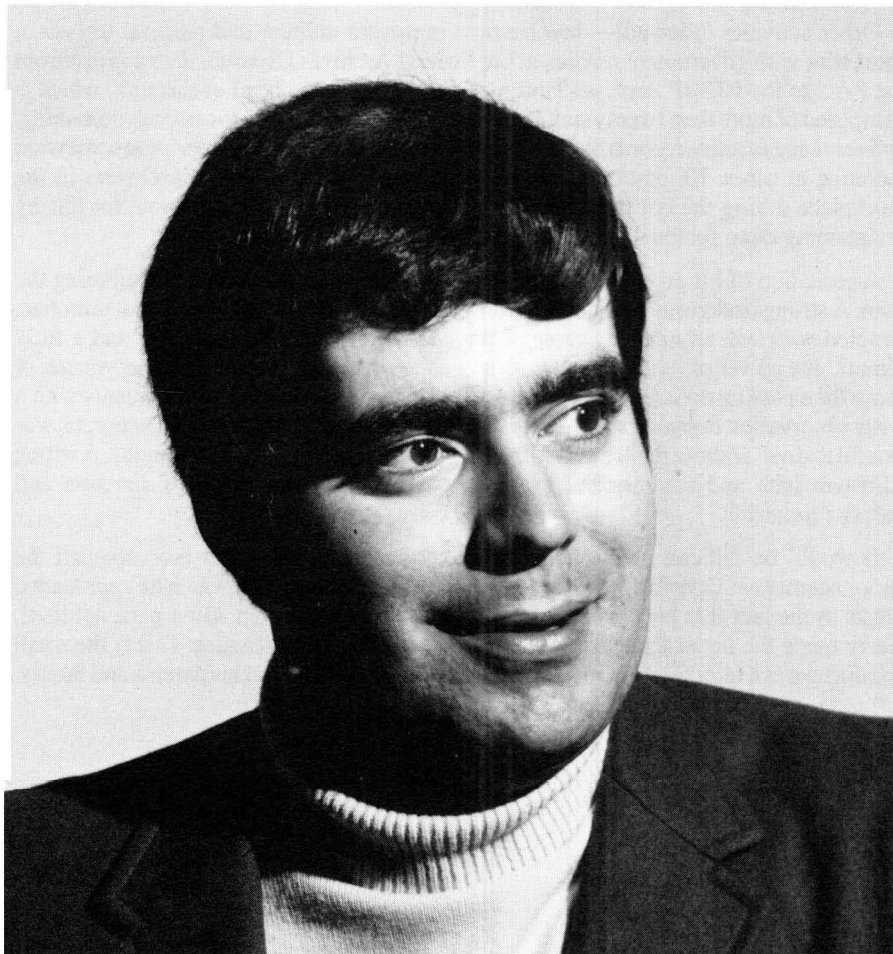


Obituaries

Gerald G. Cumming, 1944-1986



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Suddenly, and without any advance warning, Gerry Cumming died on 18 July 1986 of a heart attack. A native of Manitoba, Gerry's formal education culminated with attainment of an M.A. at the University of Manitoba in 1969. He began his archival career in the Manuscript Division of the Public Archives of Canada in 1969 and spent the next thirteen

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years working with political, military, and social archival records at the PAC. He was given responsibility for developing the area of sports archives, this in the context of a number of enhanced acquisition programmes at the PAC which were run by the Manuscript Division in the early 1970s. Numerous significant acquisitions followed. The programme was successful to the point where Gerry himself recommended it be allowed to continue on its own momentum, while he moved on to other archival pursuits. *Canada's Sports Heritage — A Selection*, an exhibition which opened in November 1975, expressed in a visual way what had been an important contribution to the Public Archives of Canada.

Other activities followed — involvement in private military and political records, a short stint with government records in the Federal Archives Division, then a move from the PAC to the RCMP Archives Unit in 1983. Work as the head of this unit, which is composed of more than twenty staff members with responsibilities for storing, describing, and servicing inactive records of the RCMP, proved challenging and, perhaps, somewhat daunting at times. He particularly missed the camaraderie of fellow archivists in the workplace during the last three years of his life, and sought to compensate for this by maintaining close personal contacts at the PAC and through the ACA.

A recitation of his archival achievements does not do justice to Gerry Cumming the man. A strong background in modern European history, an interest in personal minutiae, coupled with wit, an unerring sense of the ridiculous in human existence, and a truly remarkable power of recall made him a *raconteur* of historical events and personages of more than passing note. Fond of puncturing bombastic discourse and arguments with a witty observation designed to bring perspective to both the teller and the listener, he was careful to do so without malice and with ever-present quantities of good humour. A strong Christian faith and commitment to family gave values and a sense of direction and purpose to his life.

It would be difficult to overstate the shock and disbelief which accompanied the announcement of Gerry's death. This was as due to the vitality with which he approached life as to the fact that his passing was so sudden and unexpected. On a personal level, Gerry made life better for those who were his friends and colleagues. This is the small comfort we can offer his wife Judi, his sons Paul and Thomas, and his parents and family.

Eldon Frost
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