of what he termed council's "new cause-célèbre." Although largely based on a misunderstanding of the proposed role of the archives, its contents, and the amount of public access to them, his remarks nonetheless shed some light on the attitude of those opposed to the project:

In a way, it's kind of appropriate that Vancouver should mark the centennial of B.C.'s confederation with Canada with a mausoleum — a resting place for one man's memorabilia. There is a world of difference between archives and the "archives" destined for this building. We are in the position of an apartment-dweller who's just been bequeathed a valuable elephant. It's a great conversation-piece, but where are we going to keep it? The elephant, of course, is the collection of a lifetime of the late Major J.S. Matthews. There are absolutely priceless things in the collection, but most of it is destined to be sealed away from the public eye forever. At \$1.14 million, it will be the biggest memorial since Shah Jahan put up 400 lakhs of rupees to build the Taj Mahal — and a damned sight less pretty to look at.<sup>82</sup>

Despite the criticism leveled at the archives in these exchanges, the preparatory work continued. Major Matthews would not have found such opposition very surprising. He had faced it many times in his long career. In fact, he would probably have been more shocked had the project sailed through smoothly.

By mid-summer, plans were finalized for the 18,000 square foot structure. Designed to be as unobtrusive as possible, the archives was to be built partially underground with a grass roof replacing the parkland it would occupy. Only when viewed from the water's

80 "Archives plan cut to fit \$1.1 million," *Province*, 17 March 1971.

81 "Lorne Parton's Column," *Province*, 6 April 1971.

82 *Ibid.*

edge would the structure resemble a building in the conventional sense. Tenders were called on 26 July and in August it was announced that the H. Habler Co. Ltd. had been awarded the contract on the basis of its bid of \$1,033,482 — the lowest of eight submitted.<sup>83</sup> Construction began shortly thereafter, with completion scheduled for the spring of 1972.

The long-awaited archives building was about to become a reality. While this was reason enough for supporters of the plan to celebrate, there was concern that Major Matthews might yet be denied the recognition he deserved. Although it had been confidently expected that the building would bear his name, in late July the new City Archivist, Robert Watt, indicated that a final decision had not yet been reached. He was quick to add, however, that “I think we can safely assume the major’s name will receive top consideration.” As events transpired, almost a year passed before council finally approved the name of the building and the wording of the plaque commemorating Matthews.<sup>84</sup>

As construction neared completion, it was clear that the new archives would be much more than just a fancy home for the major’s collection. Rather, the building was intended as the cornerstone of the civic government’s records management programme. “For the first time,” City Clerk Ron Thompson remarked in an interview with the *Province’s* Aileen Campbell, “[the archives] will be responsible for the care, custody and servicing of the historic public records of Vancouver.” Never before had this been part of the archives’ mandate, as most of the valuable inactive records had been stored in a vault at City Hall. While admitting that the core of a good collection of non-official records had been developed under the guidance of Major Matthews, Thompson correctly maintained that the full potential as a municipal archives and records centre had never been realized. That was about to change. As for the archives’ significance to the government and people of Vancouver, he concluded: “In a real sense, the archives is the collective memory of the community. We can recreate the past of the city from thousands of strands.”<sup>85</sup> Major Matthews would no doubt have been surprised to hear one of the denizens of City Hall referring to the archives in such eloquent fashion. Yet Thompson had every reason to be proud of the new archives, which was destined to become the showpiece of his department. Although he might not have been completely happy with the new orientation of the archives, the major would nonetheless have been pleased to know that at last Vancouver was taking action to preserve its heritage through all of its records.

On 29 December 1972, after delays caused by a labour dispute, the Major Matthews Building was officially opened by out-going Mayor Tom Campbell in a brief ceremony before some thirty assembled officials and friends and relatives of the major.<sup>86</sup> By mid-April of the next year, the archives was fully operational for both public research and daily records centre service for all civic departments. Today the City of Vancouver

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83 “B.C. archives building will cost \$1,033,482,” *Province*, 18 August 1971. When combined with the \$75,000 architect’s fees, this brought the total to the projected \$1.1 million cost.

84 “‘Grass’ roof for new archives,” *Province*, 29 July 1971; and “Late Major Matthews gets a \$1 million ‘home,’” *Province*, 3 June 1972.

85 Aileen Campbell, “Place where time stands still,” *Province*, 28 September 1972.

86 “Last major function performed by Campbell,” *Province*, 2 January 1973.

Archives is firmly established as an integral part of civic administration, serving both the public and government officials.<sup>87</sup>

The Major Matthews Building is a symbol of Vancouver's commitment to the proper preservation of its historical records, both public and private. It is also a tribute to the man who personified archives in the city and in the process preserved his historical collection despite the indifference of generations of politicians and administrators. As Aileen Campbell concluded in 1973, Matthews "had fought city hall and won. He had got his archives into a decent home and he had made a whole city archives conscious for nearly four decades — no small achievement. A subject that in other hands scarcely would have made the paper at all used to wind up regularly on Page One. The major always knew where the action was."<sup>88</sup>

While the major's collection may not have represented a "city archives" in the true sense of the term, his perseverance insured that City Council neither forgot about the existence of the facility, nor allowed it to be closed. When the need for more formalized management of the city's official records became apparent, the archives had been providing material for historical research for nearly four decades. It represented the logical institution to take on the added responsibility of records management, thereby enabling the city to provide for both its own administrative requirements and the continued historical research needs of the community.

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87 As an example of the extent of service currently provided, during 1985 some 4300 researchers, ranging from genealogists and students to journalists and visiting academics, registered to use the various collections. Over 12,600 separate items were requested. In addition, the staff made over 3200 retrievals from the records centre for various civic departments. When telephone and written queries are included, a total of 22,181 requests were handled by the staff of the archives. This total represents an increase of 21 per cent over 1984 and reflects the demands being placed on the archives as a result of the celebrations surrounding Vancouver's Centennial and Expo 86. (Sue M. Baptie, City Archivist, to the author, 19 February 1986.) This letter included part of the draft 1985 *Annual Report* of the City Archives containing reference statistics.

88 Aileen Campbell, "Major's spirit is finally home," *Province*, 5 January 1973.