

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

standards and rules. The report is essentially a point of reference and departure; its recommendations are reasonable and practical; its clarity and brevity speak volumes in short compass.

After summarizing library standards both national and international, some of which serve as examples of the paths to excellence, chapter three, "A Study of Current Practice," has a nice familiar, ruffled air about it. Those well-thumbed, time-honoured finding aids which have been propping up archivists and confounding users for decades are reviewed with all their shortcomings and occasional strengths. It appears that we are all doing much the same thing in the same way, but with enough difference to render common practice impossible. Clearly we have nowhere to go but up, together.

Our physical arrangement may be generally archival in nature but we still persist in treating documents like books when it comes to information retrieval. Inventories can all too easily become a table of contents, comparable to chapter headings, scope and content notes, subsequent listings, and even the documents themselves become pages to be indexed as one would a book. It is hardly surprising that, in what might be the sunset years of print as the dominant medium, the index is found to be the most popular finding aid, and access is dependent on an artificial alphabetic ordering of fragmented labels almost entirely out of context which we call "persons, places, and subjects." We are all, in James Joyce's words, "ABCED minded" folk but this is the best we can do at present. Indexing in the hands of a skillful practitioner works quite well for the limited information spectrum of a book and can be idiosyncratic as well. A repository, however, is in this view like a gigantic loose leaf volume expanding towards infinity, with subject matter all over the lot and generations of archivists showering down a blizzard of unstandardized index cards. Even these work up to a point but, as the report emphasizes, with standards they could work a lot better.

The working group identifies this dilemma by recognizing that we have not yet understood the true nature of the descriptive function in archives, which is not like describing or indexing a book. We have to grapple with the problem that written description is a linear, diachronic process, whereas structures of data, information, and knowledge within the records of families and organizations alike are synchronic, in parallel, like the notes in a musical chord. Archival materials are the surviving elements of whole edifices erected by people in the course of communication. We are dealing not just with bureaucracies and family trees, but underlying ways of organizing information, which to some extent are independently "organic," in contrast to the inorganically structured encyclopedia, or any book for that matter.

We need perhaps to study the structural anthropologists who examine the common elements of related myths and regard all versions as valid in their search for meaning, or the geologists seeking to identify strata within massively faulted rocks; each is a search for the message amid the "noise." This is pattern recognition of data, as opposed to the records themselves, and the only answer to "information fall out" on the scale we are now encountering in archives. The working group quite rightly urges us to intensify our study of the life of forms in the *fonds* and the series so that we may recognize common patterns and explore on the computer their rich store of information. Holmes' five levels of arrangement are also commended as a standard. Reflecting this approach and our skill in archival arrangement, the group sees the inventory as our most effective form of description, with basic descriptive elements which most archivists include — clearly a ground-

work to be built upon. Even so, we tend to concentrate too much on the organization represented by the archival material rather than the activity; we need to know more about what actions are implied by the records if our patterns are to be more fully informative.

Seven levels of description are recognized, from the union list to the item (but why not the piece also?). Again, each archival medium should develop its own descriptive standards, using AACR2 where possible as a means of identifying levels of description. Only a few of the thirty-five recommendations, which also include ways and means to hasten success, have been alluded to here. A useful select bibliography with comments covers the field well. Altogether this report is shot through with the light of much honest common sense. It not only deserves to be read, it should be required reading for all who call themselves Canadian archivists.

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Reference Services in Archives. LUCILLE WHALEN, ed. New York: The Haworth Press, 1986. 210 p. ISBN 0-86656-521-3 (Also available as *The Reference Librarian* 13, Fall 1985/Winter 1985-1986).

One of the rewards for archivists working in smaller archives is the gratification provided by reference service. The archivists have the satisfaction of knowing that someone is using material that they have spent days and even months arranging and describing. A researcher can deal directly with a person who has knowledge of the material and who can offer suggestions and shortcuts. In larger institutions this contact between custodian and user may have been completely eliminated.

It is therefore not surprising that almost all of the sixteen essays on reference service found in this volume are written by archivists in small institutions. Many types of archives are represented: a bank, an advertising firm, a regional history centre, two religious archives, several special collections within universities, and a board of education. Unfortunately this diversity, which should allow viewpoints of the reference process from several angles, becomes one of the problems of the volume. The authors seem to be using the book as a chance to put their own institution "on the map" and consequently spend an inordinate amount of space on the history of their particular archive. What is usually left out is any useful consideration of reference service. Susan McGrath uses almost all of the fifteen pages on the archives of the Toronto Board of Education, describing the holdings of the institution and providing a capsule history of the Board. She offers some statistical information on the number of users and the areas from which they come, but aside from asserting that the archive provides reference service she tells us little about it. Most of the other essays in the volume suffer from the same fault.

There is, however, some material of interest here. Philip Mason, archivist of the special labour collections at Wayne State University, points to the usefulness of reference statistics in "establishing collecting priorities, appraisal, conservation and restoration needs, and in determining the order in which collections are processed." He also raises the problem of the lack of preparedness of younger scholars, a phenomenon to which most archivists have been exposed. An article on the archives of the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston discusses the importance of the reference interview. The chapter in the volume that comes closest to the treatment one might expect from the book's title concerns the role of