

## ***Case File Theory: Does It Work In Practice?***

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### ***Résumé***

Après avoir fait la revue de la littérature pertinente dans le domaine du tri, de l'échantillonnage, et de l'évaluation, l'auteure relate l'expérience qu'elle a faite de l'application de ces connaissances à un projet d'évaluation d'environ 525 m de dossiers individuels créés par plus de mille centres d'Emploi Canada à travers le pays. En plus d'illustrer les avantages de la méthode d'évaluation d'ensemble des fonctions d'un organisme (*macro-appraisal*), le projet d'évaluation des dossiers de l'arriéré d'Emploi Canada fournit un modèle intéressant pour examiner les implications et les rapports entre l'établissement des calendriers de conservation et la réduction de l'arriéré. Enfin, l'auteure met en lumière les bénéfices physiques et intellectuels de cette approche de l'arriéré des dossiers d'un organisme.

### ***Abstract***

After reviewing the pertinent literature in the area of selection, sampling, and appraisal, the author recounts her experience applying this information to a backlog project that involved approximately 525 metres of case files created by over one thousand Canada Employment Centres across Canada. In addition to illustrating the benefits of the macro-appraisal method, the backlog project provided an interesting model for investigating the relationship between and implications of records scheduling and backlog reduction. Finally, the author outlines and stresses the physical and intellectual benefits that arise from the implementation of this type of backlog initiative.

When Sir Hilary Jenkinson wrote the second edition of his pioneering work *A Manual of Archive Administration* in 1937, he foresaw the problem that the rapidly expanding volume of records produced by the modern state would pose for archival appraisal. Although he eventually reluctantly accepted the need to rely on selection when dealing with public records, he worried that this type of subjective process might sacrifice the sanctity of the particular characteristics of the original

group of records.<sup>1</sup> While more than fifty years have passed since Jenkinson aired his concerns about the possible ramifications of selection, the emergence and proliferation of case files poses far greater problems, which have left contemporary archivists struggling to find solutions that will enable them to discover the best methods to whittle down voluminous groups of case files into compact series of meaningful and valuable records.

We are currently living in an era of superabundance in regards to records creation. The Canadian state, for example, churns out millions of case files each year, a large percentage of which do not possess archival value.<sup>2</sup> The task of establishing some control over case files through sampling and selection is in many respects the most challenging problem confronted by archivists today. Hans Booms has asserted that "reducing quantity while condensing archival material qualitatively remains the task of the archivist appraiser. It is the archivist alone who has the responsibility to create, out of this overabundance of information, a socially relevant documentary record that is, in spacial terms, storable and, in human terms, usable."<sup>3</sup> Although a great deal has been published on the appraisal of case files, it is often difficult to determine which suggestions best suit the records involved, since each series of case files holds its own mysteries and requires an individualized sampling and/or selection method.

This article will examine some of the pertinent archival literature relating to appraisal, reappraisal, sampling, and selection within the context of a backlog project that I undertook in 1992.<sup>4</sup> This project, initiated by the Government Archives Division of the National Archives of Canada, involved the processing of case files created by two federal employment initiatives—the Local Initiatives Programme (LIP) and Training-In-Industry (TII) Programme—which at the time were part of the Department of Manpower and Immigration.<sup>5</sup> Through the investigation of these two programmes, this article will assess the role that the theoretical, strategic, and practical issues played when undertaking this project. It will also attempt to illustrate the problems one confronts when appraising case files created by an immense and ubiquitous agency that administers offices at the national, regional, district, and local level across the country. Finally, it will address the inter-relationship and implications of records scheduling and backlog reduction. As such, this article is designed to offer some constructive recommendations concerning the selection of case files.

In 1992 the Government Archives Division initiated a project intended to decrease the Division's backlog by supplying some of the archivists with assistance from contract workers. Archivists were asked to identify groups of records from their backlog that could easily be selected by contract workers, who would rely on either a recently-approved schedule<sup>6</sup> or selection criteria created by the archivist. Two of the larger undertakings that we completed dealt with the employment case files created by the Training-In-Industry and Local Initiatives Programmes. Although it was originally assumed that the contract workers would simply apply a recently-written schedule that covered those records, this experience raised a series of issues that eventually resulted in the use of special selection criteria for both projects.

It is important to begin by providing some context concerning the Department of Manpower and Immigration, the Canadian Jobs Strategy Programme, and the

records that were eventually sent to us by this institution. The Department of Manpower and Immigration was established by the Pearson Government in 1966, principally in response to a recommendation of the Economic Council of Canada to strengthen federal government manpower policy development.<sup>7</sup> The reason for the creation of the department was to incorporate manpower and immigration programmes under one agency, in order to develop labour policies that would help reduce the social and economic costs associated with chronic unemployment and to increase the efficiency and productivity of the Canadian labour force. In addition, the department possessed the broader objective of fostering comprehensive manpower programmes designed to promote Canada's productivity and growth in an internationally competitive economy.<sup>8</sup>

Although the department began modestly with five regional offices and 344 Canadian Manpower Centres (CMC's), it experienced a change of name in 1977 to the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission and has evolved into a massive agency that employs approximately 28,000 employees and administers ten regional offices and 758 Canadian Employment Centres (CEC's) across the country.<sup>9</sup>

In 1985, the Mulroney Government introduced the Canadian Jobs Strategy (CJS), an umbrella programme consisting of vocational training, job creation, employment counselling, labour market services, and labour market planning and adjustment services.<sup>10</sup> CJS administered fifty programmes, which were overseen by the department's headquarters office as well as its regional and district offices and CEC's across the country.

The case files that were processed during the backlog project were part of a massive group of records that had been transferred to the National Archives following the completion of a schedule produced in 1969, covering all of the department's employment programmes.<sup>11</sup> This schedule, which authorized the retention of all approved project files created by Manpower job creation programmes, eventually resulted in the transfer of over four hundred accessions measuring approximately 2,600 metres in extent.<sup>12</sup> The majority of these records were in the form of case files, created at all levels of the bureaucracy and, for the most part, possessing very little archival value.<sup>13</sup>

The problems with the existing schedule were related partly to operational pressures at the time in the area of the acquisition of government records, and partly to the theoretical and practical limitations of the old scheduling system. The authority involved was part of a scheduling blitz undertaken by the Archives in response to the Public Records Order of 1966, which called for the scheduling of all departmental records by 1969.<sup>14</sup> Due to the severe time constraints posed by this Order, there was very little time for archivists to visit the Department of Manpower and Immigration's district, and regional offices, and CEC's before the authority was approved by the Dominion Archivist. Consequently, decisions were made in the absence of important information relating to the extent and nature of the files that were created at the regional and local level by the department. The result was a broad and overly general records disposal schedule that ultimately led to a deluge of case files upon the Archives.<sup>15</sup>

The second problem with the old scheduling system lay in the fact that it was based on the traditional micro-appraisal method, which focuses appraisal on the value of the individual file and document. Drawing on Schellenberg's appraisal criteria, devised during the 1950s, archivists typically appraise records based on their evidential, informational, and legal value, as well as their uniqueness, physical condition, form, importance, and potential value to researchers.<sup>16</sup> The focus of this approach, therefore, is largely on the content and character of the records.

One of the inherent limitations of schedules that depend on this methodology is that they are highly vulnerable to organizational changes that occur periodically within the institution, since they rely heavily on the file classification system that is in existence during the creation of the schedule. If the programme or agency whose records have been scheduled is merged with another organization or is renamed, the schedule may no longer be useful or effective, since the agency often adopts a new record-keeping system in response to these types of changes.<sup>17</sup> The micro-appraisal approach is therefore a very inflexible method of appraising records created by agencies that are susceptible to change.

In order to avoid the limitations associated with the micro method, archivists working with government records have increasingly begun to rely on a macro-appraisal approach when appraising records. What distinguishes these two methods is that, whereas the traditional micro-appraisal method is based on the appraisal of the actual records and their relationship to the records *custodians*, the macro-appraisal approach focuses on the function and context of records creation and consequently is directed towards the records *creators*.<sup>18</sup> Richard Brown describes this system as "an appraisal strategy for records conducted at the collective rather than the item level, at the tier of the records creator, rather than at the syntactic stratum of records substance."<sup>19</sup>

In a period when departments are no longer mono-hierarchical but are highly complex and interdependent entities constantly altering their structures to reflect changing responsibilities, the macro-appraisal method enables the archivist to view the department, programmes, and activities within the context of interaction between the different implicated federal departments as well as with the general civil constituency and individual Canadians. Terry Cook asserts that the objective of the macro method is to preserve the records that reflect the "mechanism or loci in society where the citizen interacts with the state to produce the sharpest and clearest insights into societal dynamics and issues." He concludes that "it is at these points of sharpest interaction of the structure, function, and client that the best documentary evidence will be found."<sup>20</sup> This approach is therefore intended to enable the archivist to preserve the records that support the most important functions of the department, which in turn provides the best reflection of the state's interaction with Canadian society.

When utilizing the macro-appraisal method, archivists begin the appraisal process by conducting research into the mandate of the institution, followed by an investigation of the functions that support each programme, and finally, the type of records produced by each of these areas. Once the research phase has been completed, an hypothesis is formed as to which functions within the department are most significant and, subsequently, which records supporting these programmes should be retained. Instead of consulting each and every file, one need only browse

through the records in order to confirm or alter the hypothesis. In addition to producing a more comprehensive and accurate appraisal in general, this method in many respects provides the only feasible approach to appraising voluminous groups of case files.

One of the trends that has forced the profession to adopt new ways of appraising government records is that of the sudden growth and complexity of federal institutions. The Department of Manpower and Immigration proves to be a perfect example of this phenomenon. For instance, the department's CEC's more than doubled and their branch offices quadrupled during the years 1966-1977. In addition, the employment programmes' responsibilities and functions were significantly enlarged, leading to an enormous increase in the number of employment case files.<sup>21</sup> The archivist who reviewed the original schedule in 1969 could not have foreseen the department's expansion across the country, and would not have considered the acquisition of all "operational" employment files as problematic at the time. In fact, judging from the volume and nature of records that we had received from the department since the completion of the schedule, the micro method could not cope with the effect of these administrative changes.

In 1991, an archivist with the Government Archives Division, Rodney Young, researched and wrote an appraisal report that led to a new authority for the Canadian Jobs Strategy programme, which superseded the old employment schedule.<sup>22</sup> This authority covered CJS's fifty programmes, focussing particular attention on the case file issue. Since the CJS programme produces approximately three million case files a year, the intent of this schedule was to bring the case file situation under control. The CJS schedule covered 169 file primaries containing operational, subject, and case files, twenty-three national and 108 regional automated systems, and five microfiche applications. In assessing this records universe, the archivist suggested a strategy that involved protecting the electronic data from seventeen of the systems from headquarters and six from the regions, acquiring all textual operational and policy subject files from headquarters and the regional offices, and retaining a representative selection of "project" case files from thirteen programmes created by forty-nine of the department's CEC's across Canada.<sup>23</sup>

What distinguished this schedule from its predecessor, besides the sheer breadth of the records that it covered, was that it was based on a macro-appraisal method. Considering the size and complexity of CJS, the macro approach was best suited to tackle the problem of appraising the variety and volume of records created by this programme. As a result, the CJS authority provided a broad and comprehensive appraisal of the records created by the fifty programmes administered by CJS.

The original intent of the Training-In-Industry and the Local Initiatives backlog projects was simply to apply the authority to the records created by these two programmes. Unfortunately, after assessing the records, we discovered that this approach would not be possible, since the records did not reflect the description provided in the schedule. The schedule recommended that the National Archives retain all accepted "project" case files created by these two programmes from all of the regional offices and forty-nine of the Department's CEC's.<sup>24</sup> The "project" files were described as those containing summarized project proposals, project objectives, status reports, proposed training plans, detailed project assessments, contract termination reports, abridged project summaries, and information concerning

contracts. The actual "contract" files, in contrast, were supposed to contain contracts, agreements, and financial and administrative documentation created during transactions.<sup>25</sup>

After reviewing the 526 metres of case files for these two projects, we determined that there was in fact only one type of file within this body of records fitting the description of the "contract" case file. Since our holdings covered all of the records created by the two programmes from the time of their inception to their demise for every office across Canada, we were able to conclude that no "project" files had ever been created for the Training-In-Industry Programme and LIP. This situation necessitated the creation of special selection criteria for these two programmes.

The first project that we worked on involved the files created by the Training-In-Industry (TII) Programme, a group of records measuring 223 metres in extent. Operating from 1969 until the mid-1970s, TII was one of five types of employment training programmes that was administered by the department.<sup>26</sup> It was a federally-subsidized training programme that targeted workers facing imminent lay-offs resulting from technological change. The technical training offered had to be formally separated from the workplace and not produce saleable commodities. The programme therefore provided Canadian workers with the opportunity to upgrade and enhance their skills, thereby enabling them to adjust to the rapidly changing Canadian labour market.

Although the programme itself was important, the records at the case file level consisted of contractual files that were extremely routine in nature and therefore not worth preserving. The TII case files, organized by the names of the companies that sent their workers to be trained, were all thin, homogeneous files containing contractual and administrative documentation such as lists of students and teachers involved in the programme, course schedules, and occasionally the objectives of the course.

When appraising federal government case files, it is important to discover to what extent they capture the experience of the individual Canadian and provide information on the interaction between individuals and the state. Terry Cook suggests that the significance of the case file is that it can "enrich our understanding of the interaction of the individual citizen or organization with government, bureaucracy or state or reveal lives, habits, and beliefs of those hidden from 'elite' archival documentation."<sup>27</sup> The Training-In-Industry case files failed to fulfil these two criteria, since the information within the files revealed very little about either the individual trainees' interaction with government or their experiences within the programme. The information in the case files was also documented in other sources such as the subject and policy files. In addition, the department possessed an electronic system that supported this programme and contained much of the tombstone information from the case files. Joseph Anderson has noted that automated information of this type "allows researchers to select and analyze pertinent information readily, to manipulate data, and to link and compare case files with other sources."<sup>28</sup> In addition to providing a more compact format of retaining documentation, electronic data provides a more cost-effective alternative to retaining the textual case files. It was therefore decided that we should not retain any of the actual case files, since

the subject files provided a much richer source for documenting the policy and operational issues relating to the programme, and the electronic system served as a better medium to preserve information at the individual case file level.

The second project involved the case files created by the Local Initiatives Programme. Launched in 1971, LIP survived until 1977, when it was replaced by the Canada Works Programme. The main objective of LIP was to reduce winter unemployment by providing funding to local projects with minimal government intervention. It enabled individuals, entrepreneurs, organizations, and municipalities to apply for grants for special temporary projects that would benefit the community and employ seasonally unemployed workers. Applications were processed through Constituency Advisory Groups (CAG's), which were composed of volunteers from the various communities who were nominated by the Members of Parliament for the regions and appointed by the minister.<sup>29</sup>

The department's criteria for LIP applications stipulated that eligible projects had to produce new facilities and services or utilize untouched resources within the community. Funding for the programme was allocated in accordance with provincial unemployment statistical distribution. Therefore, provinces such as Newfoundland and Quebec, which experienced higher unemployment, received more funding per capita than the other provinces. In addition to enhancing Canadian communities through the construction of new facilities such as parks, community centres, daycare centres, and ski hills, LIP provided participants with new job skills intended to enable them to compete more effectively in the Canadian marketplace. During the 1970s it was the largest federal job creation programme in Canada. In 1974 LIP provided approximately \$84.4 million in funding to support 4,155 projects, which led to the employment of over 30,000 Canadians. By 1975 the funding for the programme rose to the then substantial sum of \$130,000,000.<sup>30</sup>

The LIP case files that were processed measured 303 metres in extent. Although the programme was apparently of great importance *vis-à-vis* the department and Canadian society, the backlog project proved to be much more complex than Training-In-Industry. The case files were not as homogeneous as the TII files. Not only did they vary in terms of the nature of the documentation; there was also a great deal of regional incongruity. While some of the dossiers resembled ordinary contract files in terms of their documentary content, others contained much richer information on individual projects, as well as the participants' interaction with the department at both the local and national level. Some of the richer files contained detailed project proposals and departmental feedback in the form of correspondence and evaluations, as well as the usual contractual information. We also discovered that the value of the records varied from region to region; some of the offices required more detailed information from applicants and, in turn, provided more feedback in terms of the success and/or failure of individual projects.

Our assessment of the records, based on a spot-check of every tenth box or so, indicated that the case files varied in terms of their documentation and archival value. It would have been inappropriate, therefore, to rely on a *simple random sample* for the LIP files: this method is valid only for case file series that are homogeneous and document a short-lived project or "one-shot" transactions

between individuals and the state.<sup>31</sup> The LIP case files were multi-transactional, extended over a fairly long period of time, contained individualized reports and correspondence, and were highly regionalized. Another option, *systematic random sampling*, was also deemed to be inappropriate. This numerical sampling system is best applied to a series of case files that are organized chronologically; the LIP files were organized by region and contained regional file classification numbers. The final sampling method—*stratified random sampling*—might have been suitable for this project, since it enables the archivist to break down the series into sub-groups such as region or organization and then sample each of the smaller series individually.<sup>32</sup> While this approach would have enabled us to retain a sample of the files for each region, we would have risked losing the exceptional and controversial files. After establishing that the LIP case file series contained a large number of “thicker” files that documented some of the more important, controversial, and publicized projects supported by this programme, we decided to investigate other alternatives outside of statistical sampling.

Unlike the situation with the Training-In-Industry case files, there was no electronic system that supported the operational activities of this programme. While the subject files provided rich detail about the policy and operational imperatives of LIP, they revealed very little about individual projects and/or participants. The information about the participants within these files, therefore, was not captured by any other source. It was therefore decided that we should keep some type of non-statistical selection and/or example of these case files, since they documented an important point of interaction between headquarters, the regional offices, municipal governments, and individual applicants who benefited from LIP grants.

After assessing the records, we discovered that the larger files were, on the whole, of greater value than the thinner ones. These thicker files captured information about cases that were more complex and controversial; the thinner case files, in contrast, were in general more contractual and subsequently more routine in nature. Ultimately, we decided to rely on *systematic selection*, which involved the extraction and archival preservation of only the “fat” files from this group.

A “fat” file can be described as either a multi-volume case file or a well documented file that is approximately an inch or larger in thickness. It was originally the archivists who worked on the Massachusetts Superior Court case file appraisal who determined that “fat” files on the whole tend to possess higher archival value than the medium-sized and thin case files. The famous FBI appraisal conducted by NARA also relied on the “fat” file strategy for a portion of the records.<sup>33</sup> In an international report on the subject of case files, Terry Cook has illustrated the value of the “fat” file:

as exceptional, unusual, or controversial case files almost by definition generate more correspondence than their routine counterparts, such files will be fatter and thus easily identifiable even in vast series to be pulled for archival retention. It is also logical that such exceptional files may well contain all the archivist feels is necessary to document the “hot spots” in the demographic dialectic.<sup>34</sup>

Although the retention of “fat” case files does not provide a representation of the complete original series of records, it is effective in eliminating the more routine



and consequently less valuable files, as well as preserving those records that best document the individual experience and cases that had a greater impact on programme policy and consequently Canadian society.

Rather than extracting every “fat” file from the group, the contract workers were instructed to engage in a general inspection of the contents of the files and retain only those case files that contained such documentation as project proposals, status reports, and correspondence (rather than large amounts of contracts and/or administrative information). The “fat” file selection therefore resulted in the isolation and retention of the exceptional LIP cases that were most likely to be precedent-setting and/or controversial.

In the end, we retained sixty-seven boxes (twenty metres) of the LIP “fat” files. We already held subject files, which were quite useful in documenting the broad policy and operational objectives of the programme, as well as providing information on some of the larger and more publicized projects that were undertaken each year. The “fat” files thus complemented these subject files by providing detailed information on the experiences of individual participants, as well as specific interactions between individuals and the state. Since the Local Initiatives Programme was carried out across the country at the community level, these case files also provide some local colour, by revealing the different types of projects that were undertaken within the various regions: while the successful applicants from Quebec were more likely to design snowmobile and ski runs, the projects from British Columbia often involved the creation of arts and crafts programmes, environmentally related projects, and women’s centres.

In addition to preserving the “fat” accepted case files, we also retained a regionally representative selection of rejected applications. Measuring only four and one half metres in extent, this example was retained in order to provide some information about the types of LIP projects that were rejected, enabling researchers to establish whether the programme’s criteria were being applied correctly and to compare the rejected files with the “fat” accepted case files. Although the two methods that were used did not provide a scaled down version of the original records, they can be used together to provide a fairly revealing snapshot of LIP’s activities at the local level.

Proper arrangement and appropriate documentation are integral parts of the sampling and selection process. Therefore, the “fat” files and rejected case files will be kept in two separate series. This is necessary because the records involved two distinct selection processes, which must be documented when describing the two series. Had we placed the two groups of records in one series, researchers might falsely assume that they had been selected together and, perhaps, that the total was a representative sample of the original group.

The value of the LIP case files, unlike the Training-In-Industry files, therefore, is that they enhance our understanding of the experiences of the average Canadian who participated in these projects, revealing information that is typically not available in the policy and operational files. During an era when greater numbers of scholars are embracing social history, searching for sources that document the lives and activities of ordinary Canadians, case files have become a popular and important source within the research community. In describing her work on social welfare case records, Joy Parr extolled the benefits of case files:

Case files systematically record personal information rarely available elsewhere. With the information which beadles, bailiffs and the benevolent felt necessary to manage the life of an inmate or applicant, a social historian can craft a collective biography which supplements the depth of the census and the breadth of literary sources, adding a dimension heretofore available through neither.<sup>35</sup>

In this fashion, LIP case files can be utilized by researchers to reveal the untold story of those unemployed Canadians who benefitted from LIP grants across the country.

While archivists should certainly be aware of current research methodologies, new developments and interests within the academic community should not be the primary concern when appraising archival documents. Leonard Rapport has contended that reappraisal should be based on whether researchers have consulted the records yet and the question of whether scholarship will be badly hurt should the records no longer exist.<sup>36</sup> His preconditions to reappraisal, however, ignore a number of issues pertaining to backlog appraisal. Gerald Ham provided an astute response to Rapport's recommendations, arguing that, if we follow the desires of the academic community alone, our holdings will "reflect the narrow research interests rather than the broad spectrum of human existence.... If we cannot transcend these obstacles," he added, "then the archivist will remain at best nothing more than a weathervane moved by the changing winds of historiography."<sup>37</sup>

Had we based our appraisal criteria on Rapport's suggestions, all of the case files for LIP would have been destroyed, since researchers had exhibited little interest in these records. This lack of interest on the part of the public, however, may have been the result not of the quality or value of the records involved, but of the size of the collection, the outside dates of the records, the poor state of the finding aids, or the Access to Information and Privacy restrictions. It is not hard to understand that, when confronted with over 500 metres of case files, researchers might prefer to consult another source—such as subject files or published reports—which would be easier to access and quicker to consult. The fact that these records were created during the 1960s and 1970s would also dissuade many researchers from consulting them, since there has not yet been a great deal of interest in this period. A final constraint that poses a roadblock to researchers is the lack of finding aids for half of the LIP files, and the existence of poor finding aids for the other half. The existing lists simply provide participant names and departmental file numbers. Since most researchers who rely on these types of case files approach the records at the collective rather than individual level, they would, in general, find it much more useful to utilize a finding aid that was organized by region, type of project, organization, or time period involved.

Due to these limitations, researchers in the past have been unable to use these case files. It is therefore unreasonable to base one's judgements regarding unprocessed case files on how many researchers have expressed an interest in viewing them. Even with the archivist's assistance, researchers usually prefer to deal with those records that have been processed and described, in order to save themselves the time and frustration of searching through massive amounts of unselected records at this level. Another factor that often deters researchers from

requesting records that are in our backlog is the need for them to have the Access Section review them and apply the regulations under the *Access to Information and Privacy Acts* before they can be viewed by the public.<sup>38</sup> Case files are an especially sensitive type of document in terms of the Privacy regulations, since they often contain personal information about the individuals that are documented in the file. Although the legislation enables the public to utilize the information if it is anonymized and/or used for statistical analyses, many researchers are daunted by the process and sometimes reluctant and/or unable to wait for unprocessed material to be reviewed.<sup>39</sup>

Leonard Rapport also asserted that archivists should base their reappraisal decisions on the needs of contemporary scholars. Government archivists working for the federal government, however, have a broader mandate than that of serving the academic community alone. Other clients include members of the general public, such as genealogists and local historians, and the federal departments themselves. Appraisal decisions, therefore, must reflect the broad fabric of Canadian society, rather than the specialized needs of the academic community or any other user. By relying on the macro-appraisal method, we are able to ensure that the best “image” of the federal departments’ programmes (and subsequently Canadian society) is captured by the documents that we retain. This enables us to satisfy the research objectives of all our clients.

In addition to meeting this condition, the macro model, in many respects, also enables the archivist responsible for government records to adopt a more impartial stance concerning the records being appraised—assessing them on the basis of the function that they supported, rather than the potential researchers that they could benefit.<sup>40</sup> Hans Booms recently expressed his support for this approach: “archivists have no other choice than to conduct their appraisal according to the emphasis and weight placed on events of the time by contemporaries. Only in this way can they free themselves from the social values of their own time, to which they are unconsciously subject.”<sup>41</sup> The macro-appraisal method, therefore, not only liberates us from being “slaves to historiography”; it also produces a less subjective decision on the part of the archivist, who is appraising records based on their contemporary and provenancial value at the time of creation, rather than by current-use standards.

Although the records disposal authority that was initially to be applied to the case files relied on the macro model, the problems that we confronted were related not to the archivist’s appraisal of the programmes but to the description of the records provided by the department. As government archivists, we are very dependent on information that we receive from the department’s record managers and central registry systems. Unfortunately, central registry systems often do not fully document case files, particularly at the regional and local level. For the most part, case files are lumped together as a group with the subject files, thereby hiding the specific character and extent of these records. A department’s headquarters may be responsible for providing central registry primaries; the regional and local offices, however, are left on their own to organize and describe the secondary and tertiary blocks as they please. It is therefore quite typical to find a great deal of regional variation when it comes to documenting case files within a single government department. It is not practical to verify the facts that are given for each and every

office; archivists must rely on spot-checking file blocks from several of the department's local offices and hope that this is enough to confirm the information that was provided by the records management staff.

Due to this problem, we often have to wait until the records are actually transferred to the National Archives after the completion of an authority in order to discover the flaws. Reappraisal, as was the case with the LIP and TII projects, can often provide us with new information and insight about inconsistencies found in some of the old filing systems. Such observations lead to the discovery of similar defects when working with the more recent file classification systems. While the file numbers are always altered when new file classification systems are introduced, the general nature of the case files for each programme often remains unchanged.

The most obvious advantages of this type of backlog reduction project are the monetary and physical benefits that accrue from the destruction of thousands of metres of non-archival records.<sup>42</sup> The creation of a selection criteria for these two projects will also be applied to the 2,684 metres of TII and LIP files that are being held in our seven Federal Records Centres located in Halifax, Quebec City, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Vancouver.

When undertaking a backlog project, one must view authorities as guidelines rather than sacred texts written in stone. The ultimate benefit of this type of exercise is that of utilizing the knowledge acquired to update and refine existing authorities. Backlog appraisal, therefore, is much more than a means of disposing of under-utilized and overabundant records; it is an integral part of the appraisal process that leads to the reinforcement and modification of decisions that were undertaken during the creation of an authority.

It is also important to emphasize that backlog reappraisal is an *appraisal* rather than a custodial or reference issue. As one author has expressed it, "reappraisal should only be contemplated when the conditions which contributed to the flaws in the original appraisal decision either no longer exist or can be remedied.... In effect, a reappraisal should take the form of a new appraisal, using knowledge gained since the original appraisal and using appraisal criteria based on sound appraisal theory."<sup>43</sup> Reappraisal is certainly an integral part of the appraisal process. Any reappraisal project will also serve to enhance one's knowledge of the records: it is not necessary, therefore, to wait to undertake this type of exercise until a flaw is detected in the original appraisal decision. The TII and LIP projects demonstrated this point: reappraisal utilizing a recent authority presumed to be perfectly adequate proved to require minor adjustments, based on the information that was discovered when researching the two programmes and after viewing the records. Reappraisal therefore enables the archivist to take a second look at an authority, even if initially it does not appear to require any adjustment.

Finally, it is important to stress that reappraisal in the context of macro-appraisal should not be viewed as simply a theoretical exercise grounded in research. Although much of the appraisal work involves conducting research into the mandate and functions of the institution, macro-appraisal does not replace the need to consult the documents. Assessing the records may be the last step in the appraisal

process. However, it is certainly not the least important. The records may reveal certain truths about the programmes and record management systems that shed new light on existing authorities and/or hypotheses. Thus, the research involved in the macro-level approach provides the context needed to develop a strategy and/or selection criteria before actual selection or sampling takes place. When archivists are dealing with vast numbers of case files, this approach is the only effective method to circumvent the old system of consulting each and every file—or, more recently, every file block—which in today's records environment may not be feasible.

A great deal of literature has been published on issues relating to appraisal, reappraisal, selection, and sampling. As this article illustrates, however, it is often necessary to pick and choose the information from these studies that best suits the specific characteristics of the case files being appraised. In addition, the use of archival theory in conjunction with research that is part of the macro-appraisal method provides an extremely valuable tool for the archivist to draw on before delving into the case files. Utilizing the information from the published literature and departmental sources, an archivist should be able to devise solutions for the case files being appraised before actually consulting them. Once the hypothesis is formulated, the reappraisal process provides the archivist with the opportunity to discover the special characteristics and nuances of the records that lie hidden beneath the substantial bulk of the original case file series. Through the use of selection and sampling, an archivist can transform a massive group of meaningless and inaccessible case files into a compact collection of valuable and informative files that document the most important aspects of individual Canadians' experiences with government programmes.

### Notes

- \* This article is based on a presentation to the annual conference of the Association of Canadian Archivists held in St. John's, Newfoundland, 23 July 1994. I would like to extend my gratitude to the editor of *Archivaria*, Jay Atherton, for his helpful editorial suggestions. Terry Cook, Rick Brown, Sheila Powell, and Bruce Wilson also made a substantial contributions to this work, providing insightful comments and editorial assistance. My manager, Dan Moore, must also be acknowledged for raising certain ideas and suggestions which I ended up incorporating in this piece. Finally, I would like to thank Paula Caird, who assisted me with the backlog project. Both her observations as well as those of the contract workers proved invaluable when creating both the selection criteria and this article.
- 1 In this work, Jenkinson addresses the issue of records and information redundancy by asking, "can we, faced with these modern accumulations, leave any longer to chance the question what Archives are to be preserved? Can we on the other hand attempt to regulate them without destroying the precious characteristic of impartiality which results, in the case of the older Archives, from the very fact that their preservation was settled either by pure chance or at least by considerations which did not include the possible requirements of future historians?" Sir Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, 2nd ed. (London, 1937), p. 21.
- 2 Terry Cook has estimated that Canada's federal departments and agencies retained 2.5 million linear metres of active and dormant textual records across the country in 1986. To illustrate the immense volume involved, he stated that they would circle the globe 144 times or complete eight round trips to the moon. Clearly, the majority of these records are in the form of case files, which have served in making the archivist's appraisal decisions much more time-consuming and complex. Terry Cook, "Billions of Records: What to Keep? -What to Destroy?" *The Archivist* 13, no. 2 (March-April 1986), p. 2.

- 3 Hans Booms, "Society and Formation of a Documentary Heritage," *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), p. 77.
- 4 A backlog project involves the process of performing selection on documents that are held on selective retention. The documents at this level are received following the completion of a schedule with a federal department and are described as a group and placed in the custody of the Government Archives Division. Although the Division possesses physical control over these records, there is only minimal intellectual control established at this level, since they have not yet had the benefit of selection, nor have they been divided up and described as series.
- 5 The Department of Manpower and Immigration was replaced by the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission in 1977. The Commission was responsible for administering the immigration, employment, and unemployment insurance functions.
- 6 A schedule can be defined as a "time-table which provides for the orderly disposal of records." Jerry O'Brien, "GAD Appraisal Criteria," internal Government Archives Division report (18 May 1990), p. 3.
- 7 The Economic Council of Canada was critical of the passive role of Canada's labour market policy and the institutions which were in place at that time to deliver these programmes. Economic Council of Canada, *First Annual Report: Economic Goals for Canada to 1970* (Ottawa, 1964). The Department was established under section 11-14 of the *Government Organization Act* of 1966. Gordon F. Osbaldeston, *Organizing to Govern* (Toronto, 1992), p. 405.
- 8 Douglas A. Smith, "The Development of Employment and Training Programs," in Alan M. Maslove, ed., *How Ottawa Spends* (Toronto, 1984), p. 70.
- 9 The Department operates 470 regular Canadian Employment Centres across Canada, as well as itinerant services to 187 remote or isolated communities and 101 CEC's on university and college campuses. The role of the CEC is to provide employment counselling and referral services to Canadians seeking work. Due to the fact that there were no figures available for the last three years concerning the number of regional offices and CEC's administered by the Department, the figures cited above are from 1989-1990. Manpower and Immigration, *Annual Report, 1967-1968*, p. 2 and *Annual Report, 1989-90*, p. 13. Since the time that this article was written, the Chrétien Government replaced it with a larger Department—Human Resources and Development—which involved the merging of functions from Employment and Immigration (excluding immigration), along with those of Labour Canada, portions of Health and Welfare, and the Department of the Secretary of State.
- 10 M.J. Prince and J.J. Rice, "The Canadian Jobs Strategy: Supply Side Policy," *How Ottawa Spends 1989-1990: The Buck Stops Where?* (Ottawa, 1989), p. 247.
- 11 National Archives (hereafter NA), Central Registry (hereafter CR), file 9465-50/M1-69/029, Acquisition Evaluation - GAD - Manpower and Immigration, authority for employment files, 1969.
- 12 An accession is the term used by the Government Archives Division to describe a group of records that are transferred to the division and placed together on selective retention.
- 13 NA, CR file 9465-50/C35, Canadian Jobs Strategy authority, 1991, p. 1.
- 14 Bryan Corbett and Eldon Frost, "The Acquisition of Federal Government Records: A Report on Records Management and Archival Practices," *Archivaria* 17 (Winter 1983-84), p. 202.
- 15 During that period, the schedules were created by the departments and the archivists were responsible for assessing and confirming the decisions before they were sent to the Dominion Archivist for his approval. This system therefore provided the archivist with less control over the acquisition process and consequently resulted in the transfer of records that were non-archival.
- 16 T.R. Schellenberg, "The Appraisal of Modern Public Records (1956)," in M.F. Daniels and T. Walch, eds., *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice* (Washington, 1984), p. 61.
- 17 In his article "A Weak Link in the Chain: Records Scheduling as a Source of Archival Acquisition," Eldon Frost exposes the weaknesses of the old scheduling system in contrast to the new planned macro-level approach that the Government Archives Division adopted in 1990. *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 78-86.
- 18 For more information on the macro-appraisal method relating to government records, see Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and its Theoretical Foundation: The Case for a Concept of Archival Hermeneutics," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 34-56 and Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter: Towards a New Theory Of Archival Appraisal," in Barbara L. Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa, 1992), pp. 38-70.
- 19 Richard Brown, "Records Acquisition Strategy and its Theoretical Foundation," p. 39.
- 20 Terry Cook, "Mind Over Matter," pp. 49-50.

- 21 In 1966 the Department administered 344 CMC's and forty-three branch offices. By 1977, the Department ran 843 CEC's and 196 branch offices. This information was extracted from Manpower and Immigration's *Annual Report, 1966-67*, p. 7 and the *Annual Report, 1977-78*, p. 3.
- 22 An authority is a retention and disposition schedule that has been approved by the National Archivist of Canada. NA, CR, file 9465-50/C35-91/011, Canadian Jobs Strategy authority, 1991.
- 23 NA, CR, file 9465-50/C35, Canadian Jobs Strategy Authority, 1991, pp. 84-85.
- 24 The CJS authority stipulated that all case files created by thirteen of the CJS programmes and from forty-nine of the Department's CEC's from across the country be retained. Rod Young felt that it would be sufficient to simply collect case files from the thirteen programmes which he designated to be the most important. The forty-nine CEC's were selected in order to provide a geographically-based representative selection of the Department's 758 CEC's. NA, CR, file 9465-50/C35, Canadian Jobs Strategy Authority, 1991.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
- 26 The other types of employment training programmes included upgrading courses, acquisition of new skills, language training for immigrants, and apprenticeship courses. Canada, Department of Manpower and Immigration, *Annual Report, 1969-1970*, p. 2.
- 27 Terry Cook, "Sampling Textual Records in the Government Archives Division," National Archives (draft report), 1992, pp. 10-11.
- 28 Joseph Anderson, "Public Welfare Case Records: A Study of Archival Practices," *American Archivist* 43, no. 2 (Spring 1980), p. 178.
- 29 Manpower and Immigration, *Annual Report, 1974-1975*, pp. 7-8.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 7 and Appendix 8; *Annual Report, 1975-1976*, p. 8; and Barbara Goldman, *New Directions For Manpower Policy* (Montreal, 1976), p. 48.
- 31 For information about sampling methods see Frank Boles, "Sampling in Archives," *American Archivist* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1981), pp. 125-30; Felix Hull, "The Use of Sampling Techniques," RAMP Study, (Paris 1981); David Kepley, "Sampling in Archives: A Review," *American Archivist* 47, no. 3 (Summer 1984), pp. 237-42; and Margery Sly, "Sampling in an Archival Framework: Mathoms and Manuscripts," *Provenance* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1987), pp. 55-75.
- 32 Terry Cook, " 'Many are Called but Few are Chosen': Appraisal Guidelines for Sampling and Selecting Case Files," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), p. 35.
- 33 For more information regarding the Massachusetts Superior Court and FBI case file appraisals see Hindus, Hammett, and Hobston, *The Files of the Massachusetts Superior Court, 1859-1959* (Boston, 1979); James Gregory Bradsher, "The FBI Records Appraisal," *The Midwestern Archivist* 13, no. 2. (1988), pp. 51-66; and Susan D. Steinwall, "Appraisal and the FBI Files Case: For Whom Do Archivists Retain Records?" *American Archivist* 49, no. 1 (Winter 1986), pp. 52-63.
- 34 Terry Cook, *The Archival Appraisal of Records Containing Personal Information: A Ramp Study With Guidelines* (Paris, 1990), p. 62.
- 35 Joy Parr, "Case Records as Sources for Social History," *Archivaria* 4 (Summer 1977), p. 123.
- 36 Leonard Rapport, "No Grandfather Clause: Reappraising Accessioned Records," *American Archivist* 44, no. 2 (Spring 1981), p. 149. Although I have not gone into much detail regarding Rapport's arguments, there are a number of articles that specifically challenge his contentions. For more information see Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38, no. 1 (1975), pp. 5-13, and Karen Benedict, "Invitation to a Bonfire: Reappraisal and Deaccessioning of Records as Collection Management Tools in an Archives - A Reply to Leonard Rapport," *American Archivist* 47, no. 1, pp. 43-49.
- 37 Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," p. 8.
- 38 The purpose of the *Access to Information Act* is to provide the right of access to government records to the public. It also ensures that records that contain sensitive information about the federal government are not released to the public until they are no longer viewed as confidential. The *Privacy Act* enables the government to protect the privacy of individuals and provides Canadians with the right to access personal information about themselves. For more information see the *Access to Information and Privacy Acts, 1980-81-82-83, C.III*. This legislation was promulgated on 1 July 1983.
- 39 These provisions are stipulated in section 8(2)j of the *Privacy Act*.
- 40 This approach enables the archivist to be more objective in the sense that the appraisal is not based on a perception of the academic community's needs. It is important to note, however, that no method can lead to a completely objective appraisal, since we are all imbued with certain values that affect the decisions that we make when appraising records. For more information about the issue of

- the role that values play in appraisal, see Brien Brothman, "Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 78-100.
- 41 Hans Booms, "Überlieferungsbildung: Keeping Archives as a Social and Political Activity," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1991-92), p. 31.
- 42 At the current rate of \$5.76 a cubic foot per year for records storage space at the National Archives Federal Records Centres, the annual savings for these two projects alone would have amounted to approximately \$9,600.
- 43 Sheila Powell, "Archival Reappraisal: Immigration Case Files," *Archivaria* 33 (Winter 1992), p. 105.