

# Obituaries

## John Hall Archer, 1914–2004\*



On 5 April, Canada and Saskatchewan lost a great citizen. Libraries and archives lost an articulate and active champion. Teacher, soldier, librarian, archivist, university administrator, historian, the career of John Hall Archer spanned many professions and interests. But all reflected his commitment to understanding the history of this country and its people and all were animated by his passion for communicating that understanding to as broad an audience as possible.

John Hall Archer was born on 14 July 1914 at Broadview, Saskatchewan, one of nine children born to English immigrants, Charles and Mary Archer. Following his education in local schools, John entered the provincial Normal School and received his teaching certificate in 1933. For a time, he taught in Highland School District No. 437 where he himself had been educated as a young boy. To further his education, John enrolled in summer and correspondence courses at the University of Saskatchewan. He married Alice Widdup in 1939, a few months before the outbreak of war.

John completed his teaching commitment then enlisted with the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA) in 1940 as a gunner and was soon despatched to

\* Photograph kindly provided by John Hall Archer's son, John Archer of Ottawa Ontario.

England. He was accepted in the Officer Cadet Training Unit in 1942, commissioned in June 1943 and assigned to No. 1 Canadian Army Survey Regiment. In November, his unit was transferred to the Mediterranean where John spent the remainder of his war in Italy. Although the Allies followed success with success as they moved north from Sicily, the fighting was tough and No. 1 Canadian Survey Regiment played a vital role forward of the main advance in searching out enemy guns and other primary targets. But all was not fight and fury. In July 1944, John managed the Canadian Corps track and field team at a multi-national sports event in Rome and he was asked by his fellow soldiers to stand as a candidate for one of three "soldier representatives" in the Saskatchewan provincial election. He campaigned on the need for a more comprehensive rehabilitation program for soldiers returning to the province and, drawing on his experience as a school teacher, argued for a broader education curriculum, including improved vocational training and more recreational facilities for students. John failed in his bid, his only foray into provincial politics, and shortly afterwards, his war came to an end. On 1 December 1944, Lieut. Archer received serious shrapnel wounds and by the spring of 1945, he had returned to Canada. The war was a profound experience and only served to increase John's appetite for education, and more than ever before, he embraced life and learning.

He entered the University of Saskatchewan as a full-time student and received his BA (Honours History) in 1947 followed by a Master's degree in 1948 for a history of Saskatoon. He drew on his thesis research for a small publication in 1947, *Historic Saskatoon: A Concise Illustrated History of Saskatoon*. In the fall of 1948, John ventured east for graduate studies at McGill University Library School in Montreal where he obtained his BLS in 1949 and the Library Science Award as the top student for his thesis on Saskatchewan's Legislative Reference Library. John returned to his beloved Saskatchewan and in June 1949, he was appointed administrative assistant to the Legislative Librarian, and two years later, he was promoted to Librarian, a position he held until 1964. But John wore more than one hat – in 1957, he succeeded Lewis H. Thomas as provincial archivist until 1962; and from 1962 to 1964, he served as assistant clerk of the Legislative Assembly. In 1955, he published *The Story of a Province: A Junior History of Saskatchewan*, and articles on aspects of provincial history for *Saskatchewan History*. He was always ready to lecture throughout the province and in 1961 privately published a series of talks entitled *Saskatchewan as I see it*.

In the meantime, his interest in history, particularly the history of Saskatchewan, convinced John to pursue a Ph.D. degree at Queen's University. Once his course work was completed, John accepted the position of Director, McGill University Libraries in July 1964, where he remained until 1967. Throughout the 1960s, he was active in the Canadian Library Association (CLA), serving as treasurer for three years, a member of council for five

years, and finally in 1966-1967, as President of the Association. During his years of involvement with the CLA, John was active on a number of committees, including the microfilming of Canadian newspapers, budget and finance, and Young Canada's Book Week. As President of the CLA, John encouraged librarians to contribute to the Canadian identity, but also to have ideals for the broader good of society. "Librarians are optimists; they are romanticists," he said in his presidential address at Calgary in June 1966. "We build library buildings that are shiny and efficient and automated; let us also build library collections that are deep and rich, where the shadows of romanticism nurture the human soul. Let us preserve the objective fact; let us also provide the muscle for the soul. We must have information retrieval; let us also have cultural retrieval."<sup>1</sup>

In 1967, he returned to Queen's as university archivist and assistant professor of History and in 1969, was awarded his Ph.D. for his doctoral dissertation, "A study of archival institutions in Canada." His thesis was the first comprehensive effort to sketch the historical development of archival institutions in Canada.

Saskatchewan, however, was in his blood, and in 1970 John and his family returned to the province of his birth as Principal of Regina College of the University of Saskatchewan and, in 1974, founding President of the University of Regina, a position he retained until 1976. "He was deeply committed to Saskatchewan and to the university," observed David Barnard, current President of the University of Regina, "where he made an important contribution to academic quality and direction."<sup>2</sup> He subsequently taught in the History Department and was for some years associated with the Saskatchewan Archives Board in preparing his *Saskatchewan: A History*, published as a 1980 Jubilee project by the Archives and Western Producer Prairie Books. Above all, John was a scholar and a teacher who willingly shared his love of research and his passion for history and books not only with students, but also with popular audiences. It is fitting that the main library on the University of Regina campus was named in honour of John's contributions to the university and the community.

In retirement, John was anything but retired. He returned to one of his first real interests, research and writing, and quickly produced a string of books. *The U of R: A History* (1984), was followed by *Lake Katepwa: Memories of Yesterday with Notes for Today* (1984), *Sherwood Credit Union: 50 Years, A History; 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 1937-1987* (1987) and *Honoured with the Burden: A History of the Regina Board of Education* (1987). In addition he co-authored

1 John H. Archer, "Masters of Our Fate," Canadian Library Association, Proceedings of the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference, 19-24 June 1966, pp. 60-70, quote at p. 70.

2 University of Regina, "Campus News," 22 April 2004 (<<http://www.uregina.ca/news>>).

with Trevor Powell, *Living Faith: A Pictorial History of the Diocese of Qu'Appelle from 1884 to 1984* (1984) and with John Mappin, *Bernard Amtmann, 1907-1979: A Personal Memoir* (1987).

John Archer was honoured in his time, recognized for his contributions to country, community, and church. In 1973, he was appointed Honourary Colonel of the 10<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery, and in December 1981, he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada for his contribution to Canada as a librarian, archivist, historian, and university administrator. John's native province recognized him as well in 1987 when he was named to the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. He also found time and energy to devote countless hours to the Anglican Church. As an active member of General Synod in the 1970s and 1980s, he served at various times on the long-range planning committee and, not surprisingly, on the Archives Committee and Museum Task Force. In the spring of 1988, he was one of the first recipients of the Anglican Award of Merit for his contributions to the life of the church.

We can compile a list of all the positions that he held, the honours and awards bestowed on him; we can prepare a bibliography of his many publications, but all of this would not do justice to our memory of John Archer. We would miss the man that many of us knew. These honours – from his country, his province, his university, his church – were all important and he was proud of his achievements, but they do not define him. I think of him as John Archer of Broadview. Wherever he went in this world, whomever he met, he remained firmly grounded in the land, the culture, the values, and the people of the Pipestone Valley of Saskatchewan. In 1955, as Legislative Librarian, he was active in promoting the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the province, a role that he would reprise in 1980 for Saskatchewan's 75<sup>th</sup>. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s he accepted every invitation to speak and to lend his name to local events across the province, speaking over 200 times in 1980 alone. He was committed to the people of Saskatchewan, he knew the history and geography of every region in the province, the towns, the cities, all the small communities and, above all, he always had a sense of the land and its importance to those who called it home.

On a more personal note, John Archer was a teacher, a colleague, a friend, and a mentor. At Queen's University, we shared an office and over the course of many years, I have often reflected that I had the best possible start for my career in archives. As I developed my thesis on Arthur Doughty and Adam Shortt, John was always a source of encouragement and knowledge. We were reunited in the early 1980s in Regina and we spent considerable time together, travelling to events, seeking out archival records, talking out plans, strategies, and dreams. He saw the importance of archives in everyday life, and one finds this in his approach to archives. "The concept that the only valuable records are those which tell of cyclones, rebellions, floods, hangings, 'first' things, 'oldest' things, 'biggest' things, and similar unusual phenomena is still too common," John once wrote. "It is a concept which has produced and is pro-

ducing a widespread destruction of significant records and reflects a false sense of values – for it denies that there is significance and worth in the life and labour of the mass of mankind. The historian’s interests are as varied and inclusive as the problems and concerns of every day life; the archivist’s interests cannot be less comprehensive.”

To understand John’s impact on the institutions, associations, and professions in which he was engaged, one needs to recall that he was of that generation which survived the great depression (and where was its impact in Canada any greater than in Saskatchewan?), the same generation that fought and died and liberated Europe from oppression. He was a leader in that extraordinary generation which faced these challenges with courage and determination – they survived the depression and the war with their humanity intact, having faced the worst that could be thrown in their path. They feared little else and resolved to work together for a better Canada. John’s deep-rooted sense of Canada was powerful. He fought for Canada in war and in peace. His was an informed voice in national debate. He was knowledgeable and articulate in presenting the case for Saskatchewan and the West. He was more aware than most of the disparities of Confederation and of the vagaries of a boom and bust provincial economy, but his commitment to Canada was real and unwavering. He believed in a strong national defence: a defence which was cultural and when essential military.

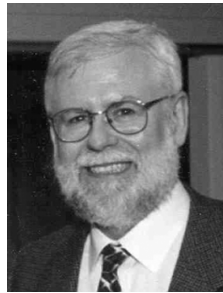
John Archer was very much the pioneer, surveying the landscape, clearing the way for others, and planting initiatives which would blossom later. In the whole range of his interests – in libraries, in archives, in academe, in church, in the community at large – John laboured in the springtime, and now all of us, especially those in libraries and archives, share in the benefits of the harvest. John knew well the challenges which face universities, libraries, and archives but his spirit remains alive in the concluding words from his inaugural address to Convocation at Regina College (15 May 1970):

The university structure may have its faults. Even administrators have their faults! Our programs may be inadequate. Our finances may fall short. But if we dare, and persevere, there are no inadequacies or deficiencies that cannot be made good. There is a commodity that money can rarely purchase. That commodity is the desire to excel. Face up to the problems and all the regrets and unfilled plans of yesterday will melt in the glow of the day’s achievement. There is hard work to be done; there are goals to be gained; there is excellence to be sought – let us do this thing together in goodwill, in good faith and in good humour.

**Ian E. Wilson**  
**Library and Archives Canada**

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## Donald Stuart Richan, 1943–2004\*



Donald Stuart Richan, who was a well known member of the archival community in Canada, passed away on 22 February 2004, after a very brief but devastating struggle with cancer.

Born in Winnipeg, Don grew up on the prairies, living in both Winnipeg and Moose Jaw. From the beginning, he was an outdoor enthusiast, but it was his early love of history and literature that motivated his career. He received his BA from the University of Saskatchewan in 1978, and completed his MA at the University of Regina in 1981. He then moved to Ontario to begin work on his Ph.D. in History, at the University of Toronto.

The career of an archivist can be summarized in a good, sound archival chronology punctuated by the milestones that divide his fonds into its series and sub-series. From 1985–1989, he was the first Archivist of the City of Regina, working in the Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB). From 1989–1991, he was Head of Reference Services at SAB. While there, he demonstrated excellent project management skills, overseeing a move of 35,000 boxes to temporary off-site storage and then their return, with nothing misplaced in the process. In 1991 he became Director, Historical Records, at the Saskatchewan Archives, and in 1994, he was appointed University Archivist at

\* Photo kindly provided by Bernard Clark.