

Obituary

Elizabeth Diamond,
1945 – 2002



Elizabeth was born in England, the daughter of a Canadian soldier and his British wife, who had, among other pursuits, worked as a multilingual travel agent for Thomas Cook & Son. At the end of the war the family resided in Moose Jaw while her father finished his preparation for the bar and then moved to Victoria where he began the practice of law; he would eventually be appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. Elizabeth attended school and university in Victoria, and later credited her decision to pursue graduate studies at the University of Aberdeen to the fact that her most interesting history professors at the University of Victoria all came from the Scottish university. It was at Aberdeen that she met her future husband, Tony.

After graduation, Elizabeth took a position with the History of Parliament Trust, researching and writing biographies of sixteenth-century members of parliament. Under stringent limitations on the length of the entries and the

strict tutelage of editor S.T. Bindoff, she honed her writing skills for the biographical sketches and administrative histories of archival description. Then she was involved in a serious car accident that claimed the lives of her hiking companions and left Elizabeth critically injured. Tony learned of the accident from his brother, who happened to read a newspaper report, and his attention and care at her bedside cemented their relationship that might otherwise not have developed given the travelling and the solitary focus required by Tony's doctoral research. They were married in 1969 and returned to Aberdeen where Elizabeth did stipend teaching while Tony completed his thesis. Their next stop was a year in Jamaica.

Sharing her life with a wandering ornithologist meant many moves that presented both opportunities and challenges to her archival career. It was difficult to practise the archivist's trade without records and archives, particularly before the advent of contract work. But, believing fervently in the importance of archives and records, she was resourceful in making opportunities, and positive about what opportunities there were. She persisted in the face of seemingly hopeless prospects, and made many valuable contributions in the places she worked. As it turned out, the moves brought her work in some of the most challenging of situations and on some of the most interesting records for which an archivist could hope to have responsibility.

Between October, 1971, and spring, 1973, Elizabeth worked at the Oxford University Archives and was accepted in the archives training programme at the Bodleian. This entailed post-graduate classes in paleography and diplomatic and historical bibliography, and work in the Western Manuscript Department learning the techniques of the archivist under close supervision. She returned to the Bodleian from 1975–1976, and again, from 1980–1983, where, among other assignments, she worked on the records of Lionel Curtis (1872–1955) and the Round Table Organisation which he founded, and the papers of scholar and explorer Aurel Stein (1862–1943). She often said that the Bodleian training and experience instilled a clear understanding of archival principles and methodology.

At the course's conclusion she joined Tony on the island of Cousin in the Seychelles where he was researching and managing the island reserve. With only four other inhabitants, also reserve staff, Cousin had no Archives, and the extent to which Elizabeth was able to exercise her archival skills was to research, on visits off the island, into Cousin's property owners for the report on the reserve.

Then, in Nairobi, from 1976 to 1980, she worked at the National Museum on the papers of Joseph Murumbi, the first foreign minister and second vice-president of Kenya, and of Mary Bazette Leakey, an Anglican missionary in the 1890s and the mother of anthropologist Louis Leakey. Murumbi's papers included much printed material, and when Elizabeth first went with colleague Anne Thurston (now Director of the International Records Management

Trust) to see the collection, a young Kenyan archivist was working on it. Elizabeth was a great help to him, Anne recalls, gently suggesting an approach based on provenance rather than on subject, and he really appreciated her willingness to support him rather than try to take over and dictate the arrangement. It was typical of her that she gave advice without imposing it and that she communicated a real joy in creating orderly access to the material. In the process she taught Anne the principles of arrangement and description, making the lesson so clear and obvious that it has always stayed with her.

From July 1983 to February 1988 Elizabeth worked in Ottawa in the manuscript division of the National Archives of Canada. She had just secured a permanent position when her husband's career took them to Saskatoon where she soon joined the John G. Diefenbaker Centre as archivist, later becoming Acting Head. Her next position was as Saskatoon's city archivist, which lasted until 1994, when she moved to Fredericton where Tony was appointed to a research chair at the University of New Brunswick.

In New Brunswick she undertook various contracts: a feasibility study of the Canadian Archival Information Network (CAIN) for the province; designing distance education for records managers; and records management work for the Literary Council, the Human Rights Commission, the government of Prince Edward Island, and Service New Brunswick. Her solid work and articulate presentations on the fundamentals and benefits of records management for Service New Brunswick, in particular, established a solid base for a comprehensive records management program for this new agency. When she subsequently transferred full time to the archival work she loved, the records management community was diminished, but others benefitted, particularly the descriptive efforts of the Provincial Archives and the CAIN project of the Council of Archives of New Brunswick, where, since 1997, she had been project officer. She had come full circle to what had always made her enthusiastic about archival work, from the time of her training at the Bodleian, where it was noted that she particularly liked and was particularly good at assisting researchers by post and in person. She would be ensuring the identification and availability of archival records for research by bringing order to records and building descriptions that would now be based on standardized rules and would be accessible through a national database. She saw the next challenge as "subject access" and she wanted to take it on.

Despite the disruptions in her archival career, Elizabeth always kept up with theoretical and practical developments in the field, and maintained a meaningful involvement in her profession. She was active in establishing the Saskatchewan Archives Society and developed an archival module for the Saskatchewan Museums Section information network. She was a member of the Canadian Council of Archives committee that planned Canadian participation at the 1992 International Congress of Archives (ICA) meeting in Montreal and had special responsibility for exhibitions. Her input helped to make

the first *Agora* such a success that it has continued ever since at ICA meetings. After this experience of working with francophone colleagues in Quebec, she championed having the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) meet jointly with members of the Association des archivistes du Québec, which it will do in 2004. Elizabeth was editor of the ACA *Bulletin* from 1994 to 1997 and, following that, chair of the ACA Publications Committee. In the latter position she gave constant support to the publications of the ACA. She is remembered and appreciated by a recent editor of *Archivaria* for her timely phone calls and e-mail messages, for her decisiveness and professionalism, her sensitivity and deference, and her beautiful use of the English language. She was also a staunch supporter of the ACA Web site from its creation, with words of encouragement, support, and enthusiastic ideas as to how to make the site a bigger and better thing. Elizabeth seemed to carry off effortlessly and assuredly whatever project or professional activity she undertook.

She was very much present in the life of ACA, whether writing for *Archivaria*, dancing at the annual banquet, contributing to debate at meetings, or cheering at ACA Baseball games (for both the East and the West). She provided support and encouragement to a number of budding archivists throughout her career. She was a mentor to many; her passion for, and intellectual interest in, archives was inspiring.

Elizabeth had many interests outside archives work: the Saskatoon Women's Calendar Collective (Herstory), the Sherlock Holmes Society of Saskatoon, the Fredericton Choral Society where she sang and, always the archivist, organized and maintained their scores. She played in the annual Gilbert and Sullivan Society productions, she and Tony were part of a group of gourmets in Fredericton, she was involved with the preservation and promotion of the built heritage in Saskatoon, and secretary of Fredericton Heritage Trust, for which she also coordinated and wrote a series of newspaper articles. She was a knowledgeable and successful gardener and she loved to travel. Committed to social justice, she not only expressed her views eloquently and passionately, but also demonstrated that commitment through volunteer work for CHIMO and by railing at injustice with the Raging Grannies.

Elizabeth made friends wherever she went and retained these friendships. She had a knack for making people feel welcomed and wanted. People were drawn to her generosity, her genuine interest in them, her sense of adventure and fun, her thoughtfulness, her wide interests, her keen mind, her kindness, her unpretentious nature, her wit, and her easy laugh. These characteristics could see her skipping an ACA session for a trip to a nearby historical or natural point of interest, on a walking tour in France, in Stratford attending as many plays as she could fit in, balloon-riding, contributing to discussions on many topics with intelligence, opening her home to her husband's colleagues, mutual friends, travelers, and exchange students, and being flat on her back at midnight miles down a New Brunswick logging road while watching, amid

snapping twigs and crawling things, for a glimpse of the August meteorite showers.

Elizabeth was so positive in her outlook and so uncomplaining that very few people knew of her six-year struggle with cancer. It was not that privacy was an overwhelming concern for her, rather that she did not want to be treated as if she were ill, and that she wanted to get on with living life to the fullest. A measure of her passion about Archives was that she continued to work even in the last weeks of her illness. The volume and quality of her accomplishments in recent years was truly impressive.

Her husband, Tony, and their sons Owen and Peter, were most important in her life. She took great pleasure and satisfaction in their company, their activities, and their achievements. Along with them, her colleagues will very much miss her and her passion for archives and for life.

Marion Beyea
Provincial Archives of New Brunswick