

The Glenbow Archives, 1966-2016: A History of Design and Circumstance

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1991 was a pivotal year for the Glenbow-Alberta Institute, and especially for its archives. 1991 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *Glenbow Alberta Act*, through which Eric Harvie gave his private Glenbow Foundation to the people of Alberta. 1991 was the year in which Glenbow's first archivist, the venerable Dr. Hugh Dempsey, announced his retirement after thirty-five years of ground-breaking service to Glenbow and its archives. 1991 brought the *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)*, the first successful attempt to create standard national rules for description of archival materials. 1991 brought a major two-year Canadian Studies Research Tools (CSRT) grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for the production and distribution of the first-ever comprehensive guide to the Archives' holdings of textual records. 1991 saw the completion and implementation of a major strategic planning exercise: *Glenbow in the Next Century* charts a course for the institution's next decade and beyond. 1991 brought the Archives and Library a special allocation of funds for renovations to their public facilities, which was an opportunity to make the first significant alterations to the floor since it opened. 1991 introduced the Canadian Council of Archives Conservation Strategy and its attendant grants programme.

Each of these eight events, in its own particular way and in combination with the others, has contributed to the creation of a Glenbow Archives which is dramatically different from that which existed, as a public institution, for the previous twenty-five years.

The Glenbow Archives is, in the context of the Canadian archival community, a very rare thing. It holds a large first-class collection of textual records, graphic materials and other archival records which document all aspects of life in a particular region — the Prairie West — and it exists for only one reason: to be used for research purposes by as broad a cross-section of the general public as possible. Although archival fonds are the essence of its holdings, the Glenbow Archives is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a purist's idea of what an archives ought to be. Indeed, by current definitions, it is not really an archives at all. Rather, it is like the proverbial small-town historical society or museum, replete with anything and everything which could even be remotely considered to be of historical interest. Unlike the small-town museum, however, it is no dark, windowless room in the back of the local town hall but an institution which

measures the linear extent of its textual documents by the hundreds of metres and its photographs by the hundreds of thousands of discrete items. Together with the calendars from some long-lost garage or pharmacy are the original ledgers recording the sale of Canadian Pacific Railway's vast landholdings to more than 50,000 homesteaders. Hard by boxes of old Christmas cards are the invaluable holograph diaries of Hudson's Bay Company factors, Indian agents, English ranchers and RCMP officers. In fact, taken — as it must always be — in combination with the Glenbow Library, the Archives is a broad-based research facility which combines original documents, publications and secondary reference sources into a set of materials which anyone undertaking research into any aspect of Prairie life ignores at her or his peril.

Open only five days a week, the sixth-floor home of the Archives and Library receives, in an average year, more than 7,000 researchers, answers the same number of written and telephone enquiries and produces more than 8,000 prints in its photo lab.

Why, then, was it necessary to take the Archives on a "quartering tack" away from the formula which had created and sustained such a remarkably successful institution?

The State of the Archives in 1990

As is so often the case, those elements which contribute the most to the strength of an institution are the same which will, if they remain unadjusted, inevitably contribute the most to its eventual decline. While one can deal at great length with the internal operation of the Archives itself, it is not an independent organization but a constituent part of a very large cultural institution; its place within that institution over the past twenty-five years, however, has had as much, if not more, to do with the state of the Archives in 1990 than what occurred internally.

Although a major component of the Glenbow since its inception, the Archives did not profit from the changes which happened in the 1970s and 1980s as the Glenbow took radical steps to establish itself as a serious, professional institution of national significance. Growth, during those times of relative plenty, was directed towards improvement in areas such as fund-raising, public relations, conservation and administration. Priority shifted from what had been a local and regional focus towards the creation of a museum which was a significant national institution. The relatively minor interest in collections management was joined by a new emphasis on the production of large exhibitions designed to disseminate Glenbow's name across the country, and on becoming the venue for significant exhibitions mounted by other institutions. *The Spirit Sings*, the huge (and hugely controversial) centrepiece of the 1988 Olympic Winter Games Arts Festival, represented the pinnacle of achievement for the "new Glenbow." It also signified the end of an era.

One of the major problems faced by the Archives during those years was its place in what had become "The Glenbow Museum." The emphasis on the promotion of Glenbow as a *museum* was a legitimate marketing tactic addressing the difficulties presented by the rather ponderous official title of the place — "The Glenbow-Alberta Institute" remains the legal name of the institution — but while the Archives managed to maintain its particular identity among the various outside user-groups, such was not the case within the institution itself. Large numbers of staff had joined Glenbow since the new image was developed, and for many the idea that Glenbow was more than just

a museum would have come as a surprise. For many employees (including some at senior levels), the success and therefore relative importance of certain departments were measured in terms appropriate solely to museums. This identity problem did not exist entirely in the minds of the non-archival staff; the Archives itself was partly responsible. In the early 1980s, the Archives abandoned its traditional, low-profile research orientation and mounted a major exhibition commemorating the centenary of the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway on the Prairies. This extremely successful show was followed immediately by a feasibility study for another equally large exhibition.

With the collapse of the oil boom in 1982-83, however, Glenbow suffered a steady decline in its revenue from both public and private sources. One of Glenbow's responses to the need for economizing was to announce that the Archives and Library would be closed to the public. It is still a matter of opinion whether these two programmes were chosen because their closure would be certain to provoke a public outcry, or because they were considered to be expendable in the new scheme of things. Regardless, along with other curatorial departments, the Archives and Library never recovered fully from the losses suffered during that period.

Two areas where the Archives lagged well behind other repositories of lesser size and importance were equipment maintenance and upgrading, and the development of automated collection management systems.

Glenbow's ongoing limitations on capital expenditure effectively prevented the Archives from replacing or upgrading much of its equipment. More than half its microfilm readers were more than twenty years old. In many cases, researchers listened to irreplaceable reel-to-reel audiotapes on the same equipment used to record in the 1960s. Masses of film, sound and video recordings remained unusable, since there was no equipment on which to appraise, edit or copy them. This also meant that the Archives was dealing with every possible recording format, from wire to digital disc. In fact, the only wire recording equipment available to the Archives was in the holdings of Glenbow's Cultural History Department. Equipment to convert these different technologies to some standard, user-oriented format was simply not available.

In the archival community at large and in the Glenbow especially, the Archives trailed badly in the development of automated collection management systems. Much of the problem lay in the absence of available capital, but there were other disadvantages. Canadian archives, among the information management disciplines, were very late in developing national standards for archival description and, therefore, in experimentation with those automated systems through which such standards could best be implemented. This left the Glenbow Archives at rather a loss for guidance as it moved into the field of automation. The rest of the museum had for many years been entering its collections catalogue into the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN), the national museum database. That this system was not applicable (or available) to archival programmes — coupled with the fact that ongoing federal support for CHIN programming obviated the necessity for Glenbow to undertake a systematic, institution-wide automation study — left the Archives with little option but to wait for the muddied waters to clear and for some strong direction to come either from the Glenbow or from the archival community. As with any first-time automation project, it was better to do nothing than to do the wrong thing.

In its physical configuration, the Archives had always been a reflection of the principles on which it was organized. The manuscript and photograph sections not only occupied separate rooms, but also held separate fonds or collections which had been accessioned, organized, stored and retrieved under different systems. This state of affairs went back almost to the beginning of the Archives when, with limited staff but an unlimited mandate, the management of the rapidly growing holdings required two distinct operations. Standards developed according to the dictates of the prevailing user groups, and largely without reference to any substantive body of established archival practice. To be fair, the situation was due more to the absence of such a body of rules than to the staff's resistance to using it.

The effect of this type of management was most visible in the photograph collections. The combination of huge acquisitions and limited access to professional archival methodology resulted in the creation of an enormous "image bank." While the image bank is certainly the most widely recognized Glenbow collection, it was also probably the least-effectively managed and, curiously, also the least accessible.

When a large studio fonds — a McDermid, Gushul or Atterton — was acquired, the arrangement and description of the fonds and its parts involved not the management of the unit as a single entity, but rather the selection of individual images for inclusion in the catalogue and the consignment of the remainder to the stacks. The remainder, in the case of a 25,000-image fonds such as Gushul, might constitute 80 per cent of the original acquisition. After what has been in some cases nearly two decades, photo storage still contains tens of thousands of negatives and original prints which are not only undescribed and inaccessible, but also remain in the cartons in which they first arrived.

In the textual records holdings, problems were less acute (and certainly less massive), but the method of arrangement and description has nevertheless created its own problems. The Glenbow Archives, like most archival repositories, does not contain only original textual documents; it is also home to a large accumulation of what is generally termed "secondary source material." Such material, especially at the Glenbow, is an invaluable aid to research. Comprising photocopies or microfilm copies of documents from other repositories as well as from a wide variety of other records, the material was by no means problematic in itself. Rather, the problem lay in the manner in which it was managed. In effect, it was treated in exactly the same way as the original materials which it supported, and it was therefore accorded equal status in the arrangement and description process. While detailed finding aids to the material were not generally produced, the card catalogue was (and is now) laced with main entries and cross-references for secondary source materials which, rather than assisting the researcher, serve often to prolong the search and obscure provenance.

Caught between graphic materials and textual records, sound recordings and moving image materials existed in a curious limbo. Sound recordings were managed by the manuscript staff and films by the photo archivists. As for videotape and other, more contemporary special media, responsibility seemed at best a matter of pure expediency.

These problems in the three primary acquisition areas had one thing in common: the inexorable growth of archives. In the absence of a major redefinition of mandate and subsequent mass deaccessioning, even retrospective reappraisal of material cannot prevent an archives from growing larger year by year. Glenbow has been building its archival

holdings for thirty-five years, and even despite the shrinking of its mandate in the face of competition from newer institutions, its holdings continue to expand.

The nature of the records which Glenbow collects, moreover, has changed. There are fewer and fewer personal and family fonds, and decades have passed since it was common for individuals to keep private journals or diaries. Much of Glenbow's old stock-in-trade — ranching or fur-trade records, RCMP material and so forth — has already found its way into public archival collections, and while important letters and diaries from the early West still arrive occasionally, they do not now constitute a significant factor in the growth of the holdings. Rather, it is the records of businesses, associations and other corporate bodies which make up the bulk of new acquisitions, and such accession units can be enormous.

Glenbow has always been justifiably proud of the variety and breadth of its archival holdings. In the first decades of its existence, those holdings grew rapidly in terms of number, but comparatively slowly in terms of volume. With a few notable exceptions — the Canadian Pacific colonization and land-sale records, for example — most were small, compact and easily managed. Arrangement and description was often undertaken at the item level, a practice which the documents themselves demanded since a few dozen letters written home from the frontier would invariably contain information about people, places and events which had to be retrievable individually by subject. Such is still the case today if a new unit of these records is acquired. Today's business and association fonds cannot receive, nor do they warrant, such attention to detail.

Unfortunately, the appearance in the Archives of newer business records (especially those made available by the mergers and rationalizations in the oil and gas industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s) predated the development of archival methodologies essential to deal with them; there are several large and extremely important fonds which have languished in the Archives for years without receiving anything like the attention they deserve.

Until 1990, the Archives was by a fair margin the largest of Glenbow's "curatorial" departments, having a permanent staff of ten, including six archivists. For many years, that staff was remarkably stable, especially at the senior levels. In its entire thirty-five-year history, the Archives has had only four Chief Archivists, the first — Hugh Dempsey — continuing to exercise management control over the programme, through a variety of more senior positions, until his retirement in 1991. The photograph collections were under the control of their original manager until 1987, and the current Assistant Chief Archivist has been at Glenbow for eighteen years.

If stability were the byword for senior staff, then steady change marked the lower ranks. Although Glenbow-trained archivists populate the larger archival institutions of western Canada, the present complement of line archivists has a combined seniority which barely equals that of the Assistant Chief. There are two main reasons for this phenomenon: first, stability at the top, in combination with fixed staffing levels (the last increase in staff was in 1975) limited the prospects for advancement. Unable to move up, junior staff went out. Secondly, Glenbow salaries for archivists did not (and do not) keep pace with those being offered in other archives. Glenbow views itself primarily as a museum, and while the salaries it pays to its curators are within the general national average for museum work, the need to maintain some institutional consistency among all curatorial staff within the Glenbow has resulted in a limitation on the salaries paid to archivists.

The long-term stability of senior Archives staff was critical in maintaining the institution's unsurpassed reputation for public service. Senior staff knew the holdings intimately. In all likelihood, they had been involved in their acquisition, arrangement and description and, sometimes, publishing their contents. Indeed, arrangement and description themselves were in many cases predicated on the assumption that the staff member involved would remain the most important "finding aid" to the material.

With respect to acquisitions as well, the entrenchment of senior staff was extremely important. Contact with the most influential constituencies — the ranching community, aboriginal groups, oil and gas companies — was facilitated through individuals who had built up personal contacts over long periods of time. Members of the various communities knew certain staff on a first-name basis and spoke directly with them. More junior staff were not at the Glenbow long enough to begin to build up their own network of contacts; quite simply, it was easier to count on the strength of personal relationships to ensure the continuing flow of materials into the holdings.

While senior staff were stable, however, they did not prove immortal. It will be several years, even under ideal conditions, before Glenbow's relationships with southern Alberta's aboriginal groups begin to replace those which had been forged by Hugh Dempsey. Given Dempsey's senior position within several of those groups, whatever new relationships do emerge will not come close to replacing those which his retirement has broken. The same is true of the loss sustained when Georgeen Klassen retired as head of the photograph collections.

The loss of 20 per cent of the professional staff complement during the lay-offs of early 1990 compounded the problems inherent in the loss of Dempsey and Klassen. While no senior staff were lost due to lay-offs, the ability of senior staff to move into the vacuums created by the retirements was limited by the increased "stay-at-home" demands of maintaining public service levels with a reduced staff. Mandatory reference rotation schedules precluded staff undertaking extended activities away from the Archives, especially those which would involve travel for the purposes of acquisition. Junior archival positions at the Glenbow had usually been training-level jobs and that training was usually in-house. However, in 1986 and 1987, the Archives hired two replacement archivists who were each in their different ways well above training level. One had substantial experience in several established archives and the other was a graduate of UBC's Master of Archival Studies programme. This new staff, having solid grounding in contemporary archival practice and three to four years' experience working with Glenbow's holdings, combined with the established senior staff in order to give the 1990 Archives a depth of professionalism which it had not enjoyed for some time.

To recapitulate, the Glenbow Archives entered the 1990s in something less than excellent shape. Although its position as one of the pre-eminent public service institutions in the country was unchallenged, that reputation lay as a rather thin veneer over a provision of serious inadequacies.

Lacking the resources to apply new archival methodologies to increasingly large and complex holdings, the results of ineffective appraisal (especially of still and moving image materials) were beginning to choke the stacks. The need to commit the professional staff to almost full-time service at the reference desks precluded their involvement in the arrangement and description of major accessions (this critical activity having been given over almost entirely to lesser-skilled, grant-funded contract staff),

and in the development of new acquisition strategies for such important areas as ranching and business.

Although Glenbow staff had resumed a position of prominence within the Alberta archival community, through holding a variety of executive and committee offices in the province's two archival professional organizations, there had been little in the way of serious client development. Glenbow's reputation and relationships with the University of Calgary and other western universities remained strong, but little had been done to promote either the overall holdings in the eyes of a potential new clientele or more recent acquisitions for the benefit of regular users.

The problem was not one of motivating the staff towards revitalizing the Archives. Senior employees were frustrated by the general lack of resources necessary to maintain, let alone expand, established programmes. Newer employees were frustrated by obsolete systems which bore little resemblance to what they knew to be contemporary archival practice, and also by the lack of such basic tools as the computers necessary to facilitate any significant changes.

To be fair, the Archives was not alone in its "mid-life crisis." Its frustrations were shared by most of its curatorial counterparts at Glenbow, since they too had been through the apparently endless cycle of frozen positions, reduced budgets and inadequate facilities. Happily, however, there were some aspects of life in other departments which did not bear on the Archives. Its role and mission were not being challenged by changing public perceptions, as they so clearly were in the Ethnology and Interpretation departments, and it was not trying to augment its holdings by means of declining funds in a wildly inflated private market-place, as were both Art and Ethnology.

As with every other archives, the Glenbow programme stands on three fundamental activities: collections management, public reference service and outreach. At the end of 1990, each of these areas was in need of serious attention. The precise nature of the problems and their solutions was obvious; all that was lacking were the resources to implement the changes. These came to hand in 1991.

The Impact of RAD

The introduction of the *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)* forced the Glenbow Archives to re-examine its place in the regional and national archival communities and, more importantly, its collections management procedures.

The need for Glenbow to look at its place within the archival community grew from the fact that the use of *RAD* was quickly endorsed and mandated by organizations such as the Alberta Archives Council. Since *RAD*, moreover, had been developed by various committees working under the auspices of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists, it was clear that an institution's use of *RAD* could well become a prerequisite for continued participation in several collections management-based grant programmes.

Acceptance of *RAD*, however, would require a fundamental change in the way in which the Archives arranged and described its fonds and collections. With thousands of different units of textual records, graphic materials and sound recordings, acquired over more than three decades, standardization would not be an easy undertaking; if handled badly, it would severely compromise access to those materials. *RAD* offered what seemed to

be the most direct route towards correcting the major deficiency in Glenbow's collections management methodology. By splitting its fonds according to media and then describing each separately, Glenbow had always largely ignored the principle of provenance.

In *RAD* provenance is absolute. For Glenbow to accept and implement *RAD*, therefore, it would be necessary not only to begin to treat all new accessions in light of the principle of provenance, but also — implicitly — to make a commitment to go back over the hundreds of fonds or collections already in the Archives and re-establish their provenancial integrity.

While it was clear that there was strong support among the archivists for accepting and implementing *RAD*, it was equally clear that given the enormity of the undertaking, reductions in staff and budget and the complete lack of automated systems, a complete retrospective conversion could never be a realistic goal. The only practical prospect for undertaking the project lay with the outside funding available from the Canadian Studies Research Tools (CSRT) Grant Programme of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC).

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Grant

If *RAD* represented the descriptive methodology which the Archives so badly needed, then SSHRCC could give it the tools necessary for implementation of the standard.¹

The Archives had recognized the importance of SSHRCC for several years, but had never applied for a grant. Though the Library had successfully completed a major map-cataloguing project several years earlier, the reasons why the Archives did not immediately try to take advantage of that success are not clear. In the late 1980s, however, it was agreed that a SSHRCC application from the Archives would not be appropriate so long as Glenbow continued to grapple with the whole question of institution-wide automation. The Library's experience with its grant clearly indicated that a project of the scale proposed by the Archives could not be undertaken successfully without automation; therefore, it was deemed better to wait until Glenbow had made the decision regarding the nature of its in-house computer systems.

Glenbow's decision not to pursue what was known as the "Willoughby Project" (named for the American museum consulting firm which had produced a blueprint for the creation of a single, integrated catalogue for all Glenbow collections, including the Archives), but rather to allow individual curatorial departments to adopt those systems which best suited their holdings, enabled the Archives to begin drawing up an application for a CSRT grant.

The Canadian Studies Research Tools programme was desirable not only from the standpoint of its relatively high funding limits, but also because it allowed applicants to include appropriate computer hardware and software, as well as staff, in the cost of the project. Money for automation still being in short supply at the Glenbow, SSHRCC would allow the Archives independently to acquire at least the rudiments of a dedicated automated system.

The only significant caveat to the proposal, from the Archives' perspective, was the fact that the CSRT programme required first and foremost the production of a published guide to the materials described. This was a source of concern for several reasons: first,

it was the Archives' intention to use SSHRCC funds to apply *RAD* to a complete redefinition of its collections management procedures, as well as to its arrangement and description practices. This would be a large enough effort without the added pressure of publishing a repository guide. Secondly, the project would require the selection of a software package which would not only be appropriate for ongoing collections management, but also capable of producing camera-ready, publication-quality text for the microfiche format proposed for the guide. The MARCON systems, which had initially captured a good deal of the archival automation business, had been proving too slow and cumbersome in several projects much smaller than that which Glenbow would be proposing; yet no other software package had really emerged to take its place. Thirdly, the Archives' programme of producing both thematic and collection level guides had been a casualty of earlier budget-cutting, and no one on staff really had much experience in publishing.

The Archives and the Strategic Plan

The development of a corporate and strategic plan was an important exercise for everyone at the Glenbow. For the staff of the Archives, however, it was pivotal.

While the multidisciplinary nature of the Glenbow — it is an amalgam of Archives, Library, Museum and Art Gallery — had never been seriously challenged (the unfortunate adventure of 1983 notwithstanding), nor had it ever been formally established in a major official document. It nevertheless became clear, early in the first policy group discussions, not only that the existing Glenbow structure would be reaffirmed, but also that its multidisciplinary nature would be broadened and deepened.

The importance of this decision for the future of the Archives cannot be overestimated. The formal establishment of Glenbow's four disciplines made two critical guidelines explicit: first, the treatment of each of the four elements must be balanced. While there sensibly is no commitment to absolute equality, there is an implicit limit on the institution's ability — so to speak — to rob Peter in order to pay Paul. Secondly, each of the disciplines is required to produce superior results according to the terms of its own specific body of professional practice. In effect, Glenbow would no longer apply museum-based procedures to non-museum functions.

Other elements of the strategic plan clearly played to the traditional strengths of the Archives. The re-emphasis on research and the creation of "new knowledge" by both the public and the staff gave the Archives a new and leading role within the institution as a whole, since the production of an exhibition was no longer to be the ultimate measure of value. Closer cooperation with the educational community was also an activity to which the Archives, with its long-standing academic relationships and reputation, could make a substantial contribution.

Although, from an archival perspective, the plan wrongly merged the two distinct issues of use and access, *RAD* and the SSHRCC grant would allow the Archives to improve its performance in both areas. First, the publication of a comprehensive guide to the Archives' holdings, and its distribution to every major university in Canada, would do much to publicize the existence of the thousands of fonds and collections currently open for research. The repository guide, moreover, would simplify the production of a series of specific thematic guides to the primary acquisition areas (oil and gas industry, ranching, performing arts, etc.). This revitalization of the Archives' moribund publication

programme should result in increased user demand. Secondly, access to the holdings would be dramatically enhanced because on-line *RAD* descriptions — even at the fonds level — would automatically generate cross-references at hitherto unattainable levels of completeness and complexity.

The matter of improving the quality of the holdings, another major concern of the strategic plan, would also be addressed, however obliquely, by the on-line collections management system. Production of the SSHRCC guide would drive a continuing vetting process aimed at ensuring that only those fonds and collections having genuine research potential would be included. The corollary to this process would be the compilation of a substantial list of primary and secondary source materials which would be recommended for retrospective deaccessioning. (If they were not appropriate or important enough to warrant inclusion in the guide, are they important enough to remain in the Archives?) This winnowing process would yield a body of records which is truly valuable and which could then serve as a standard to inform coherent acquisition strategies.

Both the Archives and the Library worked hard during the strategic planning process to ensure that their concerns and needs would be addressed in any “new” Glenbow. The subsequent commitment by Glenbow to provide \$100,000 for major renovations to the sixth floor of the building was a clear indication that the institution was serious not only about its strategic plan, but also about the important role which the Archives and the Library would play in its application.

The Renovations

Even before the 1990 lay-offs forced a re-evaluation of public service, the Archives had been agitating for funds to undertake a substantial rebuilding of the sixth floor's public reference facilities. Along with every other curatorial department in Glenbow, the Archives realized that the imminent release of what were known as the “Devonian merger funds” represented the last important source of capital for such a redevelopment. When the matter of beginning to spend the merger funds was first raised, it was in the context of the need for a complete overhaul of the museum's permanent exhibitions on the third and fourth floors, in order to bring them into line with the standard set by the redevelopment of the second floor which followed *The Spirit Sings*. Continuing requests from the Archives and Library that the sixth floor be recognized as an “exhibition” floor and included in the budgeting for the merger fund programme were not heeded, so it seemed that this last opportunity would be lost. Subsequent changes in senior management, the development of the strategic plan and the staff losses of 1990, were all factors which led to a change in policy and the resulting grant.

Certainly, the merger funds represented the last significant sum of money which would be available for application to solving problems in the existing Glenbow building. Furthermore, the merger money was available for a wide variety of applications under the general rubric of “public access to the permanent collections.” Most grants available to the Archives were either not sufficiently large to allow the renovations to be completed as a single undertaking, or did not allow for the purchase of equipment. Clearly, the state of the Archives required that equal attention (and money) be given both to the layout of the floor and to the equipment necessary to preserve the holdings and make them available for public use.

Even before May 1990, public service was distracting far too much of the professional staff's time, to the detriment of acquisition, appraisal, arrangement, description and public programmes. At the heart of the problem were the two distinct reference areas: one for the graphic materials and another for textual records.

It was the general consensus of the professional staff that the merger of the two areas would not only allow the public to be served from a single reference desk, but would also be a physical manifestation of the intellectual changes already occurring in collections management. As an extension of this process of rationalization, moreover, the Library agreed to the transfer from the Archives of the Glenbow's collection of newspapers on microfilm, theses and other published materials. These large and heavily used holdings had always logically belonged in the Library, but had remained in the Archives only as a concession to the historical realities of space available for their storage and maintenance.

The renovations proceeded under the following principles:

- 1) That the cost of construction be kept as low as possible in order to maximize the moneys available for equipment purchases.
- 2) That the two reference desks in the Archives be combined into a single reference station to be staffed on a rotation schedule by both an archivist and a clerk.
- 3) That the first priority for equipment purchase be additional computer hardware, followed by new microfilm reader/printers and equipment for the preservation of and public access to the audio-visual holdings.
- 4) That the "creature comforts" of the staff (new desks, chairs or other equipment) be addressed only after the public service needs had been satisfied.

The major renovations, which were completed early in 1992, necessitated closing the floor to the public for only five days during what is normally a quiet period.

The State of the Archives in 1992

As the drafting of the departmental 1992-93 work plan got under way in March and April, most of the infrastructure necessary to take the Glenbow Archives back into the professional mainstream was already in place. The problems were no longer those related to programme design and resource acquisition, but rather those which arose from implementation.

The renovated public and staff areas necessitated the rewriting of several job descriptions, as well as alterations to the long-established reporting relationships among both the professional and the clerical/secretarial staff.

The first user-satisfaction survey, a requirement of the strategic plan, was carried out over the course of a week in late February 1992; the results were, to say the least, encouraging. Despite the major changes and new systems, more than a hundred Glenbow Library and Archives users gave both departments a 100 per cent approval rating. The survey was repeated in September 1992, and obtained the same result.

At the time of writing (December 1992), the process of remaking the Glenbow Archives is complete. The first copies of the repository guide were delivered from the printers on 17 December —the last day of work for the SSHRCC-funded staff.

Although the published guide and the single reference point are the most obvious manifestations of the Archives' transformation — "the word made flesh" — they are by no means the only results of the process. The InMagic software used to generate the guide remains in place, operating an automated collections management system which includes accessioning, acquisition, documentation and so forth. The on-line public database already holds not only the information contained in the guide, but also descriptions of those fonds acquired since the deadline for inclusion in the publication. In January 1993 researchers will begin to access the database directly through a terminal in the reading room.

The SSHRCC application requested funding to produce a guide to the textual records holdings only. It was assumed at the time that the graphic materials would be the subject of a separate application in 1993 or 1994. However, as the early work progressed, it became clear that, by comparing the separate manuscript and photograph accession registers and making use of the extensive (and complete) donor files, it would be possible to "reunite" those multiple media fonds which had been split up immediately after their acquisition. As a result, what had been conceived as a guide to textual records was published as a guide to the holdings containing entries which describe a large percentage of the graphic materials and, by using the same comparative process, most of the sound recordings and moving image materials as well.

Through its fonds level application of *RAD* in a major repository guide publication project and its adoption of InMagic software, Glenbow has moved to the forefront of *RAD*'s application. As a result, staff have been regularly consulted by the developers of *RAD* and by a variety of intending users. Ironically, the Archives' slowness in acquiring automated systems ultimately proved a blessing. Since the computers, *RAD* and the SSHRCC grant all arrived simultaneously, it was possible to begin writing on a clean slate. There were no false starts, missed opportunities or retrospective conversions.

The Archives' large, and hitherto largely neglected, sound recording and moving image material holdings also benefited from the combination of accident and design which marked 1991 as a "make-or-break" year. The Canadian Council of Archives conservation grant programme was the first which allowed for the purchase of equipment. By using a portion of the renovation grant as matching funds, Glenbow was able to secure sufficient funds to build a basic studio for the preservation, through reformatting, of the sound recordings and moving image materials. The contract staff member hired using a portion of the CCA grant will continue the work of converting these holdings to new, publicly accessible formats into early 1993.

The Glenbow Archives enters 1993 bearing little resemblance to the institution which had already existed, privately and publicly, for thirty-five years.

The Archives, 1993-2016

Obviously, the title of this section is presumptuous. One cannot assume that any institution will necessarily continue, for the next quarter-century, on the specific course set for it by any group of individuals. Though the first Chief Archivist's direct influence was palpable for more than thirty years, the times are too unstable for that phenomenon to be repeated.

There are several issues which the Archives hopes to address in the near future, both as a component of Glenbow and as a major player in the rapidly emerging regional and national archival networks.

One major element of the strategic plan bears on the development of the Glenbow as a research centre. Although the Archives has always been a major source of grist for the public research mill, the plan would have the institution itself take a more active role in what it terms "the creation of new knowledge." The Archives and the Library are the logical foci for such development.

The Library has always maintained what are essentially two distinct collections: its "curatorial" holdings and Glenbow's professional staff library. The Archives has never had an active role in areas of curatorial support, other than those services which it provides to any researcher, public or staff. It has always been the *Glenbow Archives*, never the *Glenbow's archives*.

The first steps in resolving this problem are now being taken through the introduction of some basic records management programming. When, and if, the administrative problems are addressed and steps are taken to ensure that material does not outlive its usefulness, it will be critical that the institution move to protect and make available for research (both by staff and by the public) its own records of enduring value. Those records which survive the records scheduling process must form the core of a new and important sous-fonds: the Archives of the Glenbow-Alberta Institute itself.

In the planning and execution of the recent changes, much was made of how they were to convert the Archives into a more specialized, "professional" operation. On the surface, this might seem rather counter-productive. As Glenbow increasingly stressed its internal coherence and the interrelatedness of its four disciplines, the Archives seemed to have headed out on its own, away from integration and towards specialization. In the short run, this was true. In the longer term, however, the Archives will be in a better position to contribute fully to a stronger institution only if it first becomes a stronger archives.

The divergent course being followed by the Archives will, again in the short term, be most noticeable in its relationship with the Library. The renovations in some respects have apparently not served the immediate interests of the researchers. For example, there has been an increasingly strict application of the "rules" about what belongs in one department and what belongs in the other. The newspapers on microfilm have been transferred to the Library, as have the theses and most of the other published material. As the work of producing the guide progressed and the list of the materials which do not "belong" in the Archives grew, the volume of those series and items which will be recommended for transfer to the Library, or for outright deaccessioning, also grew.

It is ironic that this breaking of connections among materials should be occurring simultaneously with the *RAD*-driven reintegration of its own fonds and collections, which is the principle of the Archives' restructuring. It is, however, an essential step.

Libraries and archives handle their materials in different ways, each methodology being driven by the unique nature of the materials. Only by applying the most appropriate methods of cataloguing or arrangement and description can each of the units be brought fully under the degree of intellectual control acceptable to each distinct

discipline. This applies equally, of course, to Glenbow's art, military, cultural history and ethnology collections.

While this approach certainly best serves the holdings themselves, it does not necessarily serve the researcher, especially in an institution such as the Glenbow. In order to provide the researcher with the fullest possible access to all the holdings, therefore, it is critical, following their arrangement and description, that units be integrated into some form of master catalogue. Previously, the adoption of common formats and descriptors were preconditions for integrated access — first the system had to be in place, and the units subsequently described on its terms — but new software allows a more flexible and usable approach.

In producing the guide to its holdings, the Archives explored, albeit in a limited way, the potential for fully integrated access to the entire body of Glenbow's collections. Glenbow owns several large units, the various media of which cross its disciplinary boundaries. In the fonds of wildlife artist Carl Rungius, for example, a huge holding of oil paintings, sketches and engravings in the Art Department is complemented by the contents of his studio (brushes, palettes, easels, etc.) in the Cultural History Department and by the Archives' holdings of his diaries, notebooks and correspondence. The entry for Rungius in the Archives' on-line database constitutes what we have termed a "hyper-fonds." While it does not provide much documentation regarding Rungius material in the other departments, it does make specific reference to their existence, gives some indication of their size and complexity, and points the researcher to the appropriate department for further information.

It remains to be seen how this initial inquiry might be exploited, through the combination of CHIN and InMagic, in order to provide one-stop, comprehensive access to Glenbow's major holdings. The creation, on the sixth floor, of a master automated access system to the Glenbow collections will inevitably mean the creation of a true research centre: the ultimate goal of the Archives' twenty-four-month rebuilding process.

Glenbow's status as a "semi-private" institution has, over the years, been both a blessing and a curse. Traditionally, the combination of endowment, private fund-raising and provincial grant (which has provided the bulk of a \$7-million annual operating budget) has — in good times — given the institution a freedom and a flexibility not possible in a purely government-funded operation. But these are not good times. The steady decline in government grants, fund-raising and interest accrual being experienced by Canada's cultural institutions have plunged Glenbow into the latest in a regular pattern of financial crises. Unfortunately, the most recent setbacks represent "the last straw" for the old Glenbow. The new cuts which will have to be made call not for the usual round of petty economies and a close look at details of programming. This time, the institution as a whole must be redesigned and restructured on the fundamental assumption that the worst is yet to come. While the philosophical assumptions of the strategic and corporate plans may stand as guideposts, their calls for expansion and improvement of programmes, services and collections will have to be re-examined. The Archives did not expect, and has not been granted, immunity in these proceedings.

The staff and resource base at the start of the 1993-94 fiscal year will dictate how far the Archives can go in building on the foundation established over the past two years. Currently, the future of the Archives within Glenbow is extremely uncertain. Will it be able to retain its professional staff complement, or be forced to re-examine — again

— the level of service which it can provide to its researchers? Will it be formally merged with the Library? What effect would such a merger have on the Archives' new professionalism? Will it be able to handle the new research demands which the publication of the guide was designed to generate?

By the time this article is published, the answers to all of these questions and many others will be known, and the future course of the Glenbow Archives will have been charted — for a few more years at least. However, regardless of the answers and regardless of the future direction of this institution, at least two important matters have been settled to the Archives' satisfaction: (1) In a researcher-driven archives — an institution which exists only to serve its users — *RAD* fonds level descriptions work, and work well, as a tool for providing superior access to archival materials. (2) *RAD* descriptions, automated by the appropriate software, can also be useful for providing integrated access to multiple media units consisting of both archival and non-archival materials.

Glenbow Archives is now in a position to make dramatic and sustained progress from a new foundation, which it could not have done in its previous incarnation. All that remains is to wait and see whether circumstances entirely beyond its control will permit it to do so.

Notes

- 1 See the article by Susan Kooyman elsewhere in this issue.