Book Reviews

Report of the Advisory Committee on Archives. IAN E. WILSON, chair. Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1985. 78 p. ISBN 0-662-54078-6 free of charge.

The *ad hoc* Advisory Committee on Archives was appointed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) in June 1983 to review the current state of archives in Canada. Specifically, its mandate was to consider the responses and discussions emanating from the SSHRC Consultative Group Report, *Canadian Archives*, 1980; the resolutions of the National Archival Congress held in Kingston, Ontario, in 1982; and the recommendations of the Federal Cultural Policy Review Committee (Applebaum-Hébert), 1982, as they related to archives. The Committee was also instructed to address the role of the federal government in funding the development of an archival system and to advise on a possible division of responsibilities among the SSHRC, the Public Archives of Canada, and other federal agencies. Composed of Ian Wilson, Saskatchewan Archives Board; Marion Beyea, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick; Marcel Caya, McGill University Archives; Terry Eastwood, Master of Archival Studies Program, University of British Columbia; and Anne MacDermaid, Queen's University Archives, the Committee presented its report to the SSHRC in September 1984.

In the course of their work, members of the Committee held discussions with officials from the various government departments and agencies involved with archives and then reviewed the three publications specifically mentioned in their mandate. The result is the present report which contains nineteen recommendations covering a variety of archival activities, and four studies which serve as background papers to provide the context for the recommendations. As a result, the document consists really of two reports: the first one reviews the Canadian archival scene and makes recommendations for funding in a variety of areas, ranging from traditional concerns like conservation to new proposals, such as the creation of an Advisory Council on Archives appointed by the Dominion Archivist. The second report consists of the four studies which address the present concerns of archives, existing grant programmes available to cultural institutions, and a possible model for the structure of the Canadian archival system. The link joining the studies and the recommendations is money in the form of grants, or more accurately the lack of grant money, available to the archival community.

It is clear from both parts of the Report that government grants, and particularly those available from the federal government, for which archivists and archives are eligible are few and far between. Those that do exist (again at the federal level) are spread through a

myriad of programmes in several government departments and agencies, and often have such restrictive terms and conditions that few archival institutions qualify for them. The Report also notes, however, that archives have not been as skilful as they could have been in obtaining grants from the programmes for which they do qualify.

The paucity of granting programmes for which archives are eligible will not come as a surprise to most archivists, but the Report will be of interest to them if for no other reason than the information it provides about programmes which *do* provide funds for archives. It will also be of interest because, whether by accident or design, the federal government has responded to the Report's recommendation to establish a grant programme administered by the Public Archives of Canada. The announcement in September 1986 that $1.2 million had been allocated to archival institutions across Canada for projects designed to reduce the backlog of records requiring arrangement and description must surely have come as welcome news to both the Report's authors and the archival community alike. While these grants are restricted to backlog reduction, it is encouraging that a grant programme exclusively for archives now exists, and it can only be hoped that it will be expanded in future years to include the technical and professional concerns also identified in the Report.

The Report's recommendations are clearly meant to encourage government bodies to recognize archives as a distinct discipline and to expand existing programmes to include archival activities. They are also intended to encourage archivists to become more aggressive in pursuing funds from existing programmes and to lobby to have the eligibility criteria for these programmes expanded. In the absence of a programme for archives which is as diverse as the National Museums of Canada Museums Assistance Program, the need to know about existing programmes and to use them effectively is essential. The Report describes itself as a "call to action," noting that the "time for reports draws to an end," yet the onus is clearly on the archival community to push to have the recommendations implemented. While one grant programme advocated by the Report has now been established, it should not lead to acquiescence or complacency. The funds allocated for backlog reduction were clearly identified for one fiscal year and tangible results for the money spent will be required to justify continued funding. As well, it should not be forgotten that the criteria for other government programmes which could provide assistance in the areas of capital assistance or technological improvement have not been expanded to include archives. Much work remains to be done before archives will gain recognition as an eligible and distinct discipline from these programmes, but the current grants for backlog reduction are a clear sign that considerable progress has been made.

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Toward Descriptive Standards. TERRY EASTWOOD, MARCEL CAYA et al. Ottawa: Bureau of Canadian Archivists, 1985. 192 p. ISBN 0-88925-680-2 free of charge.

This is a sensible, straightforward report which shows where Canadian archives are at and suggests where we should go. The significant word in the title is "Toward" and the working group makes perfectly clear at the outset that it makes no attempt to formulate