

Personally, Hugh leaves behind his beloved wife, Daphne, who supported him all his professional life and turned impossible handwriting into his articles' neatly typed scripts for publication, two daughters (another sadly predeceased him), and eight grandchildren. For his dearly loved profession, he leaves a bold legacy of imaginative ideas and a passionate example of rethinking archives.

Hugh sowed well in the archival garden, and we all have reaped the bountiful results of his "information ecology." He would hope that we all would reseed from that harvest, and cultivate anew, growing yet higher plants of greater variety. And so many will, but we shall not see again such a gentle and wise gardener.

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JOHN ALEXANDER BOVEY, 1934–2005



John Alexander Bovey, ca. 1998. Photo courtesy of John Richthammer.

In the early hours of 12 January 2005, John Bovey passed away in Winnipeg. He and his wife Pat had just returned from babysitting his only grandchild in London, England. It was a shock to us all.

For over three decades, John Alexander Bovey was a major presence at the national and provincial levels of Canadian heritage and archives. From the out-

set of his career, as Archivist of the Northwest Territories, to his retirement as Provincial Archivist of British Columbia, John was at or near the centre of our emergence as a profession and as a national network of archival repositories.

Born on 11 February 1934, John was the only child of Edith and Reginald Bovey. His childhood in Vancouver was happy by all accounts, as illustrated by his many stories of wartime Vancouver. His passion for history and the sea came early in his life, as the Boveys were seafarers. Master mariners run through their genealogy, and his father operated R.F. Bovey Marine for many decades. John attended the University of British Columbia for his B.A. and M.A. in History, and undertook graduate research at the University of London.

I believe he became “hooked” on archives when, as a young researcher at UBC, he worked on Margaret Ormsby’s *British Columbia: A History*. The research, the interviews, and the stories he gathered formed the basis of his life-long interest in, and unabated yearning to learn more about, the history of Canada.

His first professional archival position was as the archivist of the Northwest Territories. In fact, he was the very first territorial archivist! Based in Ottawa during the mid-1960s, John was present at the beginning of the devolution of administration. Working with the Office of the Territorial Commissioner and the various federal departments holding territorial records, John began the process of developing the territorial archives. (Yes, it is true that John never visited the Territory during his tenure! When asked, he would smile and simply state the records needed were all within a three block radius of Wellington Street.)

It should not surprise anyone that John started his first day as Provincial Archivist of Manitoba on 1 November 1967. John was always very attentive to historical anniversaries, “red-letter” days, and family observances as documented in his “little black book.”

There were several significant developments during his years as Provincial Archivist. The province had just passed amendments to the *Legislative Library Act* to ensure better practices for the safekeeping of the province’s public records. John chaired the Provincial Documents Committee and was responsible for the development of schedules ensuring records of enduring value came to the Provincial Archives.

In 1971 he witnessed the creation of the Provincial Archives Branch of the then Department of Tourism, Recreation and Cultural Affairs. Before that time, the Archives had been a subordinate branch of the Legislative Library.

Perhaps his most significant achievement as Provincial Archivist was the deposit agreement of 31 July 1973, whereby the Hudson’s Bay Company archives was transferred to Winnipeg. John wrote in the archives report for 1973 that “The move of the Hudson’s Bay Archives from London to Winnipeg must be one of the largest transfers of historical documents ever to be made

from the British Isles to Canada. Certainly the material, covering more than three hundred years of fur-trading and exploration in North America as well as commercial dealings in the United Kingdom and Europe, is of great international as well as Canadian significance.”

Prior to this major event the province had acquired from the City of Winnipeg the Civic Auditorium. The Archives were to be the primary tenant of the renovated building. Over four years of planning and preparation a heritage building was transformed into a (then) state-of-the-art archival facility. The Archives moved from an office in the Legislative Building to the Manitoba Archives Building – “the archival promised land” – in the spring of 1975.

John’s tenure as Provincial Archivist was marked by years of tremendous growth at the Archives. The staff increased from three to eleven. The holdings grew by leaps and bounds, owing in part to the interest in records and research generated by the centennials of Canada, Manitoba, and the City of Winnipeg.

During his years in Winnipeg John also served as Archivist of the Ecclesiastical Province of Rupert’s Land and Archivist of the Diocese of Rupert’s Land. He was responsible for facilitating access to Church of England records for many scholars, and for major acquisitions such as the papers and journals of Archdeacon Robert McDonald of the Yukon, and the papers of the Reverend T.C.B. Boon.

John served in an executive capacity on several historical and archival societies, and for many years was the secretary of the Manitoba Record Society. He remarked to Barry Hyman last year that he was the last surviving member of the original group that had founded the Society in 1969.

During his years in Manitoba he served as the province’s representative on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. He later served as the British Columbia representative.

In 1979, John succeeded Alan Turner as Provincial Archivist of British Columbia. John soon embarked on a CBC radio show featuring B.C. historical vignettes and stories. A great success, it continues to be spoken of in the regions of the province. He weathered the massive government restraint initiative of the early 1980s with program reductions but minimal staff change. At this time, however, a formal records management program reflecting archival concerns was inaugurated in the province. He supported and established the Community Archives Assistance Program and was a founding member of the B.C. Archives Council. He supported our exploration of the Internet to broaden out research and reference access. He was, as the chair of the Provincial Documents Committee, an advocate for stronger archives and better information management in British Columbia.

John was active in many historical and community boards including the Canadian Conference of Historical Resources, the Manitoba Record Society, and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. At the time of his death he was a member of the Council of St. John’s College, University of

Manitoba, the Manitoba Historical Society, Friends of the B.C. Archives, and the Vestry of All Saints Church.

While John's career saw the creation of territorial archives, the new location of another, the establishment of a funding program, and the rise of a coordinated Canadian archival network, he was much more. The John Bovey many of us will remember and cherish is the friend, the raconteur, the gourmet, the avid reader, and the collector of facts and events of the most entertaining and, most often obscure, elements of our society. A loyal and steadfast friend, whose friendships span decades and whose encouragement led many into exploring our history. He was always interested in people, always recording names and facts in his ever-present black book. He was particularly fond of the feast days of saints; 30 January, the feast of Charles, King, and Martyr was his favourite day of all. For many, his wonderful conversations would often lead to the "book" to confirm a point or clarify a fact. As a raconteur, he brought vitality to the stories of our history and excited the child in each of us. Only once, at his retirement party at Government House did I find him at a loss for words. He always had a story to illustrate a point or concept, with a ready wit and an easy style.

In our world, John was a passionate and steadfast believer in the importance of archival documentation in a democratic society. He never lost his faith in our ability to provide open and unfettered access to the records nor our ability to collect, preserve, and make accessible our heritage to the ever-widening world. As our profession began to develop its separate identity and reach beyond the traditional confines of previous generations, John feared that formal archival education would create "functionaries" who were more interested in process than in the records. Sad to say, this fear never abated.

John cherished his family and encouraged them to stretch themselves and to grow. John balanced home and work life to an extent rare in the public service. He seldom missed family and school events, a trait which many of us should try to emulate. Today, Patricia continues to live in Winnipeg and is teaching art history at the University of Winnipeg; his eldest daughter, Alixe has a family and is teaching history at the University of Kent, while Katherine is working in television production in London.

On the feast day of St. Barnabas, family and friends gathered to scatter his ashes in McNeill Bay, the site where James Douglas first landed in his venture to secure a British stronghold on southern Vancouver Island. On a hill overlooking the bay is the eighty-year-old Historic Sites and Monuments Board cairn honouring the Exploration of the Strait of Juan de Fuca by the Spanish, British, and Americans. John would have been pleased.

My thanks to Barry Hyman and Bill Neville for their contributions.

Gary Mitchell
Provincial Archivist of British Columbia