

Development of a Religious Archives Network: The Anglican Church Archivists in the Province of British Columbia

by **DOREEN STEPHENS** and **GARTH WALKER**

It is a fall day in Vancouver, and a small group of archivists is meeting at the Vancouver School of Theology. They represent the archives of the Anglican Church of Canada in the Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia: the Archivist of the British Columbia Synod, with the Diocese of New Westminster; and the Archivists of the Dioceses of British Columbia, Caledonia, Cariboo, and Kootenay. The Archivist of the British Columbia Conference of the United Church of Canada, a frequent visitor to these gatherings, is also present. What are the origins of this network of religious archivists, and how has the network developed since the first meeting took place in 1981?

The Anglican presence in what is now British Columbia began with the appointment of a chaplain to the Hudson's Bay Company at Victoria in 1836, and grew, sporadically at first, until the appointment of a bishop and the creation of the Diocese of British Columbia in 1859. The area of this diocese included roughly what is now the civil province of British Columbia. Three subsequent subdivisions of this area resulted in the eventual creation of the following five dioceses (locations of Synod offices in parentheses): British Columbia (Victoria); New Westminster (Vancouver); Caledonia (Prince Rupert); Kootenay (Kelowna); and Cariboo (Kamloops). The formation of the Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia of the Church of England in Canada (now the Anglican Church of Canada) took place in 1914. A sixth diocese, Yukon (Whitehorse), joined the Ecclesiastical Province in 1941.

Before there were archives, church records resided in various locations: Synod offices, parish churches, and even the residences of individuals. The Provincial Synod Archives came into existence in 1956 at the Anglican Theological College in Vancouver. The first archivist was Professor Frank Peake of the college faculty, appointed on a part-time basis. During the next twenty-three years, Peake's successors collected, accessioned, boxed, and shelved a considerable amount of valuable material. Garth Walker, a retired Anglican layman with records management experience, became Provincial Synod Archivist in 1980, with an additional mandate to establish an archives for the Diocese of New Westminster, holding this joint position for six years.

The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada appointed its first full-time archivist, Marion Beyea, in 1975, and in the same year, Kent Haworth of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia became Archivist of the Diocese of British Columbia.

These two people provided the impetus for a great deal of archival growth in the Anglican Church in British Columbia. Beyea visited the province in 1977, going with Haworth to Kelowna to work with Gail Greenhalgh in establishing an archives in the Diocese of Kootenay, and to Prince Rupert to microfilm vital records for the Diocese of Caledonia. The following year, in the Diocese of Cariboo, the Bishop's secretary, Joan Newman, started an archives in that diocese. The Diocese of Caledonia appointed its first archivist in 1984. In the Yukon, an Anglican Church Historical Society collected Anglican records for deposit in the Yukon Archives under a deposit agreement. All six dioceses in the Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia therefore had an archival programme in place by the early 1980s.

In 1981, Haworth and Walker suggested that all the archivists of the Anglican church in the Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia come together to discuss their work and to consider the possibility of having regular meetings. The term "network" had not yet come into the archival vocabulary. The meeting took place at the Vancouver School of Theology in Vancouver, the location of the Provincial Synod Archives with the Archives of the Diocese of New Westminster, on the day before the fall meeting of the Association of British Columbia Archivists (ABCA). This gathering was so successful that it was decided to have similar meetings once a year, with the Provincial Synod Archivist as chair. Visitors for part of that first meeting included the Metropolitan of the Ecclesiastical Province of British Columbia, Archbishop Douglas Hambidge. A representative of the Diocese of Yukon was unfortunately unable to attend. Minutes went not only to those attending but, at the suggestion of the Archbishop, also to all the bishops of the Ecclesiastical Province.

From 1981 to 1988, there have been nine meetings of the network. These meetings were usually one day in length and were held back-to-back with meetings of ABCA, resulting in a saving in travel costs. To ensure that the programme would be interesting to all participants, questionnaires were generally sent out prior to the meetings. It was found that there was no dearth of subjects to consider, with some coming up for discussion at every meeting. The meetings generally began with a reporting session so that all were familiar with the progress of each archives since the last meeting. Major subjects of discussion have been: inventories; descriptive standards; accessioning; budgeting; microfilming; constitutional authority and regulations; insurance for holdings; user fees; use of volunteers; finding aids for photographs; forms; and applications for, and use of, grants. A considerable amount of time went into the preparation of a small manual for Anglican Church archivists. Records management has become an important subject with the undertaking by Gail Greenhalgh of a records management project in the Diocese of Kootenay. It is hoped that a guide, based on the Kootenay experience, will be made available to any interested dioceses and other denominational offices within the next year.

The network has undertaken two major projects. The first was the microfilming of the papers of The Most Reverend Walter Robert Adams (1877-1957). He was elected the first Bishop of Cariboo in 1925, and subsequently became Bishop of Kootenay (1933-1947), Metropolitan of British Columbia (1942-1951), Archbishop of Yukon (1948-1951), and Acting Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada for a period during 1951. He maintained extensive files, and it was found that collections of his papers were in the Archives of the Provincial Synod, the Diocese of Cariboo, the Diocese of Kootenay, and in the Yukon Archives for the Diocese of Yukon. By the summer of 1984, collections of

approximately nine metres of Adams material were all in the Provincial Synod Archives, which employed Wilma MacDonald to prepare them for microfilming. The project was completed in 1985 on nine reels of 16mm microfilm, and copies are on file at the Archives of the Provincial Synod of British Columbia in Vancouver, and at the General Synod Archives in Toronto. The other major project has been the preparation of the aforementioned manual for Anglican Church archivists. At the first meeting in 1981, there was discussion of the idea of developing such a manual and by 1982, the network approved a tentative table of contents. It was felt that such a manual would be a useful tool for all Anglican church archivists, and the General Synod Archivist agreed to act as a consultant for the project. The publication *Manual on Diocesan Archives Policy and Collection Management* was distributed to diocesan archivists across Canada in June 1989, under the auspices of the General Synod Archives Committee. The participation and cooperation within the network greatly facilitated the completion of these projects, both of which would have been extremely difficult for any individual member to accomplish alone.

What has been accomplished? On reviewing the eight years of operation, we see tangible benefits: the microfilming of the Adams Papers and the preparation of the manual. Moreover, there has been a greater standardization of forms and procedures, and exchange of inventories, some redistribution of material to more appropriate repositories, improved care of and recording of photographs, and the beginning of records management programmes in some diocesan offices. Instead of working in isolation, the archivists know each other and are able to work out common problems.

There have also been intangible benefits: newcomers to the group have benefited greatly from the knowledge and support of the more experienced members, and the group has fostered a greater awareness of archives, their function and their value, throughout the church. The network also provides a forum in which to discuss current directions in archival practice in the wider sphere. All the diocesan archivists make a practice of maintaining memberships in provincial archival organizations and attending conferences and workshops, with some members also attending the meetings of the Association of Canadian Archivists.

Two current concerns are automation in the archival context and the establishment and use of descriptive standards, including subject authorities. Three of the archives employ word processing, and two have the data base programme INMAGIC. The network will once more come into play during the development of standards and formats, not in isolation, but as a group process. To facilitate the development of these standards, a two-day residential workshop on descriptive standards, including the development of subject authorities, took place. With a better understanding of how subject authorities and descriptive standards are created and used, the participating archivists can begin to plan a strategy for sharing the work required in the creation of a subject authority specific to our denomination in this province.

Eight years of experience have helped to formulate the following desirable characteristics of a network:

The archivists concerned should have a common specialty, e.g., the records of a religious denomination.

The archivists should live close enough to each other to be able to meet, at least once a year, with a minimum of expense.

The archivists should have similar problems which they can help solve by sharing their experiences.

The archivists should work together towards common goals — to set standards, establish methods and hold workshops on subjects identified as being of mutual interest.

The exchanging of descriptive tools should benefit researchers whose study interest is likely to encompass information held in two or more of the network archives.

The network should be maintained with a minimum of organization and work.

In the future, the network will continue to provide a forum for the discussion of mutual concerns which arise in our day-to-day efforts to maintain our respective archives at a professional level. These discussions will, of necessity, continue to include subjects like finances, space, conservation, personnel, questionnaires, surveys, and all the other realities of life in small archives. Should the network be enlarged to include archivists of other denominational archives? Our conclusion is that a larger, more complex organization would cause the network to lose the intimacy and specificity which makes the present group so valuable to its members. However, we are considering making any network-sponsored workshops open to interested archivists in similar institutions.