

# Counterpoint

## The Spirit of Total Archives: Seeking a Sustainable Archival System

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### *Introduction*

In an earlier issue of *Archivaria*, I examined the history of the “total archives” concept in Canada.<sup>1</sup> I proposed that archival development fell into three distinct periods. Discussing the first era of archival management, from the 1800s to the mid-1970s, I suggested that the philosophy of total archives began as an expression of public obligation for the acquisition and preservation of society’s documentary heritage, regardless of the location, origins, form, or medium of the record. The heart of what became known later as “total archives” was the belief that Canadian society had a collective responsibility for the preservation of the country’s archival records. This collective responsibility was met by the establishment of public sector archival repositories. These institutions acquired and preserved not only records of the sponsoring government but also records from the private sector: from organizations, businesses, families, and individuals.

In the second era of archival development, from the 1970s to the early 1990s, the term “total archives” was coined to refer to the public responsibility to preserve all records, from all parts of society, in all media. But the total archives concept was soon overtaken by a belief in an “archival system.” The archival system, I argued, was a redefinition of total archives in the face of three realities: decentralization of public functions, growing regionalism, and diminishing funding for public archival institutions. The essence of the archival system was that responsibility for society’s documentary heritage must be shared between public and private agencies. It could no longer fall to the public sector alone to acquire and preserve the archival memory of all Canadians. A more disparate group of archival repositories, including public and private institutions, corporate and other organizational archives, would each acquire and preserve parts of Canada’s documentary heritage. By collaboration and cooperation, these institutions would ensure that a balanced record of society was preserved. It was in this second era that the Canadian Council of Archives

(CCA) was established, to serve as the cornerstone of a Canadian archival system.

I concluded my analysis of the history of total archives by examining a third era of archival enterprise, from the early 1990s to the present. In this third era, the archival system appears to be moving away from a sense of collective, shared responsibility toward a focus on individual responsibility. More and more repositories have emerged across the country, some acquiring community-based archives, others managing the records of their own institution. I argued that four factors were behind this change in archival orientation away from collective and toward individual responsibility.

First was a changing emphasis in government on efficiency and accountability over “culture” and heritage – a change brought about in part by economic restraint. Many publicly funded archival institutions felt they could no longer afford the “luxury” of private records acquisition. A second factor was the rapid growth of computer technologies. Archival institutions became more preoccupied with resolving technological challenges and related policy concerns within their host institutions. They also had to address the preservation of their institutions’ electronic records, which required increasing attention to records management responsibilities.

A third factor was the strengthening of public policy in the area of information management and privacy, in matters such as security, copyright, records management, and access to information. To meet the real or perceived demands of access and privacy, public sector archives have focused their energies on the management of the public record rather than the acquisition of materials from non-government sources. The fourth factor was the continuing devolution of identity among Canadians from national to regional to local. People seemed to identify themselves ever more closely with community or province, or even with gender, class, sexual orientation, or age, before they linked themselves with Canada. This shift led to a continued increase in the number of smaller and more specialized archival repositories, many privately funded and others supported through a range of public grants and subsidies, including funding from the CCA.

The archival system, then, is perhaps less a “system” than an assemblage of discrete entities. In spite of the growth in the number of institutions and the financial support provided by agencies such as the CCA, it seems that the vision of cooperation and collaboration has not yet been achieved in reality. The very essence of a system is that all the various elements in that system are interlinked, working together toward a common purpose. A functioning archival system requires that institutions work together to fulfil an overall purpose, in this case the preservation of Canada’s documentary memory for public use.

I believe that three factors are holding back the success of the Canadian archival system. First, the archival profession is not yet clear on its purpose and goals. What is the role of an archivist and how do archivists relate to their

information colleagues? Without a clear sense of purpose, the elements in a system cannot work toward a common goal. Second, the archival community does not coordinate efforts as much as it could, particularly with regard to acquisition and preservation, which leads to duplication on the one hand and possible losses on the other. Third, the public does not understand the nature and purpose of archives as well as it might. Because the archival community has not presented itself publicly as part of a coordinated system that serves the public good, archival repositories remain invisible and archivists struggle against public apathy. The end result is a low public profile, which limits funding, inhibits growth, and leaves archivists struggling to gain attention and respect.

This paper examines these three factors and offers some suggestions on how to rectify them in order to achieve a sustainable archival system and preserve the spirit of total archives in Canada.

### *Clarifying an Archival Identity*

For archivists to work toward a sustainable archival system, they need to share fundamental beliefs about their roles and responsibilities. In past years, the archival community struggled to distinguish itself from the world of the historian and collector. Much was written about the need for archivists to assert themselves as archivists and not be perceived as handmaidens to history.<sup>2</sup> Today, I would suggest that archivists are spending too much energy trying to align themselves with information management professionals and others, with records managers, business process analysts, and the newest participants: knowledge managers. In an effort to protect the record, and to protect an uncertain archival identity in an era of information technologies, archivists and the archival community may be overextending themselves, trying to be all things to all people.

No system can flourish if the key players in that system are unclear about their roles. Archivists are not historians, but nor are they records managers. Archivists are one group of practitioners within the larger world of information management. Consider the health sector as a parallel example. The health sector is composed of a range of individuals, such as licensed nurses, practical nurses, doctors, paramedics, psychologists, first aid attendants, and people trained in basic and emergency medical skills. These individuals work together as a team, each specializing in a particular area of expertise. The health sector may also be divided into subsectors, such as mental health, or intensive care, geriatric care, and pediatrics. Health care institutions may generalize or specialize, and the practitioners within them may also generalize or specialize. No one person in the health sector is responsible for all activities within that sphere. Doctors, nurses, and technicians focus on specialities, from paediatrics to pathology and neurology to physiotherapy.

Archivists comprise one speciality within the larger information world; they are one part of a harmonized information management team. While they cross over into another world – the heritage sector – archivists are cultural resource managers within the information sector. Archivists working in large organizations may be part of a complex information sphere, which may include an information systems division, a publications management branch, a records management office, and an archival facility. Alternately, archivists in small organizations may themselves be solely responsible for all manner of information care: records management, archives management, and so on.

Regardless of the size and scope of the sphere, archivists are responsible for one particular task: to preserve the documentary memory of a society so that it may be made available to the members of that society, for whatever reason.<sup>3</sup> If archivists in small organizations are also responsible for records management or information systems management, then they must change hats and perform those duties as records managers or information systems managers, not as archivists. Whether working alone or as part of a large institution, archivists should have distinct duties and responsibilities within the larger sphere. As caretakers of society's documentary memory, archivists should be auditors, protectors, historians, and advocates.

#### *Archivists as Auditors*

The most important role for archivists in the twenty-first century will be as auditors. It is not the archivist's responsibility to manage the creation of the record throughout its life but to protect those records that form a society's documentary memory. This audit function serves society, not administration. Archivists are not just responsible for protecting contracts and licences, registrations and regulations; archivists must also preserve the evidence of the workings of a society and its public and private agencies, in the broadest sense. Terry Cook has urged a broad definition of "evidence," inclusive of the "cultural, historical, and heritage dimensions and uses of archives, public or private."<sup>4</sup>

As auditors, archivists must also advise on the development of records-related policies and legislation, on the establishment of records-related standards, systems, and infrastructures, and on the processes needed to encourage the preservation of a well-rounded documentary record. In an office environment, however, archivists will be removed from the business of day-to-day care of current records; instead, they will work in concert with information colleagues to ensure that whatever daily systems are established, records with enduring value are protected and ultimately made available beyond the organization.

Archivists will assist records managers, information managers, and other custodians and administrators of records in the key task of appraisal: to iden-

tify records to be kept and records to be destroyed. Appraisal, indeed, is and will remain a core archival function, one requiring a recognition of the role of the record not only in an organizational but also in a societal context. Appraisal is and ought to be one of the key skills archivists bring to the record-keeping process, and archivists have a responsibility to oversee and determine appraisal decisions. Regardless of where and in what physical form archival material is kept, it will be the archivists' job to ensure that it represents the best possible documentary resource.

#### *Archivists as Protectors*

Archivists will also be protectors of the record. They will arrange, describe, and make available all the materials in their care. They will ensure that adequate preservation mechanisms are in place, emergency systems are developed, and vital records secure. They will carry out all those archival functions traditionally defined within the archival sphere, no doubt with extensive assistance from associates such as technicians or volunteers. In particular, archivists will protect the integrity of the content, structure, and context of archives, regardless of the medium or location of the material. Even when records are not physically within their care, archivists will be responsible for their arrangement, description, and protection, for society's benefit. They are the guardians of the documentary memory.

#### *Archivists as Historians*

Archivists will also be historians, not of a particular society or subject or era, but of the record and of the processes that led to its creation. Archivists will ensure that the context of the record is captured. Context is the overarching concept that governs our understanding of provenance, original order, metadata, organizational structures, and business functions. Archivists will capture the organizational, administrative, or personal history that envelops the records and gives them their meaning to creators and to society. This historical role will be critical as the profession accepts the subjectivity of archival work, particularly the process of appraisal. Archivists have a responsibility to document and explain their actions and decisions; understanding the history of the record will be essential to a balanced assessment of its ongoing value.

#### *Archivists as Advocates*

A neglected but vitally important role for archivists will be as advocates. Archivists will encourage the preservation and use of archives not just in their own institutions but throughout society. Public awareness, education, and outreach will be key activities in twenty-first century archival management.

Archivists will consider it a responsibility – not just an option – to speak out about the care and protection of records. Archivists will protest publicly, perhaps even vigorously, the misuse of records by organizations, governments, or individuals. In his recent report to the Minister of Canadian Heritage on the roles of the National Archives and National Library, historian John English recommended that Canada's National Archivist "take a public role in debates about records destruction, legislation concerning privacy and freedom of information, and in all matters concerning access to public records."<sup>5</sup> This responsibility to speak out extends beyond the federal sphere to provincial, territorial, municipal, and local environments. Archivists have a responsibility to promote records, archives, and history in order to raise society's awareness of their importance.

#### *The Records Management Role*

In order to clarify fully the distinct archival role in the information sector, it is useful to comment on the role and responsibilities of records managers, who constitute one other group of practitioners within the larger information management sphere. A brief examination of key records management responsibilities will illustrate why it is so important to understand the distinction between records manager and archivist.

In the twenty-first century, records managers will not be confined to the basement, responsible only for the boxes and files and papers. Governments and corporations are recognizing that information is a valuable commodity, and they are seeking the expertise of well-skilled records managers, just as they now rely on business managers and financial analysts to manage other corporate assets. Records managers will become increasingly pivotal and powerful members of the organization.

The care of records in the office environment is and ought to be the province of records managers. Records managers have a clear institutional responsibility; they are answerable above all to their institution and their first loyalty must be to that institution. Without good records management, the organization's archival record may not be worth preserving, but the records managers first obligation is to the organization, not to society.

Records managers will ensure that the records of their corporation, government, or other agency are accessible and well-managed. They will work with lawyers to ensure that their organization's use of different information media meets legal requirements. They will work with systems planners to identify the best way to design office systems to address work flow, information management, and other needs. They will develop record-keeping practices necessary to protect people's rights to privacy in a very public world. They will work with the archivist to help facilitate the long-range management of records and implement decisions about their ultimate disposal.

Records managers will ensure that current records are classified, scheduled, and managed, accessible to everyone within the institution. They will enforce access regulations and manage information requests. They may also participate in determining what information should be created, in what form, and in what manner and formats it should be disseminated and used. Good records managers will improve the way the office works, not just manage the information the office creates. They will be managers, traffic cops, gatekeepers, and analysts. In large agencies, records managers will serve as part of an integrated information management team, including records managers, archivists, records or archives technicians, librarians, editors, and data managers.

### *Strengthening Archival Identity*

How can archivists strengthen their identity? One step would be for organizations such as national, provincial, and territorial archival associations and councils to collaborate on the creation of clear definitions, roles, and responsibilities for archivists. Appropriate skill sets or “competencies” should also be outlined. Many different groups in Canada and internationally have been working on the analysis of archival responsibilities; the time has come to bring some of these ideas to the larger archival community for discussion and resolution.

It is particularly important to clarify in these descriptions the distinction between archivist and records manager, between full-time and part-time work, and between “professional,” “paraprofessional,” and “volunteer.” This clarification is not intended to limit access to the archival profession but rather to recognize the validity of all possible approaches to archival work, from full-time and professional to part-time and volunteer. It is critical to the success of an archival system that the archival community recognize and support all participants, whether or not they are paid, and whether or not they have undertaken formal studies in archival management.

Community archival institutions, for example, rely on part-time workers, technicians, and volunteers. To suggest such work can only be done by professional archivists is to place professional and theoretical concerns above the realities of life. Professionally trained archivists should welcome the involvement of archival technicians, practically-trained records managers, workshop-trained volunteers, and others, who should receive training and education necessary to their particular level of activity. Part of being a professional archivist is recognizing what tasks can best be done by a paraprofessional or other associate and what type of paraprofessional or associate is required. Consider the health sector again: doctors may diagnose a vitamin deficiency in a patient, but rather than prescribe a specific treatment, they then turn the patient over to the care of nutritionists, who are particularly skilled in the area in question.

*The Importance of Education*

Identity is defined in large part by the education one receives – not just by exposure to professional issues in a university classroom but also by the information conveyed in short courses, workshops, seminars, and even conference presentations. If archivists accept that their work is distinct from records management work, then it is necessary to distinguish between the two within archival education. However, many of today's archival education offerings focus on administrative and records management issues without situating them adequately within the overall archival context. Again, archivists are trying to address all of today's pressing information-related concerns, but just as no one education in the health sector can equip the doctor to be a doctor and a nurse and a paramedic, no one education in the information sphere will equip archivists to be archivists and records managers and information systems analysts.

To turn out well-educated archival professionals, educators need to ensure a holistic beginning to all university-based archives and records education. Students should gain a broad understanding of their field, so that they may serve as thoughtful and wise practitioners, not just technicians, once they embark on their careers. Regardless of the ultimate speciality chosen, the professional archivist of the twenty-first century should receive an education that includes an introduction to the creation and management of recorded information; the production and management of published information; the nature and impact of communication in society; and the sociological and cultural influences on records and information.

Within a university structure, it is possible to introduce the broad range of information-related issues and activities and then allow students to specialize as they wish. The first year of a two-year full-time graduate programme of study should include an overview of interrelated information management tasks; the second year could allow the student to specialize in a chosen career path: archives, records management, librarianship, information systems management, and so on.<sup>6</sup> Those institutions with existing archival studies or information management programmes will no doubt take an early lead, but other institutions should join this growing field. Recognizing that many existing educational institutions have limited faculty resources, this is still a goal for which to strive; archival departments should be planning for expansion and diversity so that their growth is coordinated and not ad hoc.

Educators should also emphasize the importance of high quality education in records management. Records management is not a poor cousin to archival enterprise; both are challenging and important specialities, each with its own set of skills and knowledge. While there should be a common understanding of the world of information management, records management education deserves its own place. Universities and colleges should expand their records



management offerings beyond one or two courses and incorporate all the diverse concerns regarding records care today, including electronic records issues, imaging and digitization, legal and administrative criteria for records care, and so on.

However, university education cannot be the only path to work in an archives environment. The fact is, much archival work does not require graduate education. To create a diverse range of practitioners it is important to develop educational and training initiatives that do not require two years' or more full-time study. In addition to increasing the scope of university programmes in archives management and records management, there should be credit and non-credit certificate and diploma programmes, technician programmes, and workshop and short-course training for volunteers and enthusiasts. All educational and training initiatives should include sufficient information about related information and heritage sectors to raise awareness among participants of the importance of cooperation with colleagues.

Universities and colleges should be at the forefront of such expanded educational opportunities. While archival associations are to be commended for stepping into the breach and offering a range of training opportunities, perhaps the time has come to work more closely with existing educational institutions, such as universities, colleges, school boards, and so on. After all, universities, colleges, and continuing education offices exist to teach; they have the facilities, the administrative infrastructure, and the organizational expertise to organize and deliver such courses. Archivists and archival associations can bring to the table their own knowledge of the subjects that ought to be taught and how.

### *The Role of Research*

How can archival educators know what to teach if they have no opportunity to study records and to examine the society responsible for creating them? Research is a central part of the continued development of the archival profession, yet it is a component still poorly developed in Canada and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> Graduate archival education must encompass both theories and methodologies, but without research, both the ideas about records care and their implementation in the work environment will not evolve and grow.

The library world is now working more closely with the academic disciplines of literature, communications, and policy studies to study the wider context of the book. Questions are being asked such as: How have books been received by the public? What is the effect of government policy on publishing and book sales? How have changes in editorial and publishing techniques changed the nature of the books available in society? Research is also a key component of fields such as medicine, and that research is not confined to medical and technical specialities. Genetic engineering prompts research into the relationship between medicine and ethics. The mentally ill are helped by

collaborative research in neurology, psychology, and sociology. Geriatric care relies on studies in social work and psychology.

It is important to develop similarly collaborative and innovative research programmes in archives, looking at both the strategies and ultimate goals of records care. Efforts in recent years to undertake research into electronic records management, into the concept of the record, and into the use of the record are all actions to be praised. Let us stretch the envelope further. Educators need to develop research programmes that consider the nature of records and archives not just in terms of their management but, more importantly, in terms of their relationship to and effect on society.

We need to examine not only *how* but also *why*. How often do governments go back to their archives, and for what purpose? What kinds of records do the public use most often and why? What is the relationship between record keeping and individual and collective memory? How do different societies perceive the value of their records? Research should expand an understanding of records to include their physical, linguistic, social, cultural, and symbolic properties. Researchers should work collaboratively not just with each other but also with specialists in fields such as communications, anthropology, sociology, and political science. Archivists need to look beyond the records world in order to understand the place of archives in society.

### ***Increasing Collaboration***

Once the archival community has clarified its own identity, it will be much easier for archivists to collaborate more actively with each other, with their information and heritage colleagues, and with the public at large, in order to strengthen the archival system. This collaboration will help to reduce duplication of effort while improving services and ultimately ensuring the protection of archives, regardless of where in the country they are kept. Collaboration can be seen as a natural and necessary consequence of the clarification of archivists' sense of professional identity. One area ripe for collaboration is in the acquisition and preservation of archives.

In the past, "total archives" rested on the belief that repositories must acquire and preserve all types of archives, public and private, in all media, from all sectors of society. As the archival system emerged, the idea of an "acquisition plan" was seen as pivotal to the preservation of a balanced documentary heritage. If institutions sat down at a table and "divided up the pie," each identifying specific "subject" areas of interest, then each would go out, find those records, and preserve them.

Rarely have cooperative archival acquisition programmes in English Canada been successful. Perhaps archivists rebel against the idea of coordinating or "dictating" archival acquisition. Perhaps the potential donors of archives do not fit into the neat categories devised by archivists. It is neither possible nor

logical to divide up the country – geographically, politically, intellectually, or otherwise – among archival institutions. The creators of records will always have a preference for where their documentary heritage is kept. Users will also offer their opinion about the best location for research materials. Acquisition plans do not always take the creators and users into account, nor do they always accommodate the establishment of new repositories.

Instead of developing formal acquisition programmes, archivists should strive for collaborative acquisition strategies. John English has recommended that the National Archives “review its acquisition policy in light of the need to provide a focus for archival records of national significance. A national policy should be the result of a partnership between the National Archives and the Canadian Council of Archives.”<sup>8</sup>

A national strategy is a good starting point, but it should be followed by provincial and regional approaches that suit the realities of Canada’s regions and remain flexible enough to allow for inevitable changes in resources, community needs, and research interests over time.

If the primary goal of the archival system is to preserve a balanced documentary heritage, then it makes sense for institutions to work together to identify what needs to be kept and where it is best housed. A first step – although a controversial one – might be to determine the standards of care records should receive. The participants in an archival system should take responsibility for ensuring that archives are well protected and that they are made accessible as soon as reasonably possible. If records are not safe and are not accessible to the public, then it does not matter that they were acquired by the “right” institution geographically or politically.

Is it time to consider minimum requirements for archival institutions? At the very least, an institution ought to offer a secure physical environment and adequate public services. This does not mean every institution has to have temperature and humidity controls or be open forty hours a week, but it does mean that institutions must recognize the dangers and difficulties inherent in seasonal operating hours, inappropriate storage conditions, or limitations on public access. Other requirements might be consistent and understandable archival descriptions, whether they comply with Canadian standards or not, and regular reporting on new acquisitions or changes to holdings, to help maintain information in emerging information networks, such as the planned Canadian Archival Information Network (CAIN).

Some provincial archival associations have developed institutional standards, but others have not. Consideration should be given to developing a coordinated approach. Standards should not be implemented in order to serve as justifications for decreased funding or discourage the establishment of new repositories but rather to improve the level of functionality and accountability of all members of the archival system. Standards or requirements could be linked to grant programmes; it is possible to structure funding programmes so

that smaller institutions are not penalized but instead encouraged to strengthen their own sustainability, suitable to their own communities' needs.

What if an institution does not meet the standard set? What if a community wishes to preserve a body of archives but does not yet have the institutional infrastructure to do so? Collaboration here is paramount. If the archives are acquired and preserved they may be at risk. If they are not acquired, they may be lost through neglect. Alternately, the materials may be acquired by another institution, which may care for them adequately but perhaps at a distance from the community in question, raising issues of territoriality.

Collaboration between members of the archival system could include the temporary acquisition of records by one repository on behalf of another repository, organization, or group. The Northwest Territories Archives has developed an interesting model. In order to encourage the preservation of records throughout the territory, the NWT Archives has developed a system whereby non-profit cultural, heritage, or community groups, including native groups, deposit their records with the territorial archives. The creators of the records retain complete ownership and control over their documents. The community groups provide funding for arrangement and description and the territorial archives offers centralized reference services to the public, based on terms of access established by the groups. Ultimately, these records can be transferred back to the physical custody of the groups, but in the meantime they are physically preserved and accessible in a secure environment.<sup>9</sup>

This model could be particularly valuable for the preservation of media materials such as film or video. The total archives concept suggested that all media materials should be cared for within one institution: one-stop archival shopping. The principle is praiseworthy, but is it practical? If good cooperative systems were established, would it not be possible for several institutions to pool resources to preserve and store specialized media materials in a centralized repository, such as a secure and environmentally controlled vault, so that the materials are well protected? Such collaboration requires good planning, clear organization, and excellent communications. But where is the logic in duplicating expensive, technically challenging resources such as video or film duplicating equipment, sophisticated climate-controlled vaults, and so on? In 1995, the Task Force on the Preservation and Enhanced Use of Canada's Audio-visual Heritage recommended that common regional storage facilities be established across the country to preserve audio-visual materials.<sup>10</sup>

Another avenue for collaboration is in the preservation of data archives. The English Report urged the development of a national data management strategy; ironically, the same week the English Report was published, the *Toronto Globe and Mail* newspaper reported on the near loss of the database from the global genome database project, which was rescued at the last minute. It appears archivists were not involved in identifying or protecting the database, and some suggested that the issue came down to lack of funds. However, it is

possible that the issue was not so much funds as the fact that archivists do not include what English referred to as “digital Canadiana” within their sphere of responsibility, and that the low public profile of archivists meant that they were not automatically considered when decision makers were struggling with this issue. Again, cooperation rests on an understanding of each partner’s responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>

Collaborative efforts such as these can extend beyond the care of media materials; cost-shared facilities could be established to preserve archives for entire regions, with each depositing institution sharing costs for physical storage, processing, and access. Costs could be reduced and records might be better protected. There are certainly challenges to such an approach, particularly with respect to communications and outreach. What happens when archives are moved? How are potential users notified? How do institutions keep track of what is where?

Yet these questions suggest another area of potential collaboration in acquisition and preservation. As John English noted in his report, there is a growing belief that “it is how the scholar gets to the information that will count, not where it is housed.”<sup>12</sup> The Canadian Archival Information Network initiative (CAIN) – a plan for electronically managed information about archival institutions and their holdings – is an excellent step toward electronic access to information about archives.

The CAIN system will provide useful and understandable information about archives for records creators and users. But the network could also serve as an archival communications tool. Information about new acquisitions, and about records needing protection, could be added to the network, so that archivists could keep each other informed about acquisition activities. If archivists knew not only what they have already acquired but also what they have not, the archival community would take a step closer to coordinated acquisition work without the rigidity of a formalized acquisition programme.

The Canadian Publishers’ Records Database (CPRD) is one attempt at this type of electronic networking. The CPRD was originally established at Simon Fraser University as an online guide to archival records relating to English-language book publishing in Canada. But project organizers quickly realized that a great quantity of publishing records had not yet made their way into archives; to include in the database only those materials already in archival repositories was to exclude a vast portion of Canada’s publishing history. And ignoring records still in publishers’ offices left the records at risk of loss or neglect, further diminishing the resource base for information about publishing in Canada. The project organizers decided that the database would document not only archives found in archives and libraries but also records still in publishers’ offices. The database now serves not only as a finding aid but also as a networking tool. Researchers can find information on publishers’ archives; archivists can find out if other institutions have acquired comple-

mentary records; and publishers can identify archival institutions that might be interested in their records.<sup>13</sup>

Cooperation outside of the archival community is also important. Joint conferences with records managers, librarians, museum curators, and historians should be encouraged. Representatives of the various specialties within the information management or heritage management sectors should coordinate their interaction and communications, to share information and raise awareness of each other's activities. In British Columbia, the Heritage Council of British Columbia strives to bring heritage associations together regularly; efforts should be made to establish and strengthen such groups in B.C. and across the country. Internationally, cooperation between information specialists has been evidenced by the signing in 1996 of a joint accord between the International Council on Archives and the Association of Records Managers and Administrators, as well as the International Records Management Trust, to share educational and other resources globally. The ICA also signed a joint accord with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) the same year.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Need for Advocacy*

This article has argued that one of the reasons the archival system is not flourishing is that archivists are not clear on their identity; another is that the members of the archival community are not cooperating as much as possible with each other and with their information or heritage colleagues. The public is not sufficiently aware of the value of archives and the role of archivists, and so there is limited public support for archival work. And perhaps the public is not aware because archivists have not been clear enough on their identity to mount a workable public awareness campaign. Speaking of the National Archives and National Library, the Canadian Historical Association recently noted that both institutions were "largely invisible," adding that "their importance is underrated in both Canadian cultural life and federal administration."<sup>15</sup> This low profile is true for archival institutions across the country. In order to make the archival system work, archivists need to promote their holdings and services so that the public can understand that there is a system and that they can participate in making that system flourish.

Archives are part of the social fabric of a society; they help to define a society. Archivists have a responsibility to promote the protection and use of archives as widely as possible. Archivists need to encourage everyone to become involved in records and archives care. It would be foolish, if not truly unethical, for doctors to say to patients, "wait until you are sick and then come see us and we will fix you." Rather, doctors should say, "eat more fruits and vegetables and less red meat, stop smoking, and get some exercise, and you won't need to see us so often." The people under these doctors' care will be

healthier; and the doctors win too, for their patients will still be alive and coming for continued medical care for years to come.

It is possible that some of today's archival advocacy programmes are more reactive than preventive. Rather than show people how to look after their own records, do archivists instead urge people to seek professional guidance? Recognizing that varying levels of expertise are required for different tasks, is it not possible to help people understand what they can do themselves and when they would be wise to contact a professionally trained archivist? Archivists should recognize that good records care includes helping people to understand what they can do themselves and why records are important to them.

#### *Advocacy and the Creator of Records*

The creators of records are the ultimate decision makers. They are responsible for determining whether their agency's records are kept or destroyed. Individual archivists cannot dictate whether an organization's records are preserved; the creators of records do. For records creators to appreciate the value of their archives, archivists need to raise their awareness of the contribution their records will make to society. Archivists need to promote the central role of records as part of the legacy of the organization.

The creators of the records, for instance, must recognize the need to incorporate records- and archives-related needs and services into the organization's day-to-day activities. Creators of records should encourage and support the task of records management; they should involve records managers and archivists as consultants or fellow employees where needed. And they should respect the knowledge and judgement of archivists and records managers. Both records managers and archivists need to promote good records care; otherwise, efforts to protect records are inevitably weakened by neglect and disinterest.

#### *Advocacy and the Users of Archives*

What of the person who uses the records, either during their active life or once they reach an archival repository? Users of records are equally important partners in the preservation of a balanced documentary heritage. If they do not understand how records came to be – how records managers and archivists influence the nature and state of historical materials – then they cannot support the archival process. Their research may also suffer in the absence of an understanding of the context of records creation. If archivists do not show the users of records how the nature and scope of records change over time, and how those changes affect the resources they seek to mine, archival efforts to preserve records and make them available will be in vain.

Users can also be intelligent and informed critics of archival decisions:

something every profession needs. But users cannot offer informed input if they do not understand the essence of archival work. The users of archives have to understand not only *what* archives are and *where* they are kept but also *how* they come to be in archival repositories. They need to realize the subjectivity of appraisal, the necessity of destroying up to ninety-eight per cent of records, and the reliance on institutional enthusiasm or community support for the preservation of records. Concerned and informed users should understand the archival community's efforts to establish an archival system. They should participate more actively in the establishment of archival institutions and the acquisition of archival records, and they should understand and comment on the effect of access legislation on the retention of and access to public records. The users of archival materials can be active and valuable partners in the process, rather than the adversaries they are perceived to be by some in the archival community.

#### *How to Promote Archives?*

There are many ways to promote the value of records and archives. Archivists can provide educators with teaching resources so that they can show students the relationship between archives, heritage, and history. Archivists can promote and participate in community archives programmes. They can host public events that bring people into the archives. They can participate more actively with heritage groups and hold more public discussions and debates about records and archives. Further, they can share their understandings not just within the profession but in venues such as popular magazines and newspapers and in the journals of academic and professional colleagues. For example, a recent article by political scientist Jeffrey T. Richelson in the *Scientific American* magazine examined the use of the U.S. government's secret archives for scientific research.<sup>16</sup> Archivists can write articles such as these, and they can give public presentations, collaborate with museums and libraries, and participate in conferences and seminars outside of archives in order to bring an archival perspective. Such active promotion may lead people to a greater appreciation of their society, its history, its archives, and so on. To suggest that archivists do not have time is to sideline what should be a core archival function: outreach and public awareness initiatives should be considered a fundamental part of archival work.

Advocacy and public awareness are key tasks for national, provincial, and territorial archival associations and councils. Consider the work of allied associations. The Canadian Library Association is active in promoting literacy, not to secure employment for librarians but rather to raise awareness among Canadians of the value and joy of reading. Indeed, the CLA's new strategic plan lists advocacy and coalition building as two of its core responsibilities.<sup>17</sup> Other library associations promote reading by hosting readings and author tours.



Museum associations promote heritage and culture through educational programmes. Heritage associations lobby municipal councils for the development of lists of heritage buildings, to ensure structures are protected and recognized.

The Association of Canadian Archivists, the Canadian Council of Archives, and provincial associations and councils are active representatives of their constituents, but their actual advocacy efforts have been limited, even though there has been much talk of the importance of advocacy and outreach. There should be a more concerted effort to explain to records creators, to records users, and to the public in general the importance of preserving archives: for evidence, accountability, memory, and heritage.

Perhaps Canada needs to establish an association devoted not to archives or archivists but to the preservation and promotion of the documentary heritage of Canada. Such an association would have to be arms length from government: not directly involved with funding archival activities but rather with promoting records care through public awareness and educational programmes, including seminars and speeches, presentations and exhibits. The London-based British Records Association (BRA) might serve as a good model. This organization advertises itself as

the only organization which provides a forum for everyone with an interest in archives. Members include historians and other researchers, owners of records, archivists, librarians and others responsible for keeping archives. This breadth of support ensures that the BRA has a strong voice in promoting the interests of archives and archive users at a national level.<sup>18</sup>

The BRA acts as a clearing house for historical records, rescuing them from possible loss and then negotiating their deposit to appropriate archival repositories in Great Britain and worldwide. It publishes journals for archivists and for the public, including one called *Archives and the User*; it also publishes bibliographies and finding aids and distributes guidelines on the care and preservation of records. In addition, the association holds conferences on archival and historical subjects, intended to bring together the creators and managers of records with the users of records.

A similar organization in Canada could draw its membership not only from archivists but also from historians, genealogists, family historians, and others dedicated to the preservation of historical materials. If the Canadian association followed the British model, its responsibilities might include surveying and locating lost records, promoting the care of records, and serving as “watchdog” to ensure that records are well managed and to protest against misuse or neglect. It might also become involved with or even host the emerging CAIN system, coordinating and disseminating electronic information about records around the country.

### ***Conclusion***

As mentioned earlier, a system only succeeds if all its parts work well together. In the archival system, everyone has a part to play, and everyone must be strong and viable in order to play that part. Archivists must not lose sight of their cultural responsibilities in the face of the wave of electronic technologies and information management besieging us today. They must seek to develop educational initiatives that recognize the importance of other partners in the information sector yet ultimately focus on the needs of archival practitioners at whatever level in serving their mission. Archivists then need to ensure that their work is collaborative and cooperative in order to build a truly functional, flexible, and effective archival system, one that preserves the spirit of total archives. They then need to promote the value of archives to the community at large, so that people understand and appreciate archives and participate actively in their preservation and use. The true focus of the archival system must be on protecting the record, not building archival empires.

The ultimate value of archives lies not in their information but in the knowledge and wisdom we gain from using them. As the American archivist Kenneth Thibodeau has argued, the archival value of records does not lie in their administrative usages; rather “it is value apart from the original context.” The unique function of archival repositories, he has argued, is to preserve records for the future: “Archives serve generations yet unborn; whose information needs and interests are yet undefined...[I]t would be shortsighted to suppose that we could serve the future by staying within the narrow scope within which organizations create and keep records.”<sup>19</sup>

The ultimate value of the archival system is that it coordinates the activities of hundreds of practitioners across the country to reach that common goal: to preserve a balanced record of society. The goal of archival management is not efficiency, economy, or administration. That is not to say that these are not important issues; they are very important issues. They are so important, indeed, that they should be a natural, inevitable, ongoing part of the record-keeping process. But ultimately, the archivist is and ought to be responsible to society, to ensure that the organization’s records are preserved and made available not only to the organization but also to the public and the society at large.

Further, the archivist has a responsibility to supplement the records of that government or organization with their counterparts from other sectors, whether public, semi-public, or private, so that a balanced and fair picture is preserved of the organization and its surrounding society. It is not enough to take responsibility only for the narrow sphere that is the institution’s own records; an archival system will only succeed if institutions work together and recognize the larger societal goal of their work. This search for a balanced record is at the heart of total archives; it should be at the heart of the archival system.

There have been three distinct eras in archival work in Canada, as archivists' sense of identity and understanding of their role have evolved over time. The Canadian archival community can and should move to a fourth era of archival management, an era in which the role of the archivist is clear. It is not just desirable but essential that archivists shift their concerns from the administrative responsibilities involved with records care and instead focus on their responsibilities as auditors, protectors, historians, and advocates. In that fourth era, archivists will collaborate with each other and with their information and heritage colleagues in order to encourage a respect for and appreciation of culture. Further, they will seek to improve people's knowledge and understanding of archives and their role in society. No doubt we will eventually move to a fifth era, and a sixth, and on and on. As all things evolve, so will archival work – especially as archives are, perhaps above all material evidence, the reflection of who we are, what we value, how we function, and how we relate as human beings in our societies.

## Notes

- 1 See Laura Millar, "Discharging our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada," *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998), pp. 103–46. I am grateful to Terry Cook for valuable comments on earlier drafts of this article, to Richard Valpy for reviewing several versions, and to Don Macleod for welcome editorial input throughout a long process.
- 2 For a discussion of the relationship between archivists and historians, which was actively debated in the 1970s and 1980s, see Millar, "Discharging our Debt," particularly pp. 117–22. See also the early issues of *Archivaria*, including volumes 3, 4, and 5, which included comments from professionals around the country on the role of the archivist.
- 3 The issue of the cultural role of archivists has been discussed in many venues over the years; one particularly valuable article is by the late Shirley Spragge, "The Abdication Crisis: Are Archivists Giving Up Their Cultural Responsibility?," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), pp. 173–81.
- 4 Terry Cook, "The Impact of David Bearman on Modern Archival Thinking: An Essay of Personal Reflection and Critique," *Archives and Museums Informatics* 11, no. 1 (1997), pp. 15–37. Cook discusses the issue of evidence on pages 28–30.
- 5 Quoted in John English, *The Role of the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada: Report Submitted to the Honourable Sheila Copps* (Ottawa, 1999), published electronically at <http://www.pch.gc.ca/wn-qdn/arts/english.html>, section IV, subsection 7.
- 6 This holistic introduction to information issues has become part of archival education at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information Studies and is increasingly common in European institutions. Taking the concept of "information" to its logical conclusion, some traditional archival programmes in Europe and the United States are now adding publications management to the list of courses available, thus offering an education that allows the student to choose from all aspects of information, from its production to its dissemination, use, and protection. The University of Toronto programme can be seen online at <http://www.fis.utoronto.ca>. See also the curriculum at the University of London, at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slais>. The School of Library, Archive and Information Studies offers postgraduate courses in archives and records management; library and information studies; information science; and electronic communication and publishing. It also offers a BSc in information management and an undergraduate course in "information sources and how to use them."

- 7 Interestingly, in the face of this call for increased research, there is a move away from a thesis requirement in Canadian graduate archival programmes, which was a core requirement of such studies ten years ago.
- 8 English, *The Role of the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada*, section V, subsection 5.
- 9 D.R. Valpy, "Strategic Planning and the Northwest Territories Archives," unpublished paper, June 1999.
- 10 See the Task Force on the Preservation and Enhanced Use of Canada's Audio-visual Heritage, *Fading Away: Strategic Options to Ensure the Protection of and Access to Our Audio-visual Memory* (Ottawa, June 1995).
- 11 English, *The Role of the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada*, Section V, subsection 6. Information about the global genome database project was discussed on the Canadian archival listserv "ARCAN-L" on 9-10 July 1999.
- 12 Ibid., Section V, subsection 9.
- 13 More information on the CPRD database is at [www.sfu.ca](http://www.sfu.ca) under the Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing.
- 14 See George MacKenzie, "A New World Ahead: International Challenges for Information Management," *The Information Management Journal* 33, no. 2 (April 1999), pp. 24-34. For a discussion of the "walls" between professions, see Mary Sue Stephenson, "Deciding Not to Build the Wall: Research and the Archival Profession," *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991), pp. 145-51, and Terry Cook, "'Another Brick in the Wall': Terry Eastwood's Masonry and Archival Walls, History, and Archival Appraisal," *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994), pp. 96-103.
- 15 John English, *The Role of the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada*, Section IV, subsection 1.
- 16 See Jeffrey T. Richelson, "Scientists in Black," *Scientific American* (February 1998), pp. 48-55.
- 17 See the Canadian Library Association website at <http://cla.ca>.
- 18 Taken from the British Records Association website at <http://lhr.sas.ac.uk/irh/associationstits/bra.html>.
- 19 K. Thibodeau, "To Be or Not To Be: Archives for Electronic Records," in D. Bearman, ed., *Archival Management of Electronic Records, Archives and Museum Informatics Technical Report No. 13* (1991), pp. 3, 12-13.