

Counterpoint

After the Dust Settles

What follows is the first of the responses to the long awaited Report of the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives which we hope will appear in the next two issues of ARCHIVARIA. Peter Bower's early reflections on the findings and proposals of this body, which was set up in 1977 by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to examine the state of archives across the country, ought to be followed by a spate of assessments and considered opinions. Please address your replies, either in time for the 15 April 1980 deadline for the next issue or 15 October 1980 for issue #11, to the ARCHIVARIA mailbox at : Room 349, Public Archives of Canada, 395 Wellington Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1A 0N3.

Visionary in its major proposals, if not dramatically original; usually restrained in its language, if not mundane; disjointed in its list of major recommendations, if not haphazard, the long anticipated *Report* of the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives will at once disappoint and perhaps delight archivists across the country. Compelling evidence of the crisis in Canadian archives is presented and general directions are sketched-in for some basic rescue operations and for a rational development of a national system of archives, but detail—save for a chapter dominated by statistically derived information—has been kept largely to a minimum. It is the spartan detail which will disappoint many archivists who have been waiting for the expected ammunition to blast the way for their institutions into the twentieth century. Plenty of ammunition is provided, but much more will be wanted and needed. Some of the recommendations will aggravate archivists, partly because of the apparently simplistic, naive, or superficial overtones, but after the dust settles, the report's brevity itself may be seen as a major achievement—perhaps a perverse source of inspiration—in that it leaves much of the work to archivists and their clients. Obviously, only through a sustained and impersonal process of criticism will the work of the Consultative Group be completed, the necessary detail added, and priorities established along with the means of achieving desirable ends.¹

¹ The advance copy of the *Report of the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives* made available is not quite complete. Pagination is not fixed, and a few elements are missing such as "The President's Foreword" and a small section on "confidentiality". I am grateful to have been provided with this copy, though somewhat deficient, to allow as much time as possible (slight as it was) to meet *Archivaria's* press schedule. The state of the copy has led me to avoid footnoting pages referred to, but I have generally tried to indicate chapters and sometimes subheadings. This should not be too great an inconvenience to readers because of the relatively small size of the report and its fairly detailed list of contents. Variations in some of my quotations from the original will exist as I permitted myself the luxury of adjusting minor details such as capitalization where I felt warranted in doing so on a manuscript which had not reached completion. The necessary haste in preparing my comments allowed no time for research, and I apologize in advance for any consequent errors, though I think my interpretations can stand nevertheless.

A few bootleg and incomplete copies of the report have been eagerly acquired by some archivists, and already two comments have been imprinted: first, that the *Report* is an opportunity lost; second, that it will become simply another punching bag for Canadian archivists. To the first—though I shall be in the forefront of critics—I would say that it need only be a lost opportunity if we cannot transform our criticisms and missions into productive action; to the second—probably a justified if inelegant comment on our past inability to grapple with numerous important issues—I would simply extend the metaphor: a punching bag is an essential part of the process in training for the major bout. Even the most critical, cynical, or condescending analysis of the *Report* must surely have to concede that at least a firm indication of a desirable direction for the development of Canadian archives on a national scale is provided by the Consultative Group. I suspect that ultimately the overall thrust will prove to be in approximately the correct direction, though many adjustments will have to be made before setting out, and then again frequently *en route*. When to start out, however, will present many difficulties, especially as archivists must definitely begin a march very, very soon.

From the outset, two fundamental criticisms of the Group have been voiced. They are worth repeating here, if only because in some respects they are implicit observations in the *Report* itself. The first is that the composition of the Consultative Group is suspect because it is unrepresentative as a whole. There is not one “front line” or so-called working level archivist on the committee, which will in some measure account for missing parts, impractical suggestions, and inadequate detail even for a broad sketch. The composition of the committee may be more a reflection of the Canada Council’s (now read Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) irritating predilection for dealing with the heads of archives (or close approximations) rather than recognizing the individual expertise and discipline of any given archivist, regardless of institutional rank. Obviously, a similar requirement was not demanded of the non-archival members of the Group. The *Report* in effect calls for an end to this discrimination by accepting archivists on an equal footing with the practitioners of other disciplines now eligible for grants and so forth. The second criticism rotates about the methods used by the Group in consulting archives and archivists. There is an impression given by the report that there was just too much reliance on briefs submitted and on some general meetings with groups of archivists (which may have tended to deal more with the mandate or similar matters of the Group than with substantive archival issues), and not enough basic research by the Group in secondary literature or recourse to a process of continuing consultation and criticism of components of the *Report* during the writing phase.

The *Report* itself frequently drives home the point that archives, and presumably archivists, must consult and cooperate more closely with one another to establish a variety of networks, thereby more effectively exploiting already available—though not necessarily widespread—expertise in the Canadian archival community. So long as archivists do not become bogged down in dealing with the deficiencies of the *Report* (perhaps having anticipated something far more detailed and exhaustive), thereby failing to initiate the early action so obviously needed, then the latter criticism is easily deflected. Indeed, the *Report* might be accepted as providing the essential and until now missing basis for the more detailed consultation and analysis all critics will demand. Yet, there is no getting around the appearance, even judging only by the endnotes and bibliographic paraphernalia, that the Group did not exploit archival or other relevant literature adequately. References to such materials alone would have augmented the *Report* usefully by giving ready access to more in-depth studies of many elements in the report as well as offsetting to some extent the absence of many others.

A glance at the “Complete List of Recommendations. . .” given near the end of the *Report*, and deriving from Chapters IV and V, will probably leave an impression most easily characterized as dismay. There is no discernable sense of hierarchy, priority, or the natural order of progression required for the implementation of the *Report*’s recom-

mendations. Having gone as far as it did, the Group should have taken at least this one further step. By doing so, the Group would have had to deal more substantially in the *Report* with the full import of their suggestions and with the fundamental matter of how to go about implementing the various recommendations. It is difficult to see why or even how the Group could avoid projecting some sort of critical path for implementation. For example, it is all well and good—and it is!—to press for standardization, systems, and networks in such areas as acquisition, description, and so forth, but in view of the lack of such basic features as standardized description in virtually any mixed-media archives in Canada, the ramifications of realizing such commendable recommendations on a national scale is going to raise a fog of criticism. Presumably, the good men and women who will or do occupy positions of moral authority and financial power in such proposed or existing bodies as the Canadian Association of Archives, an Extension Branch of the Public Archives of Canada, a renewed Heritage Canada, a more sympathetic Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SHRCC), a more responsive Canadian Conservation Institute, a more effective organism at the Secretary of State administering a revised Cultural Property Import and Export Act, a federal parliamentary committee investigating the disposition of business records and papers of international organizations (e.g. Labour) operating in Canada, the dozen or so provincially based networks of archives, the Bureau of Canadian Archivists, the National Archival Advisory Committee, possibly a mutated National Archival Appraisal Board, the archives sections or equivalents of such interest or pressure groups as the Canadian Historical Association *inter alia*, the Association des archivistes du Québec and the Association of Canadian Archivists with all their committees, presumably also the International Council on Archives (since we are also an influential part of the world community of archives), not to mention the scores of individual archival institutions in the country, maybe also the Dominion Provincial Territorial Archivists, and so forth, will in all their cumulatively formidable wisdom contribute to finding the *modus vivendi* and *modus operandi* to reach the heavenly city of the twentieth century archivists. Facetiousness aside, it is a complicated globe which we inhabit, and global (even in national terms) solutions entail dealing courageously with complex issues. The very elusiveness of an ideal should never be accepted as discrediting that ideal.

In proposing the creation of the Canadian Association of Archives, the Group is partly attempting to tackle the long standing issue of the perceived clubbishness of the annual meetings of the Dominion Provincial Territorial (DPT) Archivists. The new association, however, is likely to be no less contentious an issue as the DPT meetings ever were, despite almost any configuration of a more broadly representative base. The Group, in pressing for extensive networks of many kinds, sees the need for involving non-governmental archives, in addition to local authority institutions, in planning a national matrix of archives. Without at all dismissing the Canadian Association of Archives (CAA) proposition out of hand, I am certain that its near namesake, the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA), will wonder what effective roles will remain to it amongst all these kinds of authorities. I also wonder if the proposal will receive the essential support of the DPT archivists who might have a notion that their manageably sized meetings have certain utilities and rationales which would not be replaced in a more representative forum. In short, will the DPT archivists abandon their role and quietly leave the stage?

In fact, the integration of not just the CAA, the DPT's, and the ACA, but of all the various authorities and interest groups, when and if achieved should equip all concerned nicely for nomination to some national version of the international peace awards. But, again, this is what networks are all about, and the *Report* does underline that we cannot survive in our present form. Actually, the *Report* does not quite state that our very professional and institutional survival is at stake—just our records. In fact, the *Report* points out in Chapter IV that although the archival *system* is fragile, if not entirely negligible, we are survivors like all good Canadians. There is, claims the Group, an “innate resilience” in

the archival system, or what persists of it, revealing among many other things the “growing desire of Canadians to preserve the fast fading image of their heritage.” I wish I had so much faith in an archivally uninformed public!

The *Report* humbly suggests that the infusion of relatively modest amounts of money (far less, as the Group graphically points out in another context, than the cost of one new fighter aircraft) would enable the implementation of the recommendations. In addition to hundreds of thousands of dollars to be injected by the provinces into their own archival networks on a continuing basis, the Public Archives of Canada (PAC) is to develop an Extension Branch equipped each year with \$2.5 million (a minimum of one million to begin work on a nationwide guide to all forms of archival resources, and a further one and a half million to cover salaries, administration, and a grant programme for Canadian archives). This Branch will be guided by policies and priorities established by a National Archival Advisory Committee “for the benefit of the entire archival system. . . .” The Group is perhaps also thereby calling for a willing suspension of disbelief on the part of those archivists who have many times expressed serious and substantiated criticisms of the PAC in matters ranging from acquisitions to programmes with national impact initiated without adequate consultation.

There is little doubt that the PAC, a world ranking cultural institution by any standard, and whose real shortcomings are generally outweighed by positive contributions to the archival scene throughout Canada, could rise to this challenge if given the opportunity. Unfortunately, the necessary openmindedness required of non-PAC archivists will not be encouraged by Chapter II of the *Report*, “The Canadian Archival Tradition”, which concentrates too heavily upon the PAC and may irritate those unwilling to concede that the Group really did not have enough time to prepare a more balanced portrayal of our archival experience. More serious, however, is the failure of this chapter to outline the larger tradition adequately enough, for example, to understand why and how the “total archives” concept emerged. In this context, too, the extremely serious weakness, as yet unresolved, of total archives could have been usefully discussed. After all, total archives is Canada’s single most important contribution to international archival theory, and the centrifugal forces based on media specialization at work in the PAC (the most fully developed model of total archives in the country) must be brought under control if the theory is to become enshrined as safe and durable practice. Needless to say, the PAC also represents the model for very many other important archives in Canada and in the Third World. As an aside, though a very revealing one, it is disquieting to note that total archives has never been formally explored, even tentatively, by Canadian archivists at our most prestigious annual gathering, the Learned Societies Conference. The theory, and to a far lesser extent, the practice has been explained and examined more closely in foreign countries, such as the United States of America. Furthermore, our domestic literature is extraordinarily deficient in any fundamental analysis of the full theoretical and practical bases of the concept and its implications.

A particularly irritating deformity which keeps re-emerging under different guises in later parts of the *Report* is introduced in Chapter I, “What Are Archives?” This element of the *Report* is given order, quite properly in conception, largely to definitions. Archivists are acutely aware of the notoriously unstandardized vocabulary at our disposal, and we must agree on definitions to be able to communicate effectively and efficiently. We may not agree entirely with some of the definitions, but at least we might agree enough to know what is being signalled when certain words are used. Development of theory and practical applications depend very heavily upon the shorthand of words and small phrases which encapsulate the extended meaning often provided by definitions. For such reasons, I flay the Group and its *Report* for the embarrassing error in defining provenance, *inter alia*.

Principles are very special things, and should not be confused with other things such as techniques, states, conditions, practices, agreements, notions, ideas, hypotheses,

principals, apples, or whatever. Archivists, leaving aside for now such matters as ethics, are not heavily burdened by working principles, but the few we have are very important, and are often extended in one fashion or another (as is the case in the *Report*) to lead to significant new notions with at least some foundation in principles. For example, the *Report* emphasizes

the long-standing archival principle of *provenance*, namely that records originating from the same source should be kept together and not broken up. We would like to add to this very old principle a new corollary to the effect that any particular set of records should remain, as far as possible, in the locale or milieu in which it was generated. . . . Allied to the principle of provenance is the principle of unbroken custody. . . .

On the next page, the Group goes on to compound the error by virtually equating *respect des fonds* and original order, whose meanings admittedly share some common ground, but which are nevertheless distinct and distinguishable. It is, in fact, that which makes them different that makes them individually most useful and applicable. Otherwise, why keep two names or phrases for the same thing? The *Report* reads:

By themselves, records make less sense and are of limited value. For this reason archivists speak of the importance of *respect des fonds* or respect for the original order and context of materials.

Obviously, the *Report* confuses provenance with *respect des fonds* (a principal which can conceivably be adhered to without respecting the internal original order of any given group of *fonds* which are kept distinct from each other), and perhaps also with original order (which too might conceivably be maintained at the, say, subseries or file level, even though the series level of several different *fonds* have suffered some intermingling).

It is probably unnecessary to go far afield to find likely sources of this confusion and though unsubstantiated by research, I suspect that it is peculiarly North American. Although currency obtained earlier, in 1974 the *American Archivist* published a useful basic glossary of terms in which, unfortunately, the third of three meanings given (gratuitously tagged "In archival theory") closely resembles that advanced by the Consultative Group. The Public Record Office, London, put forward a very tight definition in the *Guide to the Contents of the Public Record Office* (volume 1, glossary, 1963) relating exclusively to the source of material, reflecting the British archives tradition. The British definition makes little allowance for North American extensions to accommodate concerns with migration of material (constant custody seems to be of less significance in North America) and to encompass materials which the strictest British archivist might not consider to be archives proper. These North American concerns join the British definition in the *American Archivist* glossary in the first two definitions mentioned above. In short, for Canadians,² the most useful way of looking at provenance in our tradition might be to see it as a state, a condition, a pedigree if you like, concerned with sources of archival materials and precise records of migrations.

This is not merely an exercise in semantics, for first principles and time-proven practices are the basic building blocks of our art or science. A simple illustration of the implications of such confusion: on our knowledge or sound record of the provenance of given documents could stand the results of a legal case, of how much we should pay for an archivally desirable document, of how much authority a researcher should lend to a document in constructing a mirror of the past. If I were a judge, the indisputably established provenance of a document in a pivotal situation would probably be more decisive than any conceivable applications of *respect des fonds* or original order. Consider also such

² A glance at some of the relevant course papers, now as a whole getting very tired and urgently in need of revision and updating, prepared for the PAC sponsored course on Archival Principles and Administration will reveal similar problems in these definitions or discussions of them.

kinds of distinctions in meaning within the context of their applications to records proper, to private papers and manuscripts, to the iconographic and other media found in Canadian archives, to the Manuscript and Record Group systems, to machine readable material, to the scale of archival operations, to storage and retrieval, and so on. Then a body of fascinating and important archival theory begins to emerge. Consider also the confusion introduced by the Consultative Group in trying to extend principles or practices poorly understood to encompass certain needs perceived for the Canadian archival system relating to territoriality, constant custody, institutional archives, and so forth. To echo the flawed flight of rhetoric on the last page of Chapter I in the *Report*, our effectiveness as archivists will rest on many shared commitments, not least of which is to share an understanding of the archival process and a “common commitment to the principles according to which this process should be developed by archives collectively and individually.” But like the experienced carpenter, we must also keep our principal tools sharp for the best results.

Without any condescension, I would use this example to underline the need, powerfully expressed by the Group, for more education of archivists at a variety of levels. The *Report* presses for more opportunities across Canada in archival training and education. During this period of great pressure and stress on the individual archivist, combined with shortages of resources of all kinds and an associated institutional reluctance to allow staff leave for extended periods, it is probably only through opportunities for higher studies, at the post graduate level, that enough time can be found to accelerate the process of exploring fully and then applying what has been learned from the extraordinary dimensions of archival work—the most fundamental and probably the single most important heritage or historically related activity undertaken in any country.

Archival education is promoted by the *Report* in a variety of places, though little new is added to the discussion—not surprising in view of the persistent debate among archivists through the last half decade. The Group suggests going beyond training and educating archivists at a variety of levels and locations,³ to call for more information to be provided to the public ranging from rudimentary information leaflets on how to care for materials still in private hands to inviting university level students to take archival options *en route* to their degrees. I should like to have seen much more made of such matters, with more detailed discussion of archival publications of primary source materials (such as “edukits” for schools), exhibitions and networks for circulation of displays among archives across Canada, lectures, archives days, and so forth. Of course, as the *Report* points out, there is the risk of further taxing our resources if we establish a higher profile. But, as the *Report* also suggests, a higher profile *might* help us to break our vicious budget circle by encouraging our governing authorities to provide additional resources. As the Group astutely points out, archives seem to serve the public most often through intermediaries such as historians, film documentaries, and the like. More direct contact is needed through mechanisms appropriate to archives, which may not be the same as those pertaining to libraries and museums whose contact with the public is seemingly by nature more direct. I would go further and state that archives have an obligation, whether or not the process attracts additional resources, to contribute to the cultural enrichment and legal

3 While the following comment may be on a matter declared to be outside the purview of the *Report*, it might have been worthwhile offering an opinion on the role of the Association of Canadian Archivists' annual meeting at the Learned Societies conference. The Group strongly supports the development of workshops and other learning experiences, especially spread more broadly across the country. If this sort of development were to take place, presumably the annual meeting of the ACA could more easily become what it should be: a time and place for the presentation and discussion of advanced thought, theory, and practice; in short, the *summa* of our art and science and professional matters would also be handled in appropriate formats. Basic workshops should play only the most limited role here, if any at all.

understanding of our society by undertaking appropriate measures to place our holdings more directly before the public. For a free country which occasionally seems troubled by an apparent lack of a strong sense of identity, what could be more appropriate? Our identity resides largely in our heritage and our rights in our records, and much of those can be found in our stacks. Furthermore, a public more knowledgeable in all things archival might individually be more sympathetic to our problems, from acquisitions to reference services—an attractive possibility even though more people may cross our portals in search of their sense of personal, community, and national relationships or identity. This is part of our contribution to the quality of Canadian life, its fabric and freedom, its well being—its health, if you like.

Without wishing to isolate an inconsistency, more apparent than real, between archives as portrayed early in the introductory chapter (“An archives mirrors the organization or community which created it. . .”) and an equally early comment in Chapter I (“The first archival function ensures that all those and only those materials which fall within the mandate of a particular archives and are of permanent value are preserved. By the term mandate we mean the express purpose for which the archives was created by its sponsor.”), I do take strong exception to this definition of “mandate”. Even accepting the Group’s explicit concentration upon “institutional structures devoted to the archival process”, I cannot accept a definition which might allow an organization to confer with any hint of our unreserved professional concurrence the title “archives” upon any motley assemblage of quaint old pictures, for example, gathered solely to support and promote an image for reasons of public relations and, sometimes, for profit. Neither, I am certain, would the Consultative Group whose dedication to improving the Canadian archival system is above question.

The Group appears to believe that there are certain basic features and functions of an archives critical to it being a full archives, and access⁴ seems to be one of these. Implicitly, there must be material truly worth consulting by the public in its various guises, academic to genealogical. While making all due allowances for start-up investment (i.e. perhaps initially accepting that a corporation might set up a P.R. type of archives, and hoping that this will in due course evolve into a fully acceptable repository with some reasonable right of public access to substantive corporate records) and such matters as protection of trade secrets and competitive position, there must surely be some point at which we, as professional archivists, must say loudly and clearly that this thing you have chosen to call an archives is not one at all. Trite as it may sound in these cynical times, archivists must surely be committed to the pursuit of “Truth” insofar as our role includes saving and making available those materials which provide as accurate and full a mirror as possible of any important social interaction and organism—warts and all. If the (fictitious) firm International Oil gives me only a mandate and the resources, as possibly is its right in certain senses, to preserve and ultimately to make available materials deemed of but P.R. value,

4 The *Report*, properly so, carefully distinguishes between physical access to materials (either to remote users or through various levels of location guides and finding aids) and a reasonable right of access to information. The Group also points out the difficulty archivists sometimes face in serving two occasionally conflicting objectives: those involving our role in helping to make available documentation essential to understanding our society in its fullness so that we may know ourselves better and protect our rights; and those involving legitimate rights to privacy and genuine needs for confidentiality. Balancing these objectives is a very delicate operation, no less in the private sphere than in the public. I have chosen here to explore some of the problems relating more to access in the second senses mentioned above because the Group is encouraging the development of more institutional archives in the private sector as well as the application of public funds in one form or another to achieve this objective, especially in the area of business. Not enough has been written or said about this matter, and discussion becomes increasingly imperative if public funds are involved though not just because public monies are to be used.

then surely I must decline to be called an archivist and our profession refuses to concede that this thing is an archives (though accept that it is perhaps a useful part of the corporation's image making process and records management system). Certainly this must be done once it is clear that the cause is lost at International Oil, or needs draconian action to be retrieved.

Consequently, I recoiled on seeing the Canadian Pacific Railway's (CPR) name mentioned in the *Report*, thereby with some sort of implicit approval, as being among a few companies, banks, and crown corporations which have established "company archives for orderly record keeping, [while] many others have ignored their older materials." Granted, it is a tricky problem, for it would be unthinkable that the CPR's records not be at least cared for in view of that private organization's critical and pervasive role in our historical experience and the vast quantities of public resources (land and money) which in one way or another have been funnelled into the CPR. Nevertheless, access to their corporate records is notoriously difficult—even for very old materials—if not impossible in very considerable measure. I recoiled when I saw "CPR" alongside the Hudson's Bay Company whose archival record, if not absolutely perfect, bears no mention in the same breath which whispers "CPR"—certainly not from those who consider access, at the very least, to be a fundamental archival function. On the other hand, might I suppose (for I have no concrete evidence) that the corporate records are being properly kept and that the CPR might one day allow the Canadian public more than a glimpse into itself as a formative force in our society? This is, indeed, no small reason for maintaining such archives, as for the records of many publicly owned Crown Corporations whose records are also often inaccessible to the people of Canada, but archivists and archives must still make it very clear that reasonable access is the ideal to which we are working.

The Consultative Group's *Report*, like the *Symons Report*⁵ before it, draws particular attention to business archives. Like the *Symons Report* also, the Group fails to highlight adequately the archives of labour, which participates in its own fashion as fully as business in moulding society. Furthermore, any non-governmental archives presents similar potential problems in relation to access. The Consultative Group heartily endorses the establishment of archives in the private sector, especially business, but also more broadly. In the business area, the Group points out that existing tax laws encourage firms to place their archival responsibilities on public repositories, including universities. No doubt the Group is fully aware of the potential threat, apart from the obvious direct "burden", to public archives operating in the sphere of collecting business records, or in fact in any area involving large on-going organizations such as labour, church, and so forth. The archivally responsible commitment in such acquisition activity is to receive in perpetuity, or for as long as the body exists, the inactive historically, administratively, and legally important records of that organization. This in-built growth mechanism, even without many more acquisitions from different organizations, might mean that an archival time bomb has already been lit. How long will it be before existing commitments, moral or contractual, have grown organically to the point that all our meagre resources and paltry increases are already earmarked, not allowing new and important initiatives or squeezing other acquisition areas out of the picture? Of course, this development would affect most other archival functions as well, including preservation and service.

For certain reasons, it is attractive to promote "institutional archives",⁶ but we must be

5 T.H.B. Symons, *To Know Ourselves*. The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies. Vols. I and II. Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 1975.

6 Under the sub-heading "Local or Regional Archives" in Chapter V, the Group floats the notion of cooperative archives wherein the archives of a variety of organizations might be housed together sharing a good archival facility and the services of a professional staff. This intriguing idea, perhaps reflecting the Prairie attachments of several members of the Group, should be pursued further. There is at least one instructive Eastern variant which should be studied closely since it should reveal a number of the possible working difficulties: the archival component of Co-ordinated Arts Services in Toronto.

very careful in this area. How much value is there in relieving the burden on public repositories at the expense of reasonable public access. A difficult matter indeed. The Group is urging governments (including, of course, public archives) to foster, for example, business archives through what are subsidies in one form or another, by archives providing consulting services or via tax incentives "to the extent that a business archives is serving the public" for operating their own archives. What is the measurement of this extent of service to the public? Is it the opening of certain kinds of records to and by certain dates, perhaps through following access regulations applied by governments to its own records or, perish the thought, of those applied to some of its "subsidiaries" such as Crown Corporations?

If the public is being asked to support business based archives in such a manner, what about non-profit or charitable organizations which, because they make no or too little profit, even now cannot or should not for sound financial reasons take recourse to the tax advantages already available to many businesses? What do we do about labour archives, cooperative or unprofitable firms, church archives, community-initiated and supported organizations, the arts, and so on and on? Is the answer direct subsidies, and if so, why not to already experienced and established archives which would take such materials if they had the resources? What about the matter of archival materials already accepted "on deposit" in many archives across Canada and upon which considerable funds have already been expended, yet which can be withdrawn more or less at the whim of the depositor usually without any comprehension to the public repository even though the reason for removal might be to sell the material. In England, partly in response to the accelerating value of manuscripts, there are said to be various instances of such cases, and at least one institution is rumoured to be prepared to go to court over the matter. I think that the *Report* should have explored such factors more fully.

As the values of documents on the sales markets grow rapidly, old issues are facing archivists in increasingly compelling forms often under new guises. Not only is the pressure on security being raised, the sheer cost of buying documents at "fair market value" is accelerating only more slowly than the archivist's suspicion that in many instances there is no free market operating. Further, as tax credits become more well known and sought after by "donors", increasing quantities of our resources are being sucked relentlessly into appraisals for tax purposes (and we in turn are asking our governing authorities, where applicable, to augment our resources so that we can correspondingly lower theirs). What about the National Archival Appraisal Board: is it the correct mechanism, in an appropriate jurisdiction, discharging a function ultimately of advantage to archives? It seems to be a rule of thumb that more money through tax incentives will be made available for archival materials than this same documentation would likely receive on the open market. Surely, however, such more or less indirect purchasing exerts leverage upward on market values, something which must make most archives shudder to their very foundations.

Many of these issues are not specifically handled by the Consultative Group, but to its credit, such lines of discussion are opened. In Chapter VI under "Acquisition Jurisdictions", the Group also makes an arresting statement: "Archives are not collections [think about the archival perception of most librarians involvement in archival materials at this point], and archival materials should not be sold on an open-market." I hesitate to comment on this sentence, for it is not an area much explored in the *Report*. Presumably this is not a declaration foreshadowing an initiative to close the market in documents assembled into collections, but the other ramifications warrant very close examination by Canadian archivists. Further: "there is no benefit to archives as a group in undisciplined archival collectionism or free-market entrepreneurship." Can this be construed, in part at least, as a request for well-endowed archives to draw back from, for example, "prestige buying" or in support of, say, studies in certain fields of Canadian literature where large sums have recently been expended? If so, then the response from Canadian dealers and authors, to mention but a few, should be swift and, to say the least, both predictable and exciting.

The *Report* says too little in relation to archival publishing and publishing from archival sources, though what is said is very important, if illusory. Certain compensatory mechanisms are proposed for archives whose holdings are the target of major publishing ventures. Apart from recommending that a granting agency such as the SSHRCC routinely involve archivists as assessors of applications for funding, and that grants include money specifically identified to compensate for the extraordinary services to be demanded of archives involved, the *Report* also suggests that archives establish accounting systems permitting them to receive and use payments for services rendered. Such accounting systems have already been sought by many archives in Canada, usually in vain. Though perhaps this is not immediately relevant, I think the Group should have taken a position on academic publishing of vast quantities of original materials in book format on any given but narrowly defined themes, to the point where by virtually entire collections are put into print. There are many less expensive means of diffusing such information, though less prestigious and perhaps less convenient to use in some respects.

While it may be unfair to criticize a work for not dealing with a matter the authors considered beyond their scope, more must be made here of the profession and of individual archivists. In focussing on institutional matters, the Group does not intend to downplay the role of archivists, who have both institutional and professional identities. Archivists will have to augment substantially the *Report* in this aspect and not fall prey to the thought that because it is not in the *Report*, it is not important. In fact, individual commitment and understanding will be essential to the successful realization of the grand scheme outlined by the Group.

For example, the *Report* comments on competition among archives. This bears further reflection in the context of the various proposals for networks and the role of the individual archivist. I suspect, for instance, that such acquisition competitiveness as may exist *between* archives might pale by comparison before competition *within* an archives, especially within the larger of our institutions. Acquisition is certainly one of the most attractive aspects of archival work and is a high profile activity in most institutions. It is a sure way of coming to the attention of one's hierarchical superiors, and in the competition for resources between separate acquisition units (be they defined by medium, theme, or whatever) within one institution, successful efforts seem to be useful in extracting additional funds and staff, or at least in preserving an area's priority position within that one institution's structure. Sheer volume of acquisitions seems to matter, and is additionally useful in building up formidable processing backlogs which in turn can provide the pressure needed to ensure the application of more resources to that acquisition unit.

While this dynamic of competition is actually inspired internally for the most part (say, at Institution "A"), the most serious impact could be felt externally, at Institution "B" where the material should more properly be housed. Furthermore, Institution "B" might be smaller, with better communication between the ranks, more control over staff, perhaps more scrupulous and less ruthless. The acquisition unit from Institution "A" might be so far removed in hierarchy from the chief of its institution that all this was done in ignorance (to put the best light on it) of inter-archival networks to which both "A" and "B" were parties, as arranged by the heads of these and other participating institutions. It might also be that Institution "A" acquisition unit knew that it could take shelter when necessary behind the scale of overall operations, or would be shielded by the real or feigned ignorance of supervisors. This schematic portrayal, as many will note, is not founded in fiction, but it is presented here simply to illustrate the need to inform, at the very least individual archivists of all developments in networks. Furthermore, networks involving virtually all archival functions, including information control, retrieval and manipulation, and the dovetailing of acquisition programmes (especially those in highly specialized or especially attractive areas), will all necessarily engage levels of expertise

rarely to be found in all or even in many heads of institutions. Direct contact between front line archivists will have to accompany the network matrix envisaged by the Consultative Group. The administration of such an archival network and all its individual components will have to take on new dimensions, little explored to date in Canada.

As for the conservation of archival materials, the *Report* is blunt and to the point. Our documentary records "are rapidly disintegrating and face imminent ruin It is estimated that by the turn of the century 90% of paper records now in archives will no longer be able to be handled [i.e. about 800,000 shelf feet] . . . largely bearing on the history of Canada in the twentieth century." And more: "if archivists took their long-term responsibilities seriously, many more collections would be virtually closed to users." What an indictment! Does the total archives concept encompass the notion total consumption of archives? I am left marvelling only at the measured restraint exercised by the Group in commenting upon the closing of the various regional offices of the Canadian Conservation Institute.

Finally, though much remains to be said, the *Report* advances a chapter packed with statistical information. The number of tables presented is justified by the Group on the grounds of previously unavailable data of this type. My initial reaction to the tables was a drawing back, partly because I consider myself among the innumerate, and partly because it has been some time since I pondered the mysteries of means, medians, and percentiles. Nevertheless, as I worked at appreciating the figures and tables, many became more intelligible, no doubt as I began to be absorbed by whatever it is that transfixes number crunchers. I still feel that some of the tables could have been jettisoned or at least removed to an appendix, and I discerned some difficulties experienced by those attempting to put brief but clear labels on the many columns and levels of figures. I suspect also that the results are slightly distorted by the peculiar inclusion here and there of nine (more or less, depending on where you look), archives under the federal "Policy Making Authority", even though the PAC is generally reported separately because of the high level of distortion its inclusion would have produced. These nine, or so, federal archives seem to be bodies such as the History Division of External Affairs, the Directorate of History at the Department of National Defence, the Music and the Rare Books and Manuscripts Divisions of the National Library, the Library of Parliament, the Library of the National Gallery, the Ethnology Division of the national Museums Corporation, the Louisbourg Restoration Project of Parks Canada, and the Historical Section of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. I also wonder about the Bank of Canada Archives.

In sum, is the *Report* a successful effort? A qualified and reserved "yes" would seem to be the only fair response. It is certainly provocative, both because of what is and what is not included, and should generate a great deal of discussion. It will be fashionable to lambaste the *Report* for its shortcomings, but there is little doubt that its single greatest strength will be applauded: bringing into focus for the first time at the national level the general condition of Canadian archives other than the Public Archives of Canada. Certainly the PAC has many and very great problems, few of which are specifically identified in the *Report*, but the national archives will recognize very painfully the degree to which it participates in the problems and weaknesses of the smaller institutions. Leadership for the Canadian archival system is not by any means conceded to the PAC, but is spread through an array of components, real or recommended, of the total system. The result may be overly complex, and will need much analysis and compromise among whatever components finally emerge. The PAC, on the other hand, is firmly advised to play a more vigorous leadership role in certain areas and will be the centre of a not insubstantial quantity of money for careful distribution through the system. This sum, more or less matched by the provinces, should add about \$5,000,000 annually to the system, at a guess. There should also be certain easings of pressure through such mechanisms as compensatory funds from bodies like the SSHRCC for large projects, and

by the encouragement of more institutional archives, especially in business. Will all of this be enough to fund a total national system on the scale envisaged by the Group? Perhaps not, though it will go a long way. Interestingly enough, even allowing roughly for certain more or less hidden additions to the financial request, the sum would probably still not represent an increase in the first year of much more than 20% of all reported archival budgets. After so many years of neglect and recent inflationary trends, the aggregate figure does not seem very large. Compared to the value of our holdings and the size of our responsibilities, the amount dwindles almost to insignificance. All we have to do is buy one less fighter aircraft a year, every year. That means one less to scrap or crash annually.

Considering the recommendation for funding a new Extension Branch of the PAC, it would be a pity to conclude that “he who pays the piper, calls the tune”, but archivists will be apprehensive on this account. Some will also fear that such infusions could create a “welfare bum” mentality in some authorities. It would be a shame, that is to say, if some provincial or local levels of government used such an opportunity to avoid their own responsibilities. This need not happen, of course, but will bear close watching. There are many areas left unexplored in the report, or which are touched upon superficially or insensitively. Too little space is expended on how to implement the recommendations and in what order. Perhaps too much is expected of the archival community by the Group in leaving so much out of the report. If the *Report* is not in some way or form translatable into concrete action, then when the dust settles it will be seen as insubstantial. Its principal value then will largely be only that it was funded and distributed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada—not an insignificant event in itself, but an opportunity lost all the same. On the other hand, it certainly is too much for archivists to ask of one small group of persons in a constricted period of time with slight resources available to devise every answer, for all time, in any situation. At the very least, the *Report* should stimulate many responses, which with good will should complete the Consultative Group’s work. I suspect this can be the final refuge of the committee, and if the *Report* leads to some positive and vigorous action—soon—who then will deny this sanctuary or the wisdom of the Group?

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Some performance!

In the early days of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA), the Canadian Opera Company (COC) Archivist received promotional material which listed, among the purposes of the organization, a united voice to speak on behalf of its members. To anyone involved in the emerging performing arts archives field, and in desperate need of support, this was seductive advertising indeed. And yet, during the intervening years the Association has given no indication of recognizing the existence, not to mention the plight, of this area of the discipline. The record of the arts of a nation is as representative and revealing a manifestation of that nation’s philosophies, mores, tastes, life styles, attitudes and people as are government, educational, religious and business records, and the growth of Canadian performing arts companies and of their support by Canadian audiences since World War II is a remarkable social phenomenon. Brilliant and devoted Canadians, many of them not native-born, have contributed to the recognition, organization and presentation of Canadian artistic talent, broadening the national character immeasurably. To lose the documentation of their work is to risk distorted presentations in future historical writing.