

# Counterpoint

## *The Sixth Canadian Records Management Conference: An Archivist's Perspective*

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"That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been;  
and God requireth that which is past."

*Ecclesiastes 3:15*

"Charting the Course," ARMA's Sixth Canadian Records Management Conference, was held in Halifax from 6 to 9 May 1990. Over 250 people came from across Canada to be educated and/or provoked by the latest theories, systems and equipment in the world of recorded information management.

The conference offered an excellent **Basic Track** — an intensive two and a half-day series of sessions introducing its participants to both the theoretical and practical aspects of the records management profession. The Basic Track included sessions on developing a records management programme, inventory methods, file classification, automation, records scheduling, essential records, records improvement and audit and career opportunities in the field. A certificate of completion was awarded to all those who attended every session of the Basic Track.

The **Special Interest Track** covered a host of topics of relevance to various records personnel. These included a presentation on the Certified Records Manager (CRM) designation and examinations, forms management, image management and technology, in-house record centres, records management in the retail industry, management information and management systems, security of records, and disaster planning.

The **Technology Track** was popular and provocative as those involved (both presenters and those attending the sessions) grappled with the myriad of information technologies now offered to solve every records system problem. Topics ranged from working with paper-based files (e.g., colour-coded filing systems and the use of bar codes) to integrating computers and optical disks, and included a review of specific software, networking and planning for automation.

For the first time an **Archives Track** was offered. This included sessions on the relationship of records management and archives, records scheduling, sampling, arrangement and description; several sessions on automation and electronic record-

keeping; management and care of photographs; and finally a session on “What is the Use of Archives.” Numbers attending the Archives Track were disappointing, especially for the two sessions held away from the conference venue, at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, but those who did attend were interested and enthusiastic. Clearly, there are records managers who want to know about archives.

The Programme Committee for the Sixth Canadian Records Management Conference should be congratulated on their forward thinking in making archives a part of their formal agenda. This has not always been the practice at ARMA conferences. In fact, at the thirty-fifth annual conference of ARMA International in San Francisco in November 1990, out of over seventy-five sessions only three mention archives in their summaries! The similarities and differences between archivists and records managers have been a much debated topic in the pages of archival literature. The session summary in the Halifax conference programme for Christine Arden’s presentation entitled *Records Management and Archives: The Information Continuum* states, “After thirty years, Archivists and Records Managers continue to discuss their roles, responsibilities and relationships — where does the records management function end and the archives function begin?” And herein lies the problem . . . .

It is not reasonable to think that the role of the archivist does not begin until the records manager has completed his or her work. It has been argued eloquently in the pages of this journal that archivists must become more involved with records from their very creation, rather than simply at the disposition stage. This involvement becomes more and more critical with the proliferation of electronic media. We must take a larger and an “earlier” interest in the active record stage of the “life-cycle” or “continuum.” As Hugh Taylor puts it, we must “enter . . . the mainstream of record keeping and move out of the ‘historical shunt!’”<sup>1</sup> The archivist’s role does not begin when the record manager’s ends, but rather the two roles must be increasingly concurrent.

A separate **Archives Track** at a conference on records management somehow reinforces the conception that though archives play a part in the management of records, that part is very different and almost peripheral to the REAL work of the records manager. The archival point of view appears not in the regular sessions of the conference, side by side with the other players in the records management team but in a separate track dealing with separate topics. But are these topics actually separate?

There were many topics covered in sessions in both the Special Interest Track and the Technology Track which are of considerable pertinence to archivists. Clearly it is necessary that we be aware of technological advances — advances? perhaps we’ll just call them changes — in the records management field and archivists have a vested interest in planning for automation, image management, disaster planning and records security. But it is not enough that archivists attend these sessions; they should participate in them as well.

Conferences are a great opportunity to meet and share experiences with colleagues from different backgrounds and environments. A records management conference provides an excellent forum for archivists and records managers to wrestle with the difficult questions facing information managers in the 1990s, each presenting his or her own priorities and approach to specific questions.

Participation in the non-archival tracks of such a conference would allow archivists the chance to discuss current and future records-keeping practices with those who have

present custody of the records possibly destined for the archives. The Basic Track would benefit from the presence of an archivist to underline to the beginning records manager that there *are* archival concerns in developing a records management programme, in file classification systems, in records automation, in records scheduling, in forms management and so on.

Ardern refers to Schellenberg's *Modern Archives, Principles and Techniques* in discussing our dependence on records managers and good records-keeping techniques. Frank B. Evans paraphrases Schellenberg by saying

"Records managers . . . determine the quality of our archives, quality in the sense of the completeness or adequacy of the documentation, its integrity (including its freedom from useless material), and its accessibility or serviceability for reference and research purposes. In a very real sense records managers also determine the nature of our work with archives, for upon the success of their efforts depends the ease or the difficulty with which records can be appraised for disposition and can be selected for preservation; the ease or difficulty with which they can be physically preserved; the ease or difficulty with which they can be arranged and described; and the ease or difficulty with which they can be made accessible and available for use. The interest of the archivist in records management is therefore not only legitimate—it is essential."<sup>2</sup>

At the same time as we are learning what is happening in the world of records management, archivists should be presenting to records managers the archival picture in an effort to help them to help us.

An archival presence at a records management conference is a very positive step for our profession. A more integrated programme might very well be even more beneficial to both the archivists and the records managers in the audience.

### Notes

- 1 Hugh A. Taylor, "Information Ecology and the Archives of the 1980s," *Archivaria* 18 (Summer 1984), p. 30.
- 2 Frank B. Evans, "Archivists and Records Managers: Variations on the Theme," *The American Archivist*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (January 1967), pp. 57-58.