

A. Robert N. (Bob) Woadden, 1922–2010



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A. Robert N. (Bob) Woadden, Toronto's first City Archivist, passed away in Campbellford, Ontario on 2 July 2010. Born and educated in Leicester, England, Bob served in the Royal Navy during the Second World War and then studied librarianship under Roy Stokes at Loughborough College. He served as Deputy Town Librarian of Dover during the reconstruction period of Dover's library services. He immigrated to Canada in 1956. In 1960 he was recruited to fill the new position of City Archivist and charged with creating an integrated records management and archives program for the city. In 1975 Bob was appointed Deputy City Clerk where he remained until his retirement in 1984.

It was Bob Woadden's destiny to be an archival pioneer. In 1960 Toronto acted on a management consultant's report on a reorganization of the total civic service. Among its many recommendations, this enlightened study identified the administrative need for a centralized records management and archives program and, significantly, placed it in the City Clerk's department. Bob was appointed City Archivist. At that time, no municipality in English-speaking Canada had an archives (although in the Province of Quebec the tradition of local recordkeeping was well established). Outside of the then Public Archives of Canada, a few provincial institutions, and some universities, there was no archival profession in Canada to speak of and no comparative models to emulate; as a result he was faced with custom-building the operation the city required. He proved ideally suited to the task.

Bob's experience as a professional librarian was a start, but it was his organizing skills and the force of his personality which were critical. His challenge was to introduce an unfamiliar set of procedures to an indifferent, and sometimes hostile, civic culture, a situation that tested all his talents as a diplomat, politician, salesperson, and manager. One by one he convinced department heads of the value of centralized records management – he was offering space, staff, and instant access at no cost to them. One by one they were persuaded. He took pains to become “one of us” rather than “one of them” and was soon a familiar figure at staff recreation events. He was happy to comply when he was asked by the Clerk to take on management of the

city's mailroom and chauffeur pool. These were extra burdens unrelated to the primary job, but they indicated an expression of confidence in his abilities, and allowed him to acquire a strong voice in departmental decisions and to influence those decisions in favour of his program. His established reputation for usefulness and reliability was responsible for the gradual acceptance of his program by the civic service.

Chance played a role too. Bob was on the lookout for more salubrious and expansive space than the attic of Old City Hall, where boxes of records, accumulated since the city's incorporation in 1834, were piled high and covered with pigeon droppings. The City was building a new City Hall, set to open in 1965, and Bob noticed that there was 24,000 square feet of unallocated space in the basement. Securing this was critical to the success of the enterprise.

While preoccupied with promoting the program through records management, Bob was equally conscious of the historical value of the material that had miraculously survived the attic. He recognized before anyone else the significance of the pile of glass plate negatives scattered about – some used to channel leaks from the ceiling – and rescued 26,000 important documentary photographs taken between 1911 and 1940 by the now well-appreciated City Photographer, Arthur S. Goss.

To keep informed of best archival practice, Bob availed himself of the only opportunity at the time and became an active member of the Society of American Archivists (SAA), publishing articles in *The American Archivist* and serving on several of its committees, including chairing local arrangements for the highly successful annual conference in Toronto in 1974. Having benefited from this relationship over many years, he was at pains to encourage his staff to be similarly active in the Canadian profession as it evolved from a section of the Canadian Historical Association to the Association of Canadian Archivists in the early 1970s. It was not a coincidence that the Toronto Area Archivists Group (TAAG), the first of its kind in North America, was conceived in the City Archives in 1973.

In the decade following Canada's Centennial in 1967 the program blossomed, benefiting from the new interest in heritage generated by the celebrations, and by a buoyant economy. In this period, as Bob had hoped, the archives became an important resource for researchers of all kinds. Local history was being discovered by scholars and community members alike. Demand, which was assiduously documented, led to rapid growth. Beginning in 1960 with a staff of two and a budget of \$10,000, Bob spearheaded the development of a records and archives organization, which by the time he retired in 1984, had a staff of forty-five responsible for programs including records analysis, micrographics and photography, conservation, documentary art, and a satellite exhibition gallery. Bob had done the heavy lifting for all who followed him and it is to him that we can attribute the establishment of the City of Toronto Archives as an integral part of the administrative machin-

ery of Toronto's government.

To a large degree, Bob Woadden was "old school." He was demanding and forceful, and expected only the best of his staff. It was a more formal time and he remained "Mr. Woadden" to those who worked for him, at least until his retirement. Those who came to know him well, however, recognized and admired his personal and professional commitment to his program and his staff.

In 1981, in recognition of its pioneering work and achievements over twenty years, the City of Toronto Archives received the SAA's Distinguished Service Award – at that time the only Canadian recipient and the only municipal archives to be so honoured. For Bob this was the most meaningful recognition of his career in archives.

Prior to his death Bob was enthusiastically helping plan a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the City Archives. The event unexpectedly became an occasion also to celebrate his life and the critical role he played in expanding the field of professional archives in Canada.

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