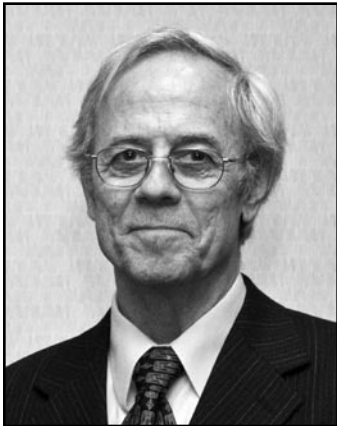


Obituaries



Robert Garon, 1942–2012



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Robert Garon, Keeper of the Archives nationales du Québec (AnQ) from 1980 to 2000, passed away on 11 February 2012.¹ Robert was born on 9 December 1942, second in a family of seven children. Following primary school in Chicoutimi, he completed classical studies at Saint-Jean-Eudes College in Quebec City and at the Séminaire de Chicoutimi before enrolling in history at Université Laval in 1964. With the encouragement and advice of Professor Claude Galarneau, he moved to Paris in 1967 to study archival science. In fact, he enrolled in the historical demography doctoral program at the Sorbonne and, at the same time, audited courses on archives at the École des

Chartes, the famous French school for archivists.

Back in Quebec City in the spring of 1969, he began a brief career as a professor of archives at Université Laval, where he was assigned responsibility for the undergraduate program in archival studies. The program was formally

1 The main source of information about the career of Robert Garon until 2000 can be found in Jean-Pierre Therrien, "Robert Garon: Une passion, les archives; une vocation, les Archives nationales du Québec" in *La gestion d'un centre d'archives. Mélanges en l'honneur de Robert Garon*, edited by Louise Gagnon-Arguin and Jacques Grimard (Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2003), 5–31. The authors also wish to thank Murielle Doyle and André Dorval, who made available the texts of their homage to Robert Garon, delivered at his funeral.

abolished in 1971, after which Robert continued to teach history courses while pursuing doctoral studies. In 1975 he received a doctorate from the Université de Paris.

After returning to Canada, he taught archival studies at Université Laval, the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi, and the Université du Québec à Rimouski on a part-time basis. While continuing this teaching, he left his position as professor at Laval in 1975 to join the Quebec civil service as records manager for the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs. In 1977, at the invitation of François Beaudin, he joined the Archives nationales du Québec as Assistant Keeper. He became Keeper in 1980. During the twenty years that he devoted to the Archives nationales du Québec, Robert modernized the institution to ensure that it effectively managed the records of the Quebec government and reflected modern archival practice. Building on the dynamic impulse instilled by François Beaudin, Robert completed the move of the Quebec City archival centre of the AnQ from the Plains of Abraham building to the Laval campus to occupy a substantial portion of the converted seminary chapel. Later, in the 1980s, he also presided over the relocation of the Montreal regional archival centre to a newly adapted and more accessible building on Viger Street.

Robert not only completed the regionalization of the Archives nationales du Québec through the archival network by opening the Sept-Îles centre in 1981, but also effectively used the network in his management of the organization. For him, it was important to make archives available in the region of their creation. This conviction was not confined to government records, for he also encouraged the preservation of private records by archival institutions other than the AnQ; he was the driving force behind the establishment of a Quebec network of accredited non-governmental archival repositories as partners financially supported by the AnQ.

One of Robert Garon's major achievements is, without doubt, the passage of Quebec's archives law in 1983 in the wake of the province's new freedom of information act passed the previous year. He will be remembered for his efforts in the drafting of a modern archives law that forced all provincial ministries and governmental bodies to implement records management and to better preserve their archival holdings. At the same time, the legislation retained all the provisions necessary to operate the Quebec archival system on a regional basis and supported the strengthening of the partnerships created through the accredited non-governmental archival centres.

Another major contribution to the improvement of archival practice in Quebec was Robert's launching of the standardization project at the AnQ, which involved many staff members and proved useful not only to the AnQ employees, but also to the wider community through the publication of *Normes et procédures archivistiques des Archives nationales du Québec*. This guide was eventually translated into English and Croatian. He was also involved in the resolution of long-standing problems in preservation of public

records in Quebec. For instance, he was very successful in gaining support for an Interdepartmental Committee on Judicial Archives, which developed criteria for the selective retention of court records, ultimately allowing the destruction of massive amounts of paper. Although with less success, he invested time and energy in seeking solutions to manage and preserve electronic records and to provide the AnQ with the proper information technology to manage its own description and reference systems for the entire AnQ network. Indirectly, Robert also supported efforts to anchor these advances on a more permanent basis by helping the history department at Université Laval establish new undergraduate and graduate programs in archival studies in the early 1980s.

Robert Garon's leadership of the archival community took many forms. Before he became head of the Archives nationales du Québec, he proved a very dynamic member of the Association des archivistes du Québec (AAQ), serving as a member of the council from 1971 to 1973, as vice-president in 1973–74, and as president in 1974–75. He constantly elevated the archival debate in Quebec with the articles he wrote and published on many subjects in the journal *Archives*.

Always a supporter of the AAQ, Robert also played important roles on the national and international scenes. As a member of the task force established within the Dominion-Provincial-Territorial Archivists Conference by the deputy ministers responsible for cultural affairs and heritage resources, he made valuable contributions that led to the establishment of the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA); he was a staunch supporter of CCA in its early days. He was also at the forefront of the launch of the Association internationale des archives francophones in 1989 and helped to reorganize it on a sounder footing in 1992, agreeing to make its permanent secretariat in Quebec City. At the same time, he contributed as one of the leaders in the organization of the International Congress on Archives in Montreal in 1992.

Life after his retirement from the Archives nationales du Québec illustrated his commitment to archives and heritage. From 2003 to 2006, he served as editor of the AAQ journal *Archives*. From 2006 to 2010, he worked as treasurer (and also secretary general from 2006 to 2008) of the Commission franco-québécoise sur les lieux de mémoire communs, where his expertise on archives and heritage was greatly valued.

Robert Garon will be remembered best as an eternally optimistic colleague who was always ready to help and find solutions to problems, no matter how difficult. A man of passion and commitment in all his undertakings, he remained a professor at heart, always ready to discuss issues, research solutions, and help colleagues, new and old.

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