

The Presbyterian Church In Canada Archives Recataloguing Project

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Introduction

In July 1988 The Presbyterian Church In Canada Archives embarked on a retrospective recataloguing of its entire holdings. The aims were (a) to develop a consistent system of access and retrieval, redescribing and rearranging records where necessary, (b) to implement descriptive standards, and (c) to reappraise records, disposing of accumulated secondary sources, duplicates and non-archival materials in an appropriate manner, in order to permit a better use of limited space and resources. This project is still in progress, but with a change of staff and the publication of *Rules for Archival Description* it seems appropriate to offer interim comments on the work to the archival community, in the hope that this project will stimulate discussion about the issues which have emerged thus far. While the solutions adopted by the archivists involved are specific to conditions at the Presbyterian Archives, the problems and issues encountered are common to most archives; it may be helpful to other archivists to see the ways in which they were handled in one small archival institution.

Background

The Presbyterian Archives is an agency of the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church In Canada, and acts as the official repository for the records of all congregations, church courts, committees, boards and agencies of the Church. The Archives began as an extension of the Caven Library of Knox College, University of Toronto, under the auspices of the Committee on History of The Presbyterian Church In Canada. The College Librarian acted as the archivist until 1973, when the basement of Knox College was renovated and a separate archives established. This was staffed initially by volunteers, later supplemented by a series of paid assistants who began to deal with accessioning and cataloguing, according to whatever advice was available from the Caven Library staff.

Until 1980, the records were classified and arranged according to library principles, using a combination of the Cutter System and a classification scheme devised by the volunteers themselves and the Caven Library staff. By this method, archives were

distinguished from books by the letters "AR" and a number was added to indicate roughly what type of records they were. Thus, *AR1* contained the records relating to General Assembly, its Boards and Committees (the supreme governing body in a Presbyterian system of church government); *AR2* contained the records relating to Synods; *AR3* the records relating to Presbyteries; *AR4* the records relating to congregations; *AR5* the records relating to individuals; *AR6* the records relating to the Church colleges and other church-sponsored institutions; *AR7* the records relating to missions; *AR8* the records relating to the denominations in existence before the 1875 union which created The Presbyterian Church In Canada; and *AR9* the ubiquitous "miscellanea." These classes were not primarily determined by provenance but by subject matter, and although subject and provenance often coincided in *AR2*, *AR3* and *AR4*, the system encouraged the disruption of fonds and series and unscientific arrangement and description.

Once the records were allocated to the general *AR* classes, the remainder of the reference code was determined on the basis of the type of record, using the Cutter system. A Baptismal Register from a congregation in Ontario would be identified as "O6" for Ontario and "B4 R2" for Baptismal Register, so that the complete alphanumeric code would read "AR4 O6 B4 R2." As a great many Baptismal Registers from Ontario congregations were deposited in the Archives, this classification scheme was useless for identifying unique records; some modifications, therefore, were made at various times by different volunteers and staff. At one stage, additional letters and numbers were used to provide a unique reference code for each congregation, but this system was never applied to every congregation. At another time, a decimal point and additional numbers were added to the *AR* classification scheme to distinguish the subject-matter of records deposited by the administrative offices of General Assembly and its Boards and Committees. Both these modifications dropped out of use thanks to changes in staff and volunteers, and no clear record was made of either these modifications or any others, so that continuity became almost impossible to maintain.

The physical arrangement of the records bore only a minimal resemblance to the classification scheme. Access was through a subject and personal and geographical name index, which included references to published materials and rare books held in the Caven Library; retrieval, moreover, was often dependent on the memory of the volunteer or member of staff.

Despite these administrative problems, much was achieved at the Presbyterian Archives between 1973 and 1980, when the present Deputy Archivist, Kim Arnold, was appointed. The volunteers, the staff and the Committee on History ensured that the Archives became a significant resource for the Church; they both publicized its activities and encouraged people in the denomination at large to take a serious interest in their history and the preservation of their documentary heritage. However, since this article is concerned with the arrangement and description of the records, it would be wrong to gloss over the extent of the difficulties facing the Deputy Archivist in 1980.

While it was immediately clear that the existing descriptive systems were all unworkable, lack of funding made a complete re-cataloguing of the holdings impossible for some years. In the interim, the policy was to arrange and describe accurately the most frequently-used records. Eventually, external funding from ADBRP (the Arrangement

and Description Backlog Reduction Programme) allowed the employment of Ian Moir for a year in order to deal with the accumulated backlog of records of the Board of World Mission; the same source also provided funding for several other significant holdings to be arranged and described by Ian Moir, Donna Murphy and myself. In July 1988, the Administrative Council of The Presbyterian Church In Canada was sufficiently impressed by the progress made, and by the increasing operational importance of the Archives that funding was provided in order to recatalogue the records. In December 1988 the funding was guaranteed for a year, and in February 1990 it was continued.

Coinciding with this development was the purchase of a microcomputer, initially with the word-processing programme, *MicrosoftWord*, which made the transition from card catalogue entries to inventories possible. With these administrative tools and secure funding, staff were able to devise the system for accessioning, classifying, arranging and describing which is now in place, drawing on the different experience and training of the archivists involved, and using the work of the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists as it became available. The continuing process of decision making and problem solving remained a cooperative task throughout the project. As the project progressed the addition of the text database software programme, *INMAGIC*, made description, access and retrieval at the fonds level much easier, while the publication of the first chapters of *Rules for Archival Description* in October 1990 resulted in some modifications; undoubtedly further modifications will be made as the project nears completion.

Accessioning System

The basic principle adopted was that the physical arrangement should be separated from the intellectual arrangement. Their training had led the archivists both to expect that records from one source would have similar reference codes and be located together on the shelves, regardless of when and how they were deposited. By switching to an accessioning system, the institution was adopting procedures more acceptable in records management; the transition was difficult, despite the existence of precedents in other Canadian repositories and the wealth of information available in archival journals. Regardless of our misgivings, however, we were convinced of the necessity of this change in the Presbyterian Archives.

Traditionally, archivists have arranged records to reflect their provenance, the administrative structure of the creating corporate body and the original order and interrelationship of the records themselves. The reference codes were devised to reveal the arrangement and clarify the connections among the records. The physical order in which the records were boxed and arranged on the shelves should then have followed the order established in the intellectual arrangement. Additional accruals to a fonds were then interposed both physically and intellectually in the existing arrangement and archivists have been taught to take into account the likelihood of such accruals when devising an archival classification scheme.

In practice, however, only the largest archival institutions, which have the resources to employ retrieval staff, manage to deal with the sheer hard labour involved in inserting large quantities of records into an pre-existing physical arrangement and reclassifying the records. Most institutions would have to had set up an additional location reference code system which identified the bay and shelf in which particular records were

stored. The archivists would also have to compromise the arrangement by adding accruals to the end of an existing run, regardless of the original order, where the institution could not justify the expense of renumbering and relabelling documents. Very often in small archives it is clear that the physical arrangement has virtually determined the intellectual arrangement. The constraints of funding, insufficient staff, search room invigilation duties and the ever-growing pile of enquiries to be answered requires archivists to make decisions about priorities; the regular shifting of archival boxes would not be high on the list.

The main criterion for the new classification scheme was that it had to provide a permanent reference code which would act as both the location reference and the call number, and would ensure that records, once placed on a shelf, need never be reorganized again. This was essential for health and safety reasons, in a small archives with only one permanent employee (and no clerical or retrieval support staff). This rationale was supported by a growing conviction that moving boxes is a complete waste of a professional archivist's time. Other criteria included the ability to retrieve records at the file level, which had not previously been possible; maintaining the physical separation of records of the different levels of church government, for administrative purposes; using the available space as economically as possible; and separating different media for appropriate storage and conservation. It was also important to adopt a system which could be transported to another facility, as The Presbyterian Church In Canada was seriously discussing the possibility of moving the administrative offices, including the Archives, out of Toronto to another city, probably in southern Ontario.

In devising a system, staff archivists examined in detail the systems in operation at the United Church Archives and the University of Toronto Archives. The archivists of both institutions were all extremely helpful; their willingness to discuss issues and problems was very much appreciated. Both institutions used the accession number as a method of intellectual control, adding container and file numbers as appropriate once an accession unit was listed. The University of Toronto Archives continued to use a location guide for records placed on the shelves, rather than locating records in accession number order. It was understood from the archivists that a single accession unit might be in six different locations, depending on what space was available and on the size and media of the records. The United Church Archives was in the process of retrospectively recataloguing their own holdings and planned to locate their records by accession number. However, they had also modified the accession number by adding one of three identifying letters to indicate the source of the records (i.e., from each of the three separate bodies they serve); the primary physical arrangement was determined by these letters. In both cases, intellectual control was entirely distinct from physical arrangement.

Staff at the Presbyterian Archives approved the idea of using an accession number as the control number. In order to separate the physical arrangement from the intellectual arrangement, we had to devise a numbering system which did not necessarily reflect the archival arrangement; we were nevertheless reluctant to adopt a meaningless sequential numbering system. Accession numbers provide a permanent link with the original depositor, and therefore a connection to both the provenance and the custodial history, which can be important in establishing legal ownership and in protecting the integrity of the record. Retaining the accession unit as the means of physical control (instead of separating the records while they are arranged and described, and allocating new permanent

numbers) would allow immediate administrative control over the records as soon as they enter the repository, whether or not it was possible to arrange and describe the records at that point, and would maintain the same degree of control throughout the various stages of processing the records. ¹ The decision was therefore made that every new accession would be allocated an accession number; thereafter, all references to those records would be by means of that number. New accession units would be intellectually arranged and described without reference to the physical organization. In addition, the entire holdings would be re-numbered retrospectively, using the accession register and communication with depositors in order to identify the year of accession as closely as possible. Once numbered, the records would be placed on the shelves in accession number order.

An accessioning system of this type does not preclude a physical arrangement of the records within each accession unit which conforms to the intellectual arrangement. It is certainly more convenient for retrieval to maintain a series in a logical physical order, as well as maintaining a record of the correct intellectual order. The use of box and file numbers allowed us to arrange the records within each accession unit in the most convenient physical order but did not oblige us to renumber items if we later discovered mistakes in the arrangement or, while recataloguing, if we found additional records after the majority of the records had been renumbered using the new system. The significant change in adopting an accessioning system of control is that future accruals do not have to be integrated into the existing numbering system, but instead can be numbered independently as part of a separate accession unit and integrated into the existing records only on paper.

The retrospective allocation of accession numbers was not a random process. It was clear from the accessions register and from correspondence that the majority of deposits entered the Presbyterian Archives as coherent fonds, although under the old subject-based system they had often then been broken up. These accession units were relatively easy to reconstruct. However, it was also clear that a number of depositors were in the habit of collecting publications, orders of service and other miscellaneous printed ephemera on their travels across Canada, and that these unique items had found their way into record groups. We were reluctant to try to segregate these individual items retrospectively, even though in future such deposits would have to be treated as separate accession units. We therefore compromised and treated all identifiable record groups as single accession units, allocating the final date of deposit as the accession year. Where there was evidence of significant deposits from one source in two or more different years, we accommodated that fact in the accession numbers by identifying the contents of those different accruals as accurately as possible.

We also considered adopting a simple sequential number for accessions. However, this would not permit the physical segregation of records deposited by different levels of church government, nor the physical separation of different media. We therefore modified the concept of an accession number system of control by adding identifiers which reflected the structure of church government, and which were loosely based on the better elements of the old "AR" classification scheme. A further modification of this system was the use of one of the identifiers to indicate records in microform, in order to permit the segregation of material in this medium. The identifiers in use are therefore as follows:

- 1: General Assembly, its Boards and Committees
- 2: Synods
- 3: Presbyteries
- 4: Congregations
- 5: Individuals (personal papers)
- 6: Colleges
- 7: Women's missionary societies
- 8: Microforms
- 9: Inter-Church records

After the section identifier, a sequential three-digit number was added, in order to accommodate the largest possible number of accession units likely to occur in any one year in each section. After processing the records, the complete accession number for any individual item would also include a sequential box and file number. To prevent the reference code from becoming too cumbersome, the section identifier and the sequential three-digit number were combined to read as a "0000" number; the nine sections were referred to thereafter as "0000 sections." As the Policy and Procedures Manual explains,

Initial accession numbers are composed of only two components — the current year and the next appropriate "0000 number" (e.g., 1990-4004). The initial accession number is augmented when the records are being finally processed. Their final form consists of four components. (Items 2*a* and 2*b* are combined to form one element.)

- (1) The year of accession: e.g., 1989
- (2*a*) The category number: choose from 1-9
- (2*b*) The sequential number: e.g., 001
- (3) The box number (where applicable)
- (4) The file or item number (where applicable)

The resulting numeric reference code would typically resemble:

1989-1001-2-3

It was recognized that the use of "8" to identify microforms is an inconsistency. It might have been better, in retrospect, to have adopted a different system of numbering microfilms, comparable to the numbering system which was already in place for Graphic Materials. However, as the intellectual arrangement of microfilms was to be fully integrated into that of the other records, it seemed sensible to use the same basic numbering system. In practice, despite the inconsistency, this procedure is thoroughly workable and serves its purpose well.

One potential problem with the system is that there is no room for expansion, should there be major changes in the structure of the Church. This possibility was considered, but was decided on balance to be not very likely: the basic Presbyterian form of church government which this national jurisdiction uses has remained relatively unchanged since about 1690.

A further modification had to be made when we considered the question of regularly scheduled deposits. Copies of the minutes of Presbyteries across Canada and of General Assembly Boards and Committees are sent to the Archives on a monthly basis. We did not want to go through the entire accessioning procedure every month for the sake of

a few sheets of paper from some twenty or so Presbyteries (not all remember to send their minutes to the Archives), particularly as some of these minutes would eventually be replaced by the official signed and bound versions. The compromise reached was that the minutes of Presbyteries and General Assembly Committees and Boards would be filed as a "000" number. Normally the first accession of the year in each section is numbered "001", so "000" was available. We estimated that no more than one box per year (that is about 10 cm) would be used to hold these minutes, so filing them alphabetically would be feasible. In future the staff would be able to discard these copies when the bound volumes were deposited, without having to go through an elaborate deaccessioning procedure.

There is also a quarterly mailing of periodicals, newsletters, information packets, advertisements and notices, which is sent to every congregation, pastor, diaconal minister and church agency, including the Archives. We were reluctant to accession this type of material, consisting as it did largely of printed ephemera. Previously the material had been left in the original envelope and maintained, unlisted, in chronological order. Retrieval of specific items was difficult; this became more of a problem as significant periodicals were increasingly included in the mailing. The mailing also took up more space than could be justified. We considered weeding and maintaining it in chronological order, defining the provenance as the Board which was responsible for issuing it. However, it was decided that this would not alleviate our retrieval problems unless we were prepared to list the contents. Instead, we decided to regard the material wherever possible as periodicals, and add them to the periodicals section of the archives; this removed the need to list individual issues. This solution compelled us to expand our definition of what a periodical actually is, but it was a convenient way to deal with printed ephemera. Only if an item could not possibly be considered to be a periodical, and could not be disposed of in any other way, would it be formally accessioned.

Locating records sequentially by accession number permits economical use of the available space: there is no longer any need to anticipate unscheduled accruals from each congregation, presbytery, synod board or committee, by leaving appropriate gaps on the shelves, although there still has to be some planning in order to anticipate the amount of space required for each section. A greater economy of space could have been achieved by designating a specific area for oversize volumes, but it was felt that the number of such records was not sufficient to justify the establishment of another identifier in the accession number. In retrospect, it might have been wiser to use continuous numbering of files within accession units rather than a box and file number, as this would have resulted in a better use of space and would have made the reference code less complicated. However, notwithstanding this reservation, the system in place is a considerable improvement on its predecessors.

The accessioning system through its various modifications meets all the criteria which were originally established. Numbering records by box and file permits retrieval to the file level. The creation of numeric identifiers permits the segregation of records deposited from different sources and in different media. The adoption of an accession numbering system of control, instead of a record group classification scheme, permits a greater economy of available space. Using accession numbers as location identifiers also means that the system is not dependent on the precise layout of the present facility, and could be easily moved to another building, should the Church so decide. In addition to meeting these basic physical criteria, moreover, accession units provide a useful means of

exercising administrative control and protecting the provenance and integrity of the fonds. The system has therefore proved to be a good choice for the needs of the Presbyterian Archives.

Intellectual Arrangement

The drawback to an accession unit numbering system is that the numbers do not indicate the fonds or series to which the records belong. This means that there has to be rigorous documentation of each accrual, the accessioning details and the provenance of each accession unit must be recorded, and careful attention must be paid to the intellectual arrangement. There also has to be an assimilation of the idea that the numbers in the inventories need not follow any clearly logical order whatever, and that it is the description alone which determines intellectual arrangement. We therefore had to develop a range of standardized finding aids in order to ensure that all records were properly identified, arranged and described. This was done by designing new accession forms and creating accession files, setting up a text database for accession units, reconsidering the card index as a primary access point and developing policies for the compilation of inventories.

The previous method of providing for intellectual control and access had been a card index, which doubled as a catalogue in traditional library fashion. This did have some benefits for the main types of users of the Presbyterian Archives — genealogists and local and congregational historians — as it permitted direct access to the material of interest to them. Using subject headings, cross-references and standard bibliographical access points, browsing was easy and required little assistance from the staff. However, the cards were inconsistent as to the level of access provided: the description of administrative records was generally at the fonds level or, at best, the series level, while congregational records were usually described at the item level but only occasionally at the series level. The depth of description was also inconsistent, as was the format, use of abbreviations and typewriting, thanks to the number of volunteers and staff involved in constructing the card index.

Our immediate priority was to produce well-constructed inventories which gave a consistent and appropriate depth of description down to agreed levels, and conformed to recognized archival standards. The administrative records in particular required adequate historical sketches and scope and content notes, and it was agreed that our aim would be to produce an inventory for every fonds, providing access and description to the file level. It was also agreed from the start that the inventories would conform as far as possible to the standards developed by the BCA's Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards as soon as these became available.

We had to think through our definitions of fonds and sous-fonds very carefully in order to be able to produce satisfactory inventories. Presbyteries, Synods and congregations change their boundaries, amalgamate with each other, divide to create new bodies, or form cooperative linkages, some of which may last for over a century, while others may last for no more than a few months. Additional complications arose when congregations were linked and used the same manuscript volume for their minutes, or baptismal or marriage registers — the records of one congregation starting from one end of the volume those of the other from the other end, upside down. It was decided that we would treat each congregation, Presbytery and Synod as a separate fonds, and treat each amalgamation (but not each linkage) as a newly-created fonds. We therefore would produce

a separate inventory, combining an administrative history and scope and content note, for each fonds. Where the same volume was used by two or more congregations, the file description would appear in both inventories, each providing a cross-reference to the other. The physical location of the unit had ceased to be a problem on adoption of the accessioning system.

Administrative records posed a similar problem of defining fonds. Presbyterians change committee names and remit on a regular basis, and The Presbyterian Church In Canada has restructured its administration roughly every ten years since 1945. We felt that it was important to show the continuity of the records and the type of work done by the administrative departments, despite these changes, and so agreed that a mere change of corporate name would not necessitate treatment as a separate fonds. Any significant change in remit, however, would require us to treat the records as a separate series and would result in the production of a separate inventory. A good example of this phenomenon is the records relating to evangelism and social concerns, which have tended to be linked together. In 1907 the Board of Moral and Social Reform was established, and in 1908 the Committee on Evangelism was set up. These two bodies cooperated extensively, so that in 1911 they were amalgamated as the Board of Social Service and Evangelism. In 1925, only a Committee of Evangelism was continued, two-thirds of the denomination having entered the United Church of Canada, but in 1932 General Assembly began to show more interest in social concerns. A variety of committees were struck, resulting in the establishment of the Board of Evangelism and Social Action in 1945. All these committees and boards are brought together in one inventory, but are carefully delineated as sous-fonds within the inventory; there is also a detailed administrative history to assist researchers. A denominational restructuring in 1972 saw the Board of Evangelism and Social Action abolished and its functions taken over by a new Board of Congregational Life, which also took over the work of the abolished Boards of Christian Education, Stewardship and Budget and the old National Committee of Presbyterian Men. This major change was reflected by the creation of a separate inventory for the Board of Congregational Life.

These decisions were made with the knowledge that many of the administrative records were passed on from board to board, regardless of structural changes. Series therefore appear in more than one inventory. However, we were also aware that many more internal structural changes could be anticipated, including a major reorganization of functions in 1991, which saw the abolition of almost all the boards and committees and their replacement by two agencies; all such changes will require further modifications of the inventories. Congregations, too, will continue to amalgamate, divide and link. We felt it was necessary to provide clear limits to the content of each inventory, which would reflect the structural organization of the denomination. The solution chosen may sound complex, but to Presbyterians familiar with the basic structure it is sensible and comprehensible.

Inventories satisfy the need to provide an intellectual arrangement which clearly identifies the provenance and context of the records. However, it was also recognized that the majority of the users were not interested in details of provenance. Most genealogists look for specific information found in easily identifiable records, and do not need to understand the original purpose or function of the records. Although their research is clearly enhanced when they study the records in context, it is not essential to grasp the intricacies of Presbyterian church government in order to find one's great-grandmother's

record of baptism. Most local historians also do not need the assistance of an inventory in order to be able to interpret the minutes of Session or the Board of Managers; often they possess more information about the congregation than a brief historical sketch in an inventory can provide. It was therefore agreed that the card index would continue in use, but would have clearly defined objectives: the cards would provide access at the item level for those types of records frequently and consistently required by genealogists and local historians, but would provide references at the fonds level to the inventories for all the other records. This meant that most researchers coming in person to the Presbyterian Archives could browse through the cards without initially requiring prolonged assistance, which freed the Deputy Archivist to give more appropriate assistance as well as deal with all the other daily tasks.

Administrative control was addressed by redesigning the accession form to include more detailed description of each accession and custodial information, and by setting up an automated catalogue and accession files. The automated catalogue is explained under Descriptive Standards, below. Creating accession files was more difficult to justify than redesigning the accession form. In theory, we wanted to collect all the correspondence and documentation relating to individual accession units into individual files for ease of access. However, we balked at the cost of providing files for every accession, particularly when many accessions had been deposited without any documentation. We inaugurated the system and created files accordingly, but by February 1991 we were allocating one file to every twenty accessions and by January 1992 the decision had been taken to allocate one file per section per year.

Processing Methods

Having decided on a new classification scheme, we agreed that all the existing holdings would be renumbered in order to conform to the accessioning system; in implementing this the opportunity would be taken to reappraise, rearrange and redescribe the records where necessary, and upgrade conservation techniques. It was therefore agreed that, as well as placing records in acid-free boxes as had been the practice, all files would be replaced with or placed within acid-free folders. All manuscript volumes which could be fitted into standard-size boxes were also placed in acid-free folders, which facilitated access as well as providing extra protection. Oversize volumes were wrapped in acid-free tissue for protection. We also undertook some minor repairs when necessary, and removed all metal paper-clips, replacing them with plastic. Inevitably, budgetary constraints prevented the purchase of some items, but we were able to achieve a consistent degree of protection for the bulk of the holdings.

The recataloguing was tackled by "0000 sections." Originally we had planned that there would be no alteration to the physical location of the records until the project was completed, but we discovered that the improved access afforded by the new system made it more sensible to reorganize each "0000 section" as it came up. This meant that we produced visible results of the project even in the early stages, which helped convince relevant staff, ministers and committee members of the value of the work. We chose to deal first with the two smallest sections — the records of Presbyteries and Synods — as a test of the viability of the system, and then concentrated on that section which was the most in need of rearrangement and redescription, and which could therefore show the most improvement — the records of the Boards and Committees of General

Assembly. Once these records had been disengaged from the subject-oriented classification system, and proper administrative histories had been researched and written to establish their correct provenance, we found that some of the records were actually still of use to the current administrative staff of the Boards and Committees themselves. The speed and accuracy of our retrieval thereafter raised the profile of the Archives.

Descriptive Standards

Although we had agreed to implement the descriptive standards developed by the Bureau of Canadian Archivists, we had to start the project without knowing what these would be. As the work progressed, reports of the working groups became available and eventually the first chapters of *RAD* were published; until then, however, we had to develop our own standards. We adopted as far as possible the standard Canadian conventions of punctuation and dating. We also established standard terminology for the types of records deposited in the Presbyterian Archives. The production of inventories on a word processor gave us the opportunity to design a standard layout, which in turn helped to produce a consistent method of description.

The care taken over consistent punctuation and terminology proved itself to have been worthwhile, after *RAD* was published; we discovered that the few minor changes from our standards to those of *RAD* were more easily made because our standards had been consistently applied. A simple "search and replace" function in the word processor dealt with most of the changes, which included the addition of square brackets for supplied dates and the replacement of "c." with "ca." for "*circa*" dates. One major change which *RAD* initially required was that "n.d." should not be used, and that a conjectural date should always be supplied. In many cases we realized that it would be possible to supply a reasonably accurate date or approximate decade, but it was felt that when the only conjectural date that could be supplied with any certainty was the century, the use of "n.d." was equally appropriate and potentially less misleading. Our reluctance to replace all instances of "n.d." was later vindicated by the report of the working group on textual documents, which made exactly the same point.

Description at the fonds level had not previously been attempted in any consistent manner, so we were free to devise a system which conformed closely to descriptive standards. We established two fonds level catalogues in the spring of 1990, using *INMAGIC* text databases: one for congregational records and one for the records of all other corporate bodies. The division into two catalogues was convenient during the recataloguing but may later prove to have been more complicated than necessary, in which case the two can easily be amalgamated. Each accession unit was entered in these catalogues with the appropriate fonds level description, although, of course, no accession unit constituted a complete fonds. The information contained in the fields conformed to the standards proposed by the Working Group on Description at the *Fonds Level* [subsequently *RAD* Chapter 2: Multiple Media Fonds].

All the information in the catalogue was already available in the inventories, the accession forms and the card index. It was time consuming to bring this information together, but most of it was imported successfully from the word-processor. The rules we developed for these catalogues were based very closely on the working group's recommendations, as can be seen from the following extract from the Policy and Procedures Manual:

ACC Accession Number

Enter accession number of accession unit.
e.g., 1973-4001

TI Title

Enter the Name of the originating court, office or person. Enter the place name and province of a congregation followed by the name used by the congregation.

GMD General Material Designation

Choose from the following terms:

architectural
cartographic
computer file
graphic
moving images
multiple media
sound recordings
text

Where there are several types these should be listed in descending order of predominance.

PRV Provenance

Enter name of the last court, office or person which actively used the records. Where the records belong to more than one court, office or person, enter the provenance for each originating body, using the function key F10 to produce additional provenance entries.

PD Physical Description

Text — give extent in metric linear measurement.

Graphic — give number of images.

All others — give number of items.

LD Level of Description

Enter “fonds”.

DR Date Range

Enter the inclusive date range for the entire accession unit.

Give predominant dates in round brackets.

CR Copy/Repository

If any records are copies, state this fact.

Note where the originals are held, giving full address and name of repository or owner.

SC Scope and Content Note

Give summary of principal record types and extent, resolving the general designations of text, graphic, etc., into correspondence, minutes and reports or

photographs (positive and negative), documentary art, etc.

State how the records have been arranged.

Give inclusive and bulk dates, noting any serious gaps in the records and any subsequent accruals that may be expected.

Give extent and depth of detail of subject content, noting relative strengths and weaknesses.

FA Inventory

State computer code of inventory and, in round brackets, state level to which inventory is listed.

e.g., FA-INTER (filing unit level)

RM Related Material

Give accession number of records which contain material closely related by subject content.

AM Associated Material

Give accession number of records which contain material closely related by provenance.

HS Administrative History/Biographical Sketch

Give brief historical or biographical sketch in narrative form.

Include date of establishment, amalgamation or dissolution of court or office; or person's date of birth and date of death.

Include any name changes and boundary changes.

SU Subjects

Use subject headings from approved list.

CH Custodial History

State name and title of person who deposited records in the Archives and date.

State any known information about custody of records prior to deposit.

Add information about withdrawals and return of records.

RE Restrictions

State any restrictions on access, length of restriction, authority for restriction and person from whom permission to view may be obtained.

RP Reproduction Rights

State name of owner of copyright if known.

Assume copyright owner is The Presbyterian Church In Canada for all corporate records.

AI Additional Information

(Use this for any additional information considered necessary.)

(N.B. Sample entries appear in Note 2 at the end of this article.)

With the publication of *RAD* it was discovered that some significant changes had been made to the recommendations of the working group. The most obvious was that provenance was not given as an element in the description, whereas the Working Group on Description at the *Fonds* Level had included provenance as an element of the title, following the general material designation and parallel title. We felt that title and provenance were distinct from each other and therefore retained provenance as a separate element in the description. In constructing these text database catalogues, however, we had some problem determining what constituted a title. What, for example, was to be done with records which originated from one congregation which had since changed its name several times following a number of amalgamations? With the publication of *RAD* this issue had to be reexamined; no final decision had been made in relation to the catalogue by the end of February 1991.

We did not attempt to implement the recommendation of *RAD* that the source of supplied titles should be indicated. At the fonds level, all titles are supplied and invariably taken from the provenance of the records in some form or other. We did not describe at the series level as a general rule, while at the file level we had not kept a record of which titles were supplied by the archivist and which were given by the generating body. In many cases, these records have no formal title while in active use by the creating body. The title proper element in the description is a bibliographic concept developed from library cataloguing, which, while useful, may often be difficult to apply.

The main advantage of this automated catalogue is that it provides immediate administrative control over each accession unit as it enters the Archives. Even if records remain unprocessed for some time, the catalogue provides a basic level of access for users. This has proved to be particularly useful as the administrative offices of The Presbyterian Church In Canada have begun to develop a records management programme and use the Archives at an earlier stage in the records life cycle than previously. The software chosen, *INMAGIC*, is sufficiently flexible to accommodate changes in the text database structure, and not only provides various methods of indexing but also permits variable-length fields. This appears to satisfy the likely future use of the software, if text databases are developed for the series and item level and if it becomes possible to permit users direct access to the computer. In the meantime the catalogues provide good administrative control, and speed up the process of reference and retrieval.

Reappraisal of the Holdings

The recataloguing project required that all records previously deposited be examined in order to confirm their provenance and arrangement; it therefore presented an opportunity to reconsider the collections mandate, tighten up the collecting policy and dispose of records which did not meet the criteria adopted. Most of the decisions were fairly routine, but publications, printed ephemera and graphic materials presented greater problems. As in many archives which began as small voluntary organizations, these holdings were especially influenced by the particular interests of the sponsors. Publications immediately posed a problem. The Committee on History had encouraged the deposit of books written about Presbyterians in Canada, about Scottish Presbyterianism and about the Christian Church in general, but had been less active in acquiring the official publications of The Presbyterian Church In Canada and its predecessors unless their subject matter was the history of Presbyterianism. Some members of the Committee were also

keen to acquire the published works of prominent Canadian Presbyterians, such as Lucy Maude Montgomery and “Ralph Connor” and also to set up a representative library of the books that might have been found on the shelves of nineteenth-century Presbyterian theological students. Many older periodicals had also been deposited which had only slight connections with the Church. The amount of shelf space taken up by these publications was unacceptable.

It was agreed that we had to redefine the collections mandate of the Archives in order to avoid accumulating publications which could easily be found in many libraries, and were of little or no reference value to users of the Archives. Official publications of the Church (by any congregation or church court) were to be actively collected, while publications authored by members, ministers or employees of the denomination were to be accepted — provided they had some relevance to the principal holdings. It was also agreed that any publications which were retained would be accessioned as archives, arranged by provenance and located among the other records of the denomination. (Provenance was defined as the publishing or commissioning body within the denomination.)

Retrieval of publications had previously been straightforward, through the card index and a simple reference code. After implementing these new policies, however, and cheerfully disposing of a large quantity of publications and periodicals to willing recipients, we discovered that retrieval of specific publications now required detailed knowledge of provenance: i.e., the board, committee or congregation which had published the item. Most users, of course, including church staff, generally had no knowledge of this, being only conversant with the author or title. We therefore retained the existing card index, and in addition, using *INMAGIC*, set up a text database for all the publications, based on *AACR2* and drawing on the assistance of Chris Tucker, the cataloguer of Caven Library, Knox College. The creation of this text database required a minor adjustment of the accession numbers, as many small pamphlets were stored together in files in order to reduce costs, and therefore shared the same file number. As the filing unit accession number was chosen as the retrieval field for editing purposes, we had to add sub-numbers using a decimal point. Our failure to read the instructions carefully enough led to a number of hours wasted in experimenting with brackets and slashes, before discovering that the decimal point was the only punctuation mark the software would accept.

The Presbyterian Archives had accumulated extensive newspaper cuttings, scrapbooks, posters and other reference materials, as well as communion vessels, bibles and other artifacts. With the cooperation of the Committee on History, repositories were found for most of the artifacts. Some of the reference materials were also disposed of, but as the Presbyterian Archives serves as an information resource and documentation centre for the Church, it was important to retain any relevant material. After consultation with a number of other archivists, we set up a basic reference collection which would not be accessioned, but would be available to researchers through the card index under subject, person and place.

It was also difficult to tighten up the collecting policy for the Graphic Materials. Again in its role as an information resource and documentation centre, the Presbyterian Archives often retains very poor reproductions simply because there is no other illustration available for a particular person or church building. However, this had led to the practice of accepting photocopies of illustrations, or photographs held by congregations or by

other repositories, and describing them as though they were original graphic records. This process was difficult to control and administer, so changes were made to the descriptions to indicate the quality of the graphic record and the policy was established that while the Archives would continue to collect whatever was available, poor photocopies and illustrations would be replaced with archival record copies or originals wherever possible.

Benefits

There were a number of initial benefits which resulted from this project. The most important for the Presbyterian Archives was a faster rate of retrieval combined with greater accuracy of description, which raised the stature of the Archives among the administrative staff, the ministers and the members of the Church. This in turn led to a greater confidence in the ability of the Archives to manage and preserve the records, and encouraged a higher rate of deposit. Certain types of record, which the administrative staff "had been meaning to send to the Archives" for some years actually started to arrive.

The higher profile assisted the Deputy Archivist in establishing a records management programme for the administrative offices. The idea of records management had been discussed from about 1984 onwards, and the staff had slowly recognized the benefits of such a programme. The faster, more accurate retrieval which resulted from the recataloguing project, however, gave the staff evidence of what could be achieved so they became more supportive, allowing the Deputy Archivist to set up training workshops and develop preliminary scheduling. There is still work to be done in this area, but present administrative staff are now convinced of the value of a records management programme — which in itself is a major achievement for a church archives.

Restrictions on access to sensitive material was an area where church members and staff regularly expressed concern, and where guidelines had been established some years prior to the recataloguing project. However, during the recataloguing project it became clear that records had been deposited without the depositor's having indicated the sensitivity of the material, while access to other records had been restricted excessively. After this matter was drawn to the attention of General Assembly staff, a review of the guidelines for congregations was carried out, and separate guidelines were agreed upon, with the Boards and Committees for the records which they and their predecessors had generated. The project therefore provided the Deputy Archivist with accurate information on which to establish better cooperation with the offices which generate the records.

The higher profile which the Archives achieved in the eyes of the Church gave the Deputy Archivist a good basis for requesting additional funds. The Presbyterian Archives had been staffed by only one permanent, full-time professional archivist since 1980, but the Administrative Council of General Assembly accepted that the recataloguing project required additional staffing; they therefore allocated sufficient funds for an Assistant Archivist for three years, for the purchase of the computer and software and for training on the software.

One extremely beneficial result of the project was the drafting of a Policy and Procedures Manual. As has been noted, one of the major difficulties in the past was the lack of information about the descriptive systems and the changes made by staff and volunteers over the years. Like many small and medium-sized archives, most of the information

through which control of the records and cataloguing was maintained was held in the minds of the staff; inevitably, given staff changes, this information was lost and had to be rediscovered through considerable effort. The Policy and Procedures Manual began as a little black notebook and ended up as a compilation of detailed policies and instructions regularly updated and reprinted. So many decisions had been made that a manual was the only way to keep track of what we were doing, avoid inconsistencies and prevent too frequent reconsideration of the same issues. The manual was also useful for training new staff in the methods and procedures of the Archives. On its first utilization as a training manual, when Donna Murphy joined the project, we discovered that despite the effort which had gone into the initial drafting of the manual, she was nevertheless able to identify inconsistencies and problems of which we had been unaware. The Manual emerged out of the daily issues on which we had to make decisions, and is continually in process; none of the decisions recorded in it are irreversible, and undoubtedly more sections will be rewritten as the need arises.

One of its most significant benefits was the opportunity for professional development that this project offered to the archivists involved. In making decisions we had to go back to basics over and over again, debating precise definitions of fonds and sous-fonds, and series and subseries; clarifying our terminology; maintaining consistency; establishing the principle of provenance and defining it at the most detailed levels. We taught ourselves to challenge every method and concept we had held, and while the principles survived, the tendency to perform tasks a particular way out of habit was systematically destroyed. It was an exhausting process, but we were determined to make decisions that would be appropriate and professionally acceptable.

Conclusion

The main issue raised by this project for other archives is whether it is sensible to separate the physical arrangement entirely from the intellectual arrangement. The Presbyterian Archives is relatively small; the accessioning system described here may not be appropriate for larger archives. The work involved in retrospectively recataloguing the records might be impossible for a large archives with a backlog running into hundreds of staff-years. The mental adjustment required to operate this system might also be an unnecessary addition to the workload of an already over-worked staff. However, it is also worth considering the staff time and resources employed to operate any system which requires regular physical reorganization of the records or elaborate location codes and plans.

Most archival manuals argue that it is perfectly acceptable to change to a new system of arranging and describing records without affecting the previous system. The assumption is made that it is possible to run two descriptive systems concurrently within the same archives. We disagreed with this because there were already several cataloguing systems in place, and because trying to cope with these systems proved to be impossible. Even if there had only been one previous system with which to contend, the radical change in the physical arrangement would probably still have required us to redescribe the existing material rather than try to maintain the old system alongside the new one. A single method of classification and retrieval appeared to us to be essential, given the level of staffing which could realistically be anticipated over the next few years.

A project of such magnitude is not to be undertaken lightly. It has already taken longer than we originally anticipated, and as of January 1992 was still in progress. The regular

work of the Archives — reference and retrieval service, administrative tasks, records management, oversight of an active microfilming project, committee work, appraisal and selection, arrangement and description — still has to be done by only one full-time professional archivist. The recataloguing project required a major commitment of resources and funds on the part of the Deputy Archivist, the Committee on History and the Administrative Council of The Presbyterian Church In Canada. The benefits were considerable, however, and while it has been frustrating and time-consuming to implement, it has also been tremendously satisfying.

Notes

* I am particularly grateful to Mark Van Stempvoort, formerly of the United Church Archives, who debated many of the issues and ideas and gave valuable assistance.

1 For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see Debra Barr, "Protecting Provenance: Response to the Report of the Working Group on Description at the Fonds Level," *Archivaria* 28 (Summer 1989), pp. 141-45.

2 The following example is typical of entries in the automated catalogue:

ACC 1973-1001

TI Committee on the Revision of the Book of Praise

GMD textual documents

PRV Committee on the Revision of the Book of Praise

PD 1m

LD fonds

DR 1964-1973

SC This unit consists of approximately 1 metre of the minutes, correspondence, paste-ups of hymns and other records of the Committee on the Revision of the Book of Praise. The minutes and correspondence are arranged chronologically as far as possible. The paste-ups of the Book of Praise and similar records are arranged in page order as far as possible. The records are fairly complete. A further series of the papers of L.H. Fowler relating to the Committee are held by the Archives but are closed until the year 2010.

FA FA-REVB

RM 1973-1040; 1982-1001

HS The Committee for the Revision of the Book of Praise was established by the General Assembly of 1964 as a sub-committee of the General Assembly's Committee on Church Worship. Its final report was made to the General Assembly in 1973 and the Committee was then dissolved, continuing responsibility for the Revised Book of Praise (1972) being transferred to the Committee on Church Worship.