

**The George Ryga Papers: George Ryga fonds, Renée L. Paris fonds, George Ryga & Associates fonds. An Inventory of the Archive at the University of Calgary Library.** JUANITA WALTON and SANDRA MORTENSEN, comps., MARLYS CHEVREFILS and APOLLONIA STEELE, eds. JAMES HOFFMAN, biocritical essay. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995. ISSN 0-831-4497. Number 13.

The University of Calgary Library is to be heartily congratulated. *The George Ryga Papers*, number thirteen of a series which first appeared in 1986 and includes the published finding aids to sixteen outstanding archival collections, is now available in print. The series to date, which includes finding aids to the papers of such luminaries as Robert Kroestch, Mordecai Richler, Alice Munro, Hugh MacLennan, Brian Moore, and W.O. Mitchell, covers a wide and representative range of Canadian authors, poets, novelists, critics, playwrights, and children's authors. The University of Calgary Library is to be praised not only for its astute acquisition strategy, which began in 1973 and was once a source of some controversy, but for the Library staff's dedication to organizing, describing, and making their acquisitions available. Two more finding aids to the papers of John Metcalf and Constance Beresford-Howe await publication, while Christie Harris is in the wings. Although SSHRCC funding, which made this series possible, will be difficult if not impossible to obtain in the future, the University of Calgary intends to continue publication of this series--a laudable aim indeed.

However, more important than the individual publications in the series is the InMagic database itself. Containing both fonds-level descriptions for virtually all of the collections held by the University of Calgary and detailed file-level descriptions for those collections deemed most significant, the database should be made available online to researchers coast-to-coast and abroad. Once integrated with other databases within the province and, eventually, Canada-wide, the University of Calgary's database will help render archival collections more accessible to a broader range of potential researchers. Given current financial constraints, perhaps a print-on-demand rather than a published finding aid might satisfy those researchers who want to peruse the whole of an individual author's papers before choosing a part for examination. If tough choices have to be made, the maintenance of the database should win hands down.

As researchers and archivists know, browsing a finding aid, while no substitute for examination of the collection *in person*, does provide a remarkably palpable "feel" for the writer and the context in which he or she lived; the more accurate and detailed the finding aid, the better the feel. *The George Ryga Papers* follows the format established in earlier numbers in the series; it contains an exemplary inventory which is preceded by a biocritical essay and an archival introduction. Appendices, an index to Ryga's titles, and a nominal index follow the inventory and assist the researcher looking for specific works or individuals. Keyword browsing, available only through direct access to the InMagic database on campus but not yet online, is an acceptable substitute for subject analysis or third party analytics.

I have no quarrel at all with the archival description and the apparatus which enhances access to it. The compilers of the three inventories, Juanita Walton and Sandra Mortensen, provide accuracy and a level of detail welcomed by researchers and rulers of archival description. Although they overuse the catch-all "personal matter" to describe any number of personal subjects, the annoyance is minimal. Use of *RAD-*

like descriptions is acceptable and consistent with practice at most Canadian archival institutions and should pose no major problems for users of *RAD*. Their indexing is a heroic attempt to provide access to as many names as possible and is a welcome enhancement to the finding aid. Quibbles, such as a failure to bring together Ryga's negotiations with Turnstone Press and David Arnason, Turnstone's editor, through cross-referencing in the index, are inevitable, but few and far between. To my knowledge, with exceptions for particularly significant or exceptional fonds, no other Canadian institution is as thorough and consistent in its archival descriptions as the University of Calgary. If all finding aids were as detailed and available online (the projected future of the Calgary series) perhaps the current mania for digitizing entire fonds, box-by-box, file-by-file, leaf-by-leaf, might be quelled. Provision of access to our rich archival collections should be the priority of all archival institutions.

Although lack of subject indexing might not please all researchers, no subject indexing is preferable to the application of antiquated subject analysis still used by cataloguing departments in our major libraries. Until a thesaurus relevant to researchers is developed and adopted by archivists, keyword searching will prove a useful substitute. Although it would be best if researchers could dial in and search the database themselves, the archivist, with her understanding of the nuances of the system, of archival description, and of the fonds in her custody, will continue to be the researcher's most highly-valued ally.

For me, James Hoffman's biocritical essay, while thoroughly and engagingly written, is somewhat problematic. The essay, like his recently-published *The Ecstasy of Resistance: A biography of George Ryga* (ECW, 1995), asserts the importance of Ryga in the canon of Canadian playwrights. Although Hoffman alludes to Ryga's lifelong difficulties with the established community of Canadian theatre and theatrical publishing, he never attributes Ryga's apparent marginalization to two obvious possibilities: ethnicity or poor writing. The seventies in Canada became the decade of the Canadian play; historical dramas that created and celebrated Canadian heroes and events flourished, helping Canadians, it was believed, forge a common identity. Ryga's personal and professional correspondence confirms his position on the periphery of his contemporaries. His correspondence with other Canadian writers is slight; not surprisingly it includes Henry Beissel but not mainstream playwrights Sharon Pollock or Carol Bolt. Nor was Ryga published by Playwrights Canada, that institution of dramatic respectability, but was instead continuously backed by Turnstone Press. Was it that Ryga was not a very good playwright, or was it that his polemical approach to theatrical writing was awkward, unwelcome, or unappreciated? Was Ryga, like Laura Goodman Salverson, Vera Lysenko, and other second-generation Canadian immigrants, with their high-minded literary inheritance, woefully out of step with contemporary artistic reality? Had it not been for the incredible success of *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, it seems reasonable to speculate whether or not George Ryga would merit Hoffman's insistence on canonical status. On the contrary, perhaps Ryga will be studied because he was outside the mainstream.

Hoffman's biocritical essay is unabashedly subjective, a curious juxtaposition to the archival description which follows, since the University of Calgary's standardized archival introduction asserts that description has been guided by two principles: that description is most useful when it is as free as possible from subjectivity and archival judgments of researcher interest and that it should provide document control for the

repository and an acceptable degree of detail for the user. In lieu of Hoffman's essay, which relies heavily on sources not contained in the fonds it serves to introduce, researchers might deem a biographical timeline and a complete bibliography of Ryga's works, published and unpublished, more useful. Researchers do not need Hoffman's introduction to discover telling and touching facts about Ryga's life: that he cared and fought for the rights of an ailing father; that, between he and his wife Norma, he shared responsibility for four children; that Ryga negotiated the world of car-buying and insuring with difficulty, but was avid about planting trees. Careful reading of the finding aid made this reviewer-cum-researcher ask questions and that's what a well-prepared finding aid should do.

The University of Calgary is to be commended for following through with a vision and product initiated in the affluent eighties; *The George Ryga Papers* is an impressive addition to an outstanding series. At \$34.95, university and other research libraries supporting Canadian studies should acquire this volume for their reference collections, while we all work toward easier electronic access to all of our country's archival collections.

**Lorna Knight**

National Library of Canada

**A Record of Service: A Guide to Holdings of the Central Archives of The United Church of Canada.** RUTH DYCK WILSON, project coordinator with PETER D. JAMES. Toronto: United Church of Canada/Victoria University Archives, Occasional Paper Number One, 1992. ISBN 0-9696545-0-2.

This guide is of special interest to Canadian archivists in that it is one of the earliest finding aids that adopted *Rules of Archival Description (RAD)* published by the Bureau of Canadian Archivists in 1990. As such, it is a pioneering work because it is a good example of how *RAD* has been applied in a conventional finding aid. It is from this perspective (the use of *RAD* to produce conventional archival finding aids) that I will review it.

The type of finding aid *A Record of Service* most closely resembles is the inventory. I do not believe that there are any hard and fast rules that are or were used to produce archival finding aids. In other words, I do not believe that there are standards for the naming of finding aids, nor what should appear in any particular type of finding aid, or how the material should be presented. The inventory is perhaps the type of finding aid that has the most typical conventional structure in that it usually starts with an administrative history, biographical information, or family history, as the case may be, for the creator of the material with which it deals. This is usually followed by a description of the material itself in an order reflecting its arrangement and that seems most logical to the archivist who prepared the inventory. Most inventories of this sort are accompanied by an index at the end and a table of contents at the beginning and some may have an introduction, foreword, or both. This is a structure suited to the stand-alone or monographic type of publication format, i.e., the book. *A Record of Service* generally follows this format, but with significant differences. It has a foreword, an introduction, a section with the "entries," an index, and, of course, a table of contents. So, in what way has it adopted *RAD*?