

especially since important material can now be “desktop published” in quite acceptable form for a fraction of the costs of the hard-bound volumes discussed in your article. It is true that documentary editing in Canada has not yet confronted desktop publishing and its implications for the genre head-on, but to write and publish an article in the mid-1980s on the subject that does not fully explore the possibilities of the new technologies is, in my view, truly being the “dinosaur.”

J.M. Bumsted
General Editor
Manitoba Record Society

Coles Responds

I am delighted to hear from J.M. Bumsted that the Manitoba Record Society has “attained a new lease on life” and is currently active and flourishing in its publications activities. I congratulate the Manitoba Record Society on its renewed success and encourage those interested in documentary editions to support the society’s publication series through their subscriptions.

I must remind Professor Bumsted that my study of documentary publishing in Canada analyzed the work of provincial archives and historical societies, not independent scholars, between 1869 and 1984 (which organizations I did contact during the course of my research). Professor Bumsted is welcome to compare the fruits of our labours, but I cannot turn my apple into his orange.

As an active participant in, and strong advocate of, the computerization of publishing work, I am well aware of the capabilities and drawbacks of desktop publishing. There is no question that new and simplified typesetting programmes can save time and money by allowing authors and editors to input, edit, and format documents themselves, rather than relying totally on the equipment and expertise of publishers, typesetters, or printers.

However, many proponents of desktop publishing almost seem to believe that they can type the words into their computer, push a button, and watch a bound book roll out of their laser printer. To “desktop publish” means to be author, editor, typesetter, designer, and production manager all at once. Desktop publishers need to understand such production intricacies as picas, fonts, points, kerning, gutters, and widows. All this is not impossible, indeed it can be delightfully entertaining, but it can also be distressingly time-consuming, particularly for archivists with other projects on their plates.

I would encourage archives and historical societies — and independent scholars — interested in documentary editing to consider desktop publishing. But I warn archivists in particular to determine their reasons for publishing before beginning *any* documentary programme. If documentary editing has a high priority in your archives, desktop publishing is undoubtedly a worthwhile direction to consider. But if your publishing activity is sporadic and minimal, with uncertain funding or limited facilities, the cost of computer hardware and software may not be justified.

If offering such a caution leaves me a “dinosaur,” then so be it. But those who launch into desktop publishing without due consideration of its profits and pitfalls might find themselves orbiting aimlessly without a flight plan.

Laura M. Coles
Gibsons, British Columbia

English County Record Offices and Quarter Sessions Records

Before it becomes part of the mythology of archives may I correct the statement which appears in Douglas Hay, “Archival Research in the History of the Law: A User’s Perspective”? (*Archivaria*, 24 (Summer 1987), p. 37)

As recently as the period after the Second World War the newly formed county record offices in England were preparing to throw out most of their quarter sessions records, now the most used series of documents in many of their reading rooms.

When I decided to become an archivist in July 1944 there was no formal training available in England, so I gained experience by working voluntarily in as many record offices as I could. In all the county record offices which I knew, the quarter sessions records were the most carefully preserved series. In some counties (Hertford and Buckingham spring to mind first) their publication had begun before 1939; in others (e.g. Sussex) they were the first records to receive conservation treatment.

Any losses to quarter sessions records which occurred (e.g. Cornwall) happened *before* the county had a record office and an archivist. These losses were a direct result of World War II:

1. At the beginning of the war Air Raid Precautions (later called Civil Defence) instructed everyone to get rid of inflammable material. Many records — not only from quarter sessions — perished in this manner.
2. Later we were urged to send paper to help produce munitions, and even more was lost. In one badly bombed city I once estimated that more historic records were lost in this way than by German bombs.

Some records were also lost because the Public Record Office in 1916 issued a destruction schedule for quarter sessions records, but it was not widely used. Anyone wishing to pursue this further should see Hugh M. Waltor, “Destruction Schedules: Quarter Sessions’, Magistrates’ Courts’ and Coroners’ Records,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 3 no. 2 (1965), pp. 61-74.

By the Fifties I knew every county archivist in the country and I never heard one discuss the possibility of “throwing out most of their quarter sessions records.”

Edwin Welch
Yellowknife, NWT