

# Counterpoint



## Coming Up with Plan B: Considering the Future of Canadian Archives

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**RÉSUMÉ** Des changements de direction à Bibliothèque et Archives Canada accentuent une crise plus fondamentale : les opérations archivistiques traditionnelles sont menacées d'obsolescence face aux transformations technologiques. L'approche linéaire pour l'acquisition, la préservation et l'accès est basée sur un modèle de service physique impliquant la garde effective des documents d'archives : les ressources archivistiques doivent être conservées dans des institutions d'archives afin de pouvoir bénéficier d'une attention de la part des archivistes. Cette orientation axée sur la garde physique des documents d'archives est rendue plus difficile au Canada étant donné que la philosophie des archives totales et l'approche du système d'archives qui en découle ont tous les deux encouragé le rêve inatteignable d'une gestion d'archives qui puisse être encyclopédique, collective et contrôlée. Comment les archivistes peuvent-ils acquérir, conserver et rendre accessible une collection d'archives de valeur à l'âge numérique quand la nature même des documents numériques dicte qu'ils soient dispersés, pas conformes aux normes et sélectifs? La meilleure stratégie pour protéger les documents d'archives dans l'environnement numérique d'aujourd'hui n'est pas de conserver un modèle désuet basé sur la garde physique des documents,

- 1 Responsibility for the ideas here falls on my shoulders alone. I have, however, benefitted greatly from the support, encouragement, criticism, and inspiration of many people during the evolution of this article. In 2011, the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information (iSchool) generously invited me to spend a term teaching in Toronto, providing the precious gift of time for research and writing. My students, both those of recent vintage and those who have long since become colleagues and friends, keep me linked to the ever-changing world of records and archives management. I thank them all for their support and ideas. I appreciate the valuable input of *Archivaria's* anonymous peer reviewers, whose comments helped me with my search for precision. Terry Cook has never failed to encourage my work, for this piece and so many others over thirty years, and I am ever grateful. Gary Mitchell of the Royal British Columbia Museum offered an insider's perspective on the realities of archival administration in the twenty-first century. His comments helped me refine my analysis, and he encouraged me to push my thinking on the future of archives "to the fringes." Heather MacNeil has always offered insightful comments on my research, as a friend, colleague, and, most recently, as *Archivaria's* general editor. Richard Valpy, recently retired from the Northwest Territories Archives, has unfailingly provided detailed and perceptive critiques of various drafts of this paper, as well as unwavering encouragement. Thank you, all.

qui marginalise les institutions d'archives, mais d'adopter une approche basée sur la gestion du risque pour les documents d'archives et les services archivistiques, permettant ainsi aux organisations et aux individus de protéger les preuves documentaires numériques, qu'ils se trouvent soit dans un environnement dans lequel on considère la garde physique des documents d'archives (« *custodial environment* ») ou bien dans un autre dans lequel la garde physique des documents n'est pas prise en compte (« *non-custodial environment* »). Une nouvelle stratégie aidera la communauté archivistique canadienne à atteindre son but ultime, qui est de permettre à la société de créer et de conserver des documents d'archives afin d'appuyer la responsabilisation, de nourrir l'identité et de protéger la mémoire.

**ABSTRACT** Changes in direction at Library and Archives Canada highlight a more fundamental crisis: traditional archival operations risk obsolescence in the face of technological transformation. The linear approach to acquisition, preservation, and access is premised on a physical, custodial model of service: archival materials must be housed in archival institutions in order to receive archival care. This custodial orientation is exacerbated in Canada because the total archives philosophy, and the subsequent archival system approach, have both encouraged the unattainable dream that archival management can be encyclopedic, collective, and controlled. How can archivists acquire, preserve, and make available a valuable collection of archives in a digital age when the nature of digital records is that they are dispersed, unregulated, and selective? The best strategy for protecting records in today's digital environment is not to save an outdated, custodial model, which marginalizes archival institutions, but to take a risk-based approach to records and archives service, helping organizations and individuals protect their digital documentary evidence in both custodial *and* non-custodial environments. A new strategy will help the Canadian archival community achieve its ultimate goal, which is to help society create and capture records in order to support accountability, foster identity, and protect memory.

### **Anxious Times**

Many today are alarmed at recent changes in the structure of Canada's archival system. The budget at Library and Archives Canada (LAC) has been cut by \$9.6 million, and staffing levels are being reduced by at least 20 percent. Increased focus on the management of government information resources, and an apparent de-emphasis on the acquisition of private-sector archival holdings, are key components of LAC's latest business plan. The \$1.7 million in federal funding for the decades-old National Archival Development Program (NADP) has been eliminated.<sup>2</sup> Licensing agreements with private-sector providers of

2 The Library and Archives Canada (LAC) modernization initiative, first introduced in 2010, continued to evolve throughout 2013. Specific principles and initiatives are described in detail in the About Us section of LAC's website: <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/modernization/Pages/default.aspx>. LAC announced the elimination of NADP funding in

archival description and access services signal a change in the government's approach to archival digitization and dissemination, raising questions about intellectual property rights and collective ownership.<sup>3</sup>

In 2011, the Librarian and Archivist of Canada announced, as part of a proposal to develop a Pan-Canadian Documentary Heritage Network, that LAC's "monopoly as stewards of the national documentary heritage is over."<sup>4</sup> To many, such statements cast a dark shadow over Canada's archival future, threatening to impair the nation's publicly supported, federally coordinated approach to the preservation of both government archives and private-sector historical resources. Reductions in service levels at LAC are seen as threats to research and access, exacerbating the fear that the institution is no longer fulfilling what the archival community has long considered its central role: to acquire, preserve, and make available the documentary evidence of Canadian society. Questions are being asked about the change in direction and about the consequences for archives and archivists.<sup>5</sup>

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April 2012 as part of the budget cuts, which also led to the reduction of some 200 to 400 employee positions out of a total staffing complement of just over 1,000. (The staffing numbers cited in public sources vary considerably, from 215 to over 400. It appears that some positions will be lost through attrition and others through the elimination of current positions.) For different analyses of the situation at LAC, see, for example, the "Save Library & Archives Canada" website (<http://www.savelibraryarchives.ca/update-2012-05.aspx>) and CBC News report from 2 May 2012 (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/federal-libraries-archives-shutting-down-1.1139085>). For additional background about the cuts and for details of the reaction from the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA), see the Advocacy section of the ACA website, [http://archivists.ca/sites/default/files/Attachments/Advocacy\\_attachments/reinstatement-jun13.pdf](http://archivists.ca/sites/default/files/Attachments/Advocacy_attachments/reinstatement-jun13.pdf).

- 3 A memorandum of agreement was signed in 2013 between Library and Archives Canada and Canadiana.org, a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to preserving Canada's documentary heritage. The terms of the agreement were made public by University of Ottawa law professor Michael Geist as the result of an access to information request submitted to the federal government. Details of Geist's investigations are outlined in Michael Geist, "The Untold Story Behind the LAC-Canadiana Digitization Plan," Michael Geist website, under "Columns Archive," 1 October 2013, <http://www.michaelgeist.ca/content/view/6962/135/>.
- 4 See LAC, About Us, "Towards a Pan-Canadian Documentary Heritage Network," <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/Pages/towards-a-pan-canadian-documentary-heritage-network.aspx>.
- 5 For reaction to the budget cuts and policy changes, see, for example, the various public communications issued by the Canadian Council on Archives (CCA) ([http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/whnew\\_2009.html](http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/whnew_2009.html)), the ACA ([http://archivists.ca/sites/default/files/Attachments/Advocacy\\_attachments/reinstatement-jun13.pdf](http://archivists.ca/sites/default/files/Attachments/Advocacy_attachments/reinstatement-jun13.pdf)), and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (<http://www.savelibraryarchives.ca/default.aspx>). In addition to the various grassroots protests on social media and online discussion forums, a number of other groups have been examining the status of Canada's archives. Activities include a series of meetings coordinated by the Public Policy Forum, with the assistance of LAC, to consider strategic approaches to digital preservation; see *Preserving Canada's Memory: Developing a Strategic Approach to Digital Preservation* (Ottawa: Public Policy Forum, September 2013), <https://www.ppforum.ca/sites/default/files/Preserving%20Canada's%20Memory%20-%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf>. In February 2013 the Royal Society of Canada established

Clearly, the archival community is motivated to address the immediate impact of changes to Canada's national archival institution, to the concept of total archives, and to the vision of a national archival system. But we must look beyond short-term fears to examine causes and consequences and then to consider long-term strategies for action. Is it all just a matter of money? Or are budget cuts reflective of a changed philosophy about the role and purpose of archives? What is the role of the archival institution in Canada – be it national, provincial, or local – in the twenty-first century? Are archival institutions destined to become obsolete in the digital age?

### **To Have and to Hold**

As all archival studies students are taught on the first day of class, the essence of archival service is to acquire, preserve, and make available the documentary evidence of society's communications, actions, and transactions. That documentary evidence was, for centuries, a tangible entity: a physical item that had to be managed in a particular geographic location. The uniqueness of the item was intricately connected to its placement within an aggregation of materials, which themselves were bound together by the integrity of their collective content, context, and structure. Archivists did not collect single items; they acquired accumulations of materials, ideally through some formal process of transfer from creating agency to storage room.

To provide this physical service, archivists brought these aggregations of archival materials into a repository, arranged and described them, perhaps copied some of the content, then invited researchers to access their holdings either in person or remotely. This process was not just custodial, it was linear: acquisition before preservation, preservation before description, description before access. If this linear, physical process defines archival management, and if archival institutions today are still executing this process, one can argue that they are still performing their essential service. But that does not mean the institutions are not in danger of becoming obsolete.

Horses and buggies still perform their essential service. It is still possible to hitch a horse to a wagon and drive down a country road, if one has access

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an Expert Panel on “the status and future of Canada's libraries and archives”; see <http://rsc-src.ca/en/expert-panels/rsc-reports/status-and-future-canadas-libraries-and-archives>. In 2013, a Canadian Archives System Task Force (CAST) was struck to examine the consequences of the changes at LAC and to consider strategies for the future. (For more on CAST, see the ACA website: <http://archivists.ca/content/terms-reference-canadian-archives-system-taskforce-cast>.) As well, ACA, CCA, CAST, and L'Association des Archivistes du Québec (AAQ) hosted a Canadian Archives Summit in Toronto on 17 January 2014, with simultaneous broadcasts across the country. The summit was designed to start a conversation to consider the future of archival services in Canada. See the Advocacy section of the ACA website: <http://archivists.ca/content/canadian-archives-summit>.

to horse, wagon, and road. But the infrastructure associated with maintaining a horse and buggy is difficult to find. As cars replaced horses, roads were paved, which was good for cars but bad for horses. As gas stations were built, grazing lands diminished. Horse barns were torn down as parking garages were built up. Blacksmiths and veterinarians lost business, while car salesmen and auto mechanics gained customers. And as horses and buggies gave way to cars and trucks and trains and planes, people's expectations changed. Now that they could drive across town in an hour, they bought cars, moved into suburbs, and became commuters. As it became easier to fly from one part of the country to another, people pursued careers away from home, knowing they could return periodically. Conventions rotated from city to city, business meetings could be held at short notice, and destination tourism boomed. In the end, it became faster, more efficient, and infinitely more sensible to travel 50 kilometres by car or 1,000 kilometres by plane than to hitch Bessie to the wagon. Today, much of the world sees horses and buggies as nostalgic reminders of days gone by, not as a primary form of transportation. As one advocate of New York's horse-and-buggy trade argued – in light of recent attempts by the city government to abolish horses and buggies as dangerous and unhygienic – “people come to us for the clip-clop.”<sup>6</sup>

Archival institutions and traditional archival service are stubbornly physical in a world where physicality is becoming a liability, not an asset. As such, archival institutions risk becoming quaint reminders of an analog past, repositories of records valued for their historical allure as documentary symbols of a bygone age – accompanied by the enchanting smell of iron gall ink or the sensation of crumbling newsprint – more than for their enduring value as evidence. Archives have always been stereotyped as dusty, musty, and old. As the world becomes relentlessly digital, this emphasis on caches and treasures instead of evidence and testimony imperils the archival future.<sup>7</sup>

6 See PBS “Newshour,” 17 October 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2013/10/new-york-citys-horse-and-buggy-industry-risks-extinction.html>.

7 An example of this emphasis on physicality is found in the creation of the Museum of Letters and Manuscripts in Paris, established in 2004, and its affiliate, the Museum of Letters and Manuscripts in Brussels, formed in 2011. The museums are the creations of Gérard Lhéritier, president of the Paris-based Aristophil, a private company created in 1990 to buy and sell letters and manuscripts. Among the materials displayed by these “museums of the record” are individual letters by Albert Einstein, Édith Piaf, and Victor Hugo. For background on the establishment of the museum, see the Aristophil website: <http://www.aristophil.com/>. See also the museum websites: <http://www.museedeslettres.fr/public/index.php> for the Paris museum; and <http://www.mlmb.be/fr/index.html> for the Brussels museum. While one cannot condemn the desire to engage the public in history through the display of literary and historical manuscripts, one has to ask if the archival value of the items collected has been adequately regarded. The museums seem to highlight the value of the documents as examples of the written word rather than as archives with evidential and historical worth.

### *Shopping for History*

These traditional, physical repositories were much like archival “stores” that managed documentary “goods,” rather like butchers, grocers, or bakers who sold meat, vegetables, or bread. The earliest archival repositories, often referred to as “institutional,” “sponsor,” or “corporate” archival repositories, held what I will refer to as “agency archives”: the historical records of their particular creator, such as a monarch, church, government, or business. Their evidential value was secured by protecting and documenting their “chain of custody” – the trail of bread crumbs between creator and custodian. Other repositories, such as libraries, research institutions, or (to a lesser extent) museums cared for what I will call “collected archives”: historical materials from some entity other than the sponsor of the custodial institution, not “acquired” through an unbroken chain of custody but “collected” as sources of historical information and knowledge.<sup>8</sup> The institutions were archival “stores,” but what they contained was a bit harder to discern, as their collections were defined by institutional mandate, politics and economics, and even personal proclivity.<sup>9</sup>

To access and use both agency archives and collected archives, researchers had to travel to various repositories, just as a customer might visit different shops to purchase lettuce, beef, and bread. In the absence of an archival Yellow Pages, researchers had to work hard just to know where to look for relevant materials, which meant conducting multiple inspections of ever-changing card

8 The literature on archival history is vast, and I have no intention of trying to repeat what has been articulated many times by so many others. The following works are often considered milestone publications on which rested many subsequent theoretical arguments. The first substantial first work – chronologically – to influence North American archival practice was Hilary Jenkinson’s 1922 *A Manual of Archive Administration: Including the Problems of War Archives and Archive Making* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), revised in 1937. The second was Arthur H. Leavitt’s 1940 translation of S. Muller, J.A. Feith, and R. Fruin’s 1898 Dutch work, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (New York: Wilson, 1940). The third was Theodore R. Schellenberg’s *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), reprinted by the Society of American Archivists in 1996. A fourth author, Ernst Posner, does not get the attention he deserves; see *Archives and the Public Interest: Selected Essays*, ed. K. Munden (Washington: Washington Public Affairs Press, 1967), and *Archives in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972). For an overview of archival history in the Western world, see Terry Cook, “What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” *Archivaria* 43 (Spring 1997): 17–63.

9 At this point, some archival theorists might protest the use of the term “archives” to refer both to materials received internally through an unbroken chain and to materials collected from diverse sources. As I argue here, the digital age requires us to abandon dichotomies such as archives versus manuscripts or archival versus non-archival. I have deliberately chosen the terms “agency archives” and “collected archives” to refer to what I believe are legitimate documentary sources that follow different paths of creation, management, and preservation. As discussed later, I also think the boundaries between records versus archives need to be challenged.

catalogues, union lists, and archival directories. These reference tools were also doggedly physical, found only in the custodial institution itself, or in repositories that could afford the purchase price. The inclusion of archival descriptions in annual reports, the publication of archival directories and union lists, and the transcription of original documents were strategies to help researchers discover relevant sources before investing in lengthy and expensive research trips.<sup>10</sup>

As these two approaches to archival management developed – care of agency archives and care of collected archives – a difference of professional opinion emerged. Some archivists believed that archives, as sources of evidence, had to be managed with their authenticity intact, which demanded that the chain of custody not be broken. As Jenkinson argued in 1922, “archive quality is dependent upon the possibility of proving an unblemished line of responsible custodians.”<sup>11</sup> According to this theory, materials in collections-oriented libraries or museums, having arrived as a result of a break in the chain of custody, were not true archives. While their informational worth was not necessarily disputed, their value as evidence was in grave doubt. As Jenkinson bemoaned, “we cannot think that a stray paper from some dispersed family collection, itself picked up in a sale, is a fit inmate for a National Archive Establishment.”<sup>12</sup>

For others, particularly for North Americans, the collection of non-institutional archives was reasonable, and the distinction between evidence and information less worrisome. As the American archivist Theodore Schellenberg wrote in 1966, “I do not refer, in a Jenkinsonian sense, to the sanctity of the **evidence** in archives that is derived from ‘unbroken custody.’ I refer rather, and quite arbitrarily, to a value that depends on the importance of the matter evidenced, i.e. the organization and functioning of the agency that produced the records.”<sup>13</sup>

10 I examined the history of documentary publishing in Laura Millar Coles, “The Decline of Documentary Publishing: The Role of English-Canadian Archives and Historical Societies in Documentary Publishing,” *Archivaria* 23 (Winter 1986–87): 69–85. For recent historical studies of institutional finding aids, see Jennifer Douglas and Heather MacNeil, “The Generic Evolution of Calendars and Inventories at the Public Archives of Canada, 1882–ca. 1975,” *American Archivist* 77 (forthcoming, Spring/Summer 2014); and Ciaran B. Trace and Andrew Dillon, “The Evolution of the Finding Aid in the United States: From Physical to Digital Document Genre,” *Archival Science* 12, no. 4 (December 2012): 501–19.

11 Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archive Administration*, 11.

12 Ibid., 44. This point was made more dramatically seventy years later by European archivist Joan van Albada, when he argued that “archives are successively *created, received, maintained*, and *preserved*; archives are not *collected*, never ever.” Joan van Albada, “On the Identity of the American Archival Profession: A European Perspective,” *American Archivist* 54 (Summer 1991): 399 (emphasis in original).

13 Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 139 (emphasis in original). For a recent discussion of the different perspectives of Jenkinson and Schellenberg, see Robert Fisher, “In Search of a Theory of Private Archives: The Foundational Writings of Jenkinson and Schellenberg Revisited,” *Archivaria* 67 (Spring 2009): 1–24.

### *Total Archives as Supermarket*

As history demonstrates, Canadian archivists were not particularly bothered by these distinctions between agency archives and collected archives. Canada's total archives tradition – an all-embracing approach to archival management – emerged from a general belief that Canada's federal government had a central role to play in fostering a national sense of culture and identity. To fulfil that role, the government had an active responsibility to collect and preserve archives from all sources, public and private, and in all media, from textual to visual to aural. Those collections would be supplemented by art, books, and artifacts, most of which fell under the care of the archivist (especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the absence of a national art gallery or national library).<sup>14</sup>

The evolution of Canada's total archives tradition was more about practicality than theory. The Dominion Archives was formed in 1872, only five years after Canada itself was founded. The country was young and immature, its sense of self quite fragile against the backdrop of its powerful neighbour to the south. There were not a lot of government archives to acquire, especially after a series of fires in government buildings diminished the volume of extant records. Thus, the first Dominion Archivist, Douglas Brymner (in post from 1872 to 1902), and the second, Arthur Doughty (1904 to 1935), focused instead on collecting and copying British Colonial Office records and British and French military and political papers. The consequence – intended or otherwise – was the adoption of a broad and unrestricted definition of "archives": if the Dominion Archivist deemed something worth keeping, it fell under his care and was protected accordingly. This approach persisted for decades; as the authors of the Royal Commission on Government Organization argued in 1963,

the materials contained in the Public Archives are not all strictly archival and some of the functions still performed are not normally associated with archives. Nevertheless, Canada is immeasurably the richer for the effort made to preserve our heritage, particularly during the period when no other appropriate national institutions were in existence.<sup>15</sup>

14 For an examination of the history of the total archives concept and the creation of Canada's archival system, see Laura Millar, "Discharging Our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept," *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998): 103–46; and "The Spirit of Total Archives: Seeking a Sustainable Archival System," *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999): 46–65. See also Ian E. Wilson, "'A Noble Dream'? The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada," *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982–83): 16–35.

15 Canada, Royal Commission on Government Organization, *Report*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1963), 574.



If one thought of a traditional archival institution as a main street store, Canada's government repositories – the Dominion Archives and, later, provincial and territorial repositories – could be likened to “supermarkets”: one-stop archival shopping experiences, bringing together in one physical place all historical material deemed worthy of preservation, regardless of source, medium, or origin.

### *Decentralization and the Archival System*

While the total archives approach became Canada's archival creation myth, the model eventually became unsustainable. The federal and provincial governments could not maintain the financial and administrative effort required to sustain such a comprehensive collection. And government archivists also had to grapple with the growing need for institutional records management, which split attention between the care of agency archives and the management of collected archives. At the same time, researchers and the public lobbied for the preservation of archival materials closer to their points of origin. The argument was not just about logistics. There was a growing sense that it was not “right” to remove archives from local control and take them to distant provincial or national capitals. Community identity began to overpower national sentiment. Eventually, more archival institutions were formed, local acquisition tussled with national collecting, and confusion arose about who was keeping what.<sup>16</sup>

After many years of discussion and debate, including studies of archives by the Commission on Canadian Studies in 1972 and by the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives in 1978, a new approach was proposed: to foster the development of a “comprehensive system of archives” in Canada. This coordinated, controlled, and publicly supported network of archival institutions would be led by the Canadian Council on Archives (established in 1985) and would welcome participation from “all archives in Canada intending to preserve and to make accessible the documentary heritage of Canada, and willing to adopt a cooperative approach.”<sup>17</sup> Under the direction of the CCA, this archival system would reduce the centrality of national and provincial repositories, increase the involvement of local communities and associations, and encourage the establishment of more corporate and institutional repositories, acknowledging the distinction between agency archives and collected archives but encouraging the

16 Jay Atherton, “From Life Cycle to Continuum: Some Thoughts on the Records Management–Archives Relationship,” *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985–86): 43–51. Atherton's seminal piece gave voice to the growing concern that archival waters were being muddied by the merger of institutional records care and non-institutional archival collection, particularly at the national level.

17 Canadian Council of Archives, *Constitution and By-laws*, Section 2.3: Canadian Archival System, <http://www.cdncouncilarchives.ca/bylaw.html>.

continuation of integrated institutional/private records care as appropriate, to sustain the “spirit” of total archives.<sup>18</sup>

Under the umbrella of the CCA, and with federal financial support, the aggregate number of institutions in this archival system grew dramatically, from fewer than 200 in the early 1980s to nearly 1,000 in the first decade of the twenty-first century. A large portion of these have adhered to the canon of total archives: acquiring and managing their institution’s archives, collecting and preserving non-institutional documentary resources, and accepting materials in all media and forms. The supermarket had, in effect, established franchises.

In 2004, the Canadian archival landscape changed again, when the National Archives and the National Library were merged into one agency, Library and Archives Canada. If one stretches the metaphor – which at this point is stretched about as far as it can go – the total archives supermarket, which had expanded to include provincial, territorial, and local franchises, was now joined by a national “big-box superstore.” The blended national library and national archives was the home of agency archives, collected archives, the country’s legal deposit collection, and other published and unpublished resources, both public and private.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the evolution from total archives to archival system, Canada’s comprehensive, controlled, encyclopedic vision of physical archival preservation remained steady.

18 See T.B.H. Symons, *To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies* (Ottawa: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 1975), vol. 2, especially 69–74. See also the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives, *Canadian Archives: Report to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada by the Consultative Group on Canadian Archives* (Ottawa: Information Division of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 1980), especially 63–75. The CCA was established in 1985 with an initial budget of \$1.4 million. Its tasks included identifying national priorities, developing programs to support archival development, advising the National Archivist on priorities and issues, and communicating with decision makers, researchers, and the public. Despite some periodic increases in funding, by the time the NADP program was cancelled, funding levels, at \$1.7 million, were only marginally higher than when the CCA was first established. For two accounts of public funding for archives, including discussion of the origins of the CCA, see Marion Beyea, “Pennies from Heaven: The History of Public Funding for Canadian Archives,” and Shelley Sweeney, “Lady Sings the Blues: The Public Funding of Archives, Libraries, and Museums in Canada,” both in Cheryl Avery and Mona Holmlund, eds., *Better Off Forgetting? Essays on Archives, Public Policy and Collective Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 3–16 and 17–36.

19 It must be remembered that the National Library and National Archives (first known as the Dominion Archives and then as the Public Archives) had close ties before the 2004 merger. The National Library, established in 1953, was administered from 1953 to 1967 by W. Kaye Lamb, who also served as Dominion Archivist from 1948 to 1969. The National Library and National Archives have a long history of operating in the same building and sharing administrative services. For an early history of the National Library, see Jean Lunn, “The National Library of Canada, 1950–1968,” *Archivaria* 15 (1982–1983): 86–95. See also F. Dolores Donnelly, *The National Library of Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1973).

*Control in Cyberspace*

The game changed with the emergence of digital technologies. As more and more organizations adopted electronic technologies, and then as individuals became wedded to their personal computers, the nature of communications and information was forever altered. We all hear the stories of terabytes of data in cloud-computing systems, of billions of text messages sent and received, and of the constant presence of smartphones in society, particularly in “the younger generation” (who have, through no fault of their own, been their own foreign country since the beginning of time).<sup>20</sup>

But when computers first appeared on the scene, only a handful of outliers could see the writing on the wall (or, more to the point, the fact that the writing was no longer on a wall). The first reaction was technical: how to deal with the exponential growth in data, the complications of digital information management, and the difficulty of ensuring that digital records were not inadvertently deleted. Many archivists looked for strategies to achieve the same ends – the acquisition and preservation of archives – in this new digital world. One solution was to change the archival focus from custody to control. In the postcustodial world, archivists would no longer wait to acquire archives physically in order to ensure that they were protected and available. Instead, archivists could maintain records control by providing advice and support to records creators and by overseeing the management of agency records and archives. Agency records, particularly digital records, could “live” in computer servers or digital storage devices and still be protected for their evidential and informational value, as long as the archivist played a central role in their care.<sup>21</sup>

This perspective repositioned archival intervention earlier in the life cycle, which fit rather well with the care of agency archives. Archivists responsible solely for their agency’s archives could insert the archival perspective early in the recordkeeping process. But the underlying vision was still of centralized archival management somewhere at the end of the postcustodial road. Linear

20 California-based communications researchers Martin Hilbert and Priscila López demonstrated that people around the world stored 295 trillion megabytes of information in 2007 alone. As Hilbert noted, “If we would use a grain of sand to represent one bit each of the 295 trillion, we would require 315 times the amount of sand that is currently available on the world’s beaches.” Quoted in Andrea Leontiou, “World’s Shift from Analog to Digital Is Nearly Complete,” NBC News, 10 February 2011, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/41516959/>.

21 Among the many archivists who have addressed issues of postcustodialism and archives, Canada’s most prolific contributor has been Terry Cook, whose articles include “The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems and Solutions,” *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993): 24–37, “Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 22, no. 2 (November 1994): 300–28, and “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives,” *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 14–35.

tasks – acquisition, arrangement, description, preservation, and access – remained at the heart of archival planning. As Gerald Ham wrote in 1981, addressing the changes brought by postcustodialism, “our work, and indeed our behavior as archivists, is determined by the nature of the material we deal with: we are what we *accession* and *process*.”<sup>22</sup>

The Australians challenged this linear approach early on, developing a concept known as the “series system,” which separated the description of agents, business functions, and records, thus allowing for changes in each descriptive element over time. Australians later proposed the concept of a records continuum, which integrated recordkeeping and archives management and highlighted the fact that records could be used and reused for many different reasons over time.<sup>23</sup> Despite the innovative nature of the series and continuum approaches, though, they were best applied in government and institutional repositories. As some Australians have acknowledged, the continuum approach does not lend itself easily to the management of collected archives.<sup>24</sup>

In Canada and around the world, the archival community is edging ever so slowly toward the real challenge of managing digital records, particularly those created outside of organizational environments. A complete rethink about the concept of custody is the next intellectual leap we have to make.

### The Power of Surrender

So we find ourselves back in 2014, with the elimination of NADP funding, significant budget cuts at LAC, increased focus on third-party partnerships, and a de-emphasis on the acquisition of private-sector archives in favour of the management of institutional records. If the Canadian archival community wants to maintain the linear, custodial status quo of total archives and the archival

22 Gerald Ham, “Archival Strategies for the Post-Custodial Era,” *American Archivist* 44, no. 3 (Summer 1981): 207 (emphasis added).

23 An early overview of the evolution of the records continuum can be found in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds., *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years* (Clayton, VIC: Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, 1994). Adrian Cunningham has written extensively on the series system of description; see particularly his edition of the works of Peter Scott (inventor of the series system) in *The Arrangement and Description of Archives amid Administrative and Technological Change: Essays and Reflections by and about Peter J. Scott* (Brisbane: Australian Society of Archivists, 2010). See also the Australian Society of Archivists Committee on Descriptive Standards, *Describing Archives in Context: A Guide to Australasian Practice* (Canberra: Australian Society of Archivists, 2007).

24 For a discussion of description and collected archives in Australia, see Sigrid McCausland, “Adapting the Series System: A Study of Small Archives Applications,” in Sue McKemmish and Michael Piggott, eds., *The Records Continuum: Ian Maclean and Australian Archives First Fifty Years* (Clayton, VIC: Ancora Press in association with Australian Archives, 1994).

system – an approach tightly bound to the linear process of “acquire, preserve, and make available” – the solution would be for the government to provide more money for custodial archival programs, returning to a collective, publicly funded archival model. But adding money to the archival pot, and demanding that the government keep supporting physical, collections-oriented archival service when the world is resolutely digital, will not solve the fundamental problem, which is that Canada’s collective, controlled, and encyclopedic model of archival service risks obsolescence in the face of technological transformation.

Computers, the Internet, personal digital assistants, and social media networks are more than tools, and their impact is more than technological. They are, in McLuhan fashion, drivers of social and organizational change, transforming how people conduct their business and personal lives, how they interact, and how they document their actions, transactions, and communications. Today, virtually all of society’s records start life in digital form, even if some creators still cling to “print and file” management strategies.<sup>25</sup>

The reality is not just that people *can* use digital communications technologies but that they *will* and they *do*, with dramatic consequences. People have always had the right to manage their information however they want, if they had the ability and the tools. But widespread access to digital and social media tools – not just in developed countries but everywhere in the world – is breaking down hierarchical models of governance, changing the essence of social interaction, and giving people a freedom – both as individuals and as part of organizations – to create, change, destroy, share, and keep their ideas, their images, their records however and wherever they wish. The printing press helped Martin Luther start a revolution in religious thought. Digital technologies are helping to start revolutions in countries like Egypt and Tunisia, to expose the secrets of governments and spy agencies, and to crowdsource ideas or services and crowd-fund businesses and charities. As futurist Peter Schwartz argues, technology “enables the enterprise to organize itself in a distributed fashion, without central power, to deliver and collaborate in ways that you couldn’t before.”<sup>26</sup>

25 Hilbert and López, “The World’s Technological Capacity to Store, Communicate, and Compute Information,” 60. Hilbert and López report that digital technologies completely dominate the process of creating and preserving information: in 2007, 94 percent of society’s information was digital.

26 For an examination of the role of digital information and communications technologies in the Arab Spring movement, see Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, *Democracy’s Fourth Wave?: Digital Media and the Arab Spring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The official website for WikiLeaks can be reviewed at <http://wikileaks.org/>; many have examined Julian Assange’s actions, including political analyst Micah L. Sifry, whose *WikiLeaks and the Age of Transparency* (New York: O/R Books, 2011) looks closely at the intersection between politics and media technologies. Peter Schwartz is quoted in Gavin Newsom and Lisa Dickey, *Citizenville: How to Take the Town Square Digital and Reinvent Government* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013): xv.

The products of these digital communications and interactions – the records and archives we so want to preserve for posterity – are now directly in the hands of their creators, who may not feel a sense of connection, affection, or trust for a centralized and bureaucratic archival repository. From the time the first documentary collections were brought into archival custody, archivists recognized that what came into the repository was far from everything created in the first place. But now, the percentage that finds its way into “public” hands may be infinitesimally small, while cyberspace becomes the home to collections more focused on new and different concepts of community. As Terry Cook suggests, “ordinary” citizens are creating records “to bind their communities together, foster their group identities, and carry out their business.”<sup>27</sup> The traditional, custodial, mainstream archival institution may have little role to play in supporting this new concept of documentary preservation.

In this “post-postcustodial” environment, neither archival institutions nor specific creating agencies will necessarily have custody of specific archival items, even if those items belong within an intellectual aggregation by virtue of shared provenance or context. Instead, the multitude of digital objects that make up what some might call a fonds may live entirely separately in cloud-computing storage systems, social media sites, multiple digital repositories, or hybrid paper-electronic storage environments. Their creators may have little interest in, or understanding of, the value-added service archivists can bring to the preservation of these archives “in the wild.” A change of strategy is critical to helping these myriad communities save their records before they come into custodial care, if in fact they ever do.<sup>28</sup>

### *Developing a Strategy*

Canada’s total archives philosophy was a strategy, not a goal. Its successor, the Canadian archival system, was another strategy, but it was also not the goal.

27 Terry Cook, “Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms,” *Archival Science* 13, no. 2–3 (June 2013): 113.

28 Credit goes to Costis Dallas for his use of the expression “in the wild.” Dallas is director of Museum Studies and associate professor at the University of Toronto iSchool, where he is conducting research into digital curatorship in institutional environments and across society. Before Dallas, however, one must also acknowledge the seminal work of John McDonald, who wrote about “the wild frontier” of records management in his 1995 article, “Managing Records in the Modern Office: Taming the Wild Frontier,” *Archivaria* 39 (Spring 1995): 70–79. The question of whether records will ever come into archival custody is heightened by the development of tools such as Snapchat, a social media application that allows users to share content, including photos, videos, and text. But the content is only accessible to recipients for a short time – from one to ten seconds – after which it is hidden from the recipient’s device and deleted from Snapchat’s servers. As the creators of Snapchat argue, “there is value in the ephemeral. Great conversations are magical. That’s because they are shared, enjoyed, but not saved.” See Snapchat’s website, <http://blog.snapchat.com/page/2>.

One should not argue that these strategies were wrong; they may well have been distinctly appropriate in their particular time. But that time has passed. Today the Canadian archival community needs to develop a new strategy to achieve its archival vision.

Changing strategies is not a failure. Quite the opposite. Changing strategies is an essential part of keeping a vision alive and viable. Any business today that intersects with information, communications, and technologies – from newspapers to booksellers to post offices to book publishers – is forced to look afresh at how to keep its vision alive in a changing world. Writing about the future of newspapers, noted American media and Internet analyst Clay Shirky has argued that society does not need newspapers; society needs journalism. As he puts it, “when we shift our attention from ‘save newspapers’ to ‘save society,’ the imperative changes from ‘preserve the current institutions’ to ‘do whatever works.’” Indeed, as Shirky has so skilfully argued, it is imperative that we fight against the status quo since, as he suggests, “institutions will try to preserve the problem to which they are the solution.”<sup>29</sup> The imperative for archivists today is not to save archival institutions but to find sustainable and effective ways to preserve and protect society’s documentary memory.

### ***The Archival Vision***

Any strategic plan begins with a vision. Let me present mine. I want to live in an enlightened, civilized society that is democratic, respectful, and self-aware. And I believe that for a society to be free, democratic, respectful, and self-aware, it needs a memory – a collective consciousness born out of unfettered access to the evidence of the communications, actions, and transactions of its members, from government to the governed, from formal institutions to people on the street. Open and unencumbered access to records and archives supports democracy, transparency, and accountability, and helps to foster a sense of personal and collective identity. Records help to hold people and agencies to account by proving or disproving facts, acts, and decisions. Records help people and agencies know themselves, by offering appreciable proof of their lives and work. And along with books, artifacts, films, stories, art, and other cultural creations, records help people and societies understand and value themselves and each other, fostering identity and memory. Records help people remember – themselves and each other – generating both pride and humility by reminding them of the efforts and experiences of their predecessors, from distant ancestors to contemporary colleagues. I am not sure

29 See Clay Shirky, “Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable,” *Clay Shirky* (blog), 13 March 2009, <http://www.shirky.com/weblog/2009/03/newspapers-and-thinking-the-unthinkable/>. See also Clay Shirky, “The Shirky Principle,” *Kevin Kelly* (blog), under “The Technium,” 2 April 2010, [http://www.kk.org/thetechnium/archives/2010/04/the\\_shirky\\_prin.php](http://www.kk.org/thetechnium/archives/2010/04/the_shirky_prin.php).

that archives are a “public good” in the strict sense of the term, but I certainly believe they are good for the public.

The archival mission supports my vision by helping society gain access to its documentary evidence. My articulation of our archival mission (fit for the back of a business card or for a sixty-second elevator speech) is, **Archivists protect records to support accountability, identity, and memory.** To achieve this vision and accomplish this mission, archivists must adopt strategies that suit the circumstances of the twenty-first century. For at least the next decade, archivists must focus not primarily on analog archives management but on helping society understand the importance of protecting born-digital records.

### **Making Change**

How can we achieve the change we need, to achieve this mission and this vision? Strategic thinking involves identifying priorities. Not every change we might want to see can happen at once. Some require a change of government; some take a lifetime. What do we emphasize as “must dos” and what do we consider “nice to haves”? What comes first, and what has to wait? My first priority is to change how we as archivists conceive of our role and our priorities. This change is critical if, as a profession, we are going to help records creators realize – and accept – the importance of protecting their records today, for themselves, *and* for posterity.

### ***Records and Archives Yin and Yang***

The division between records (read “current”) and archives (read “historical”) is unsuitable in a digital age. While discussions about the differences between records and archives, between archives and manuscripts, or between evidence and information can be stimulating, provocative, and intellectually fruitful, archivists need to create a strategy for helping society change the way it manages its documentary memory. And society thinks of records as *new* and archives as *old*. If archivists talk to the public about keeping *archives*, people will assume the focus is on dusty, old, and archaic “stuff,” not on valuable documentary evidence of actions and transactions. People do value archives, as evidenced by the overwhelming surge of interest in genealogy, family history, and community heritage. But they do not clearly understand the link between current records and historical archives. They do not fully appreciate that, in a digital age, the electronic records they are making today will be lost if they are not protected now. Archivists have tried the old way of communicating about archives, focusing on historical and cultural value. Now we must try a new way. We must talk about our role as recordkeepers, not “just” as archivists, who help society protect its records, not “just” its archives. If we do not care for records today, we will have no archives tomorrow.



*From Cowboys to Pit Crews*

Archivists also have to change how we conceive of ourselves as professionals. We need to talk about records managers, recordkeepers, and archivists not as representatives of distinct disciplines but as professionals whose overarching mandate is to help society protect its documentary evidence in order to support individual and collective accountability, identity, and memory. Practitioners within this broad recordkeeping church may be specialists in records analysis or metadata management or description or photographs or maps or digitization. But we are all working, as a team, toward a common goal.

In his analysis of the changing nature of the health-care system, Atul Gawande, an American surgeon, journalist, and public health researcher, has argued that the medical profession needs to develop more effective “systems” for quality health care. He argues that “we train, hire, and pay doctors to be cowboys. But it’s pit crews people need.” In a successful system, he says, “diverse people actually work together to direct their specialized capabilities toward common goals for patients. They are coordinated by design.”<sup>30</sup>

Archivists have long been, by our own admission, the quintessential cowboys: we are the “lone arrangers.” Total archives and the archival system are, despite the use of the word “system,” inward looking, not interdisciplinary. We have not yet developed a truly team-based approach. Archivists communicate with other archivists, but there is not enough interaction with our information allies. Public funding and professional support are directed at the members of the “archival community,” even though the increasing majority of records and archives are being created and managed outside of those structures.

As Gawande proposed for medicine, archivists need to adopt a team-based approach to records care, involving not just archivists and records managers but also records creators, records users, data analysts, software developers, and others in the wider information and records management universe. The successful twenty-first-century archival system will resemble Gawande’s pit crew. Specialists will bring their particular expertise, whether in records, archives, information management, computer programming, auditing, security, or privacy, to the common goal of protecting society’s documentary evidence for current and future use. To achieve this team-based approach, we need to restructure our professional and public alliances to support our unity of

30 Atul Gawande, “Cowboys and Pit Crews,” *News Desk* (blog), *The New Yorker* online, 26 May 2011, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/05/atul-gawande-harvard-medical-school-commencement-address.html>. This essay is drawn from Gawande’s 2011 commencement address to the graduates of Harvard Medical School; the ideas he summarizes here are articulated in more depth in his *The Checklist Manifesto: How to Get Things Right* (New York: Picador, 2011).

purpose. We need to shun the duelling dichotomies of records versus archives, creator versus custodian, current versus historical ... us versus them.

### *Managing Records for Risk*

Archivists must also change our perception of the nature and relative value of records. Rather than conceiving of archives as “goods” to be managed in different “stores” – church archives, business archives, government archives, literary archives, and so on, like meat from the butcher and bread from the baker – we need to look at records and archives from the perspective of risk. We need to discriminate between records with high, enduring public accountability and enduring value, those with high but time-limited accountability and enduring value, and those with lower accountability but continuing value. Then we need to help society manage those different sets of records and archives accordingly.

Why should a provincial or local government be able to establish an archival institution that collects local historical materials but does not give its records specialists a role in the management of government information? Why should a corporation not be required to preserve and make available records and archives that intersect with citizens’ rights? Why should “open data” initiatives be promoted with little regard for the fact that the “data” in question are really records? Why should citizens have to turn to community archival repositories, run by dedicated but under-resourced volunteers, to find documentary evidence of government or corporate decisions that ought to have been retained by those agencies?

High-risk records creators may include governments, extraction industries, regulatory agencies, educational institutions, or licensing bodies. Some of their records – not all, but some – have enduring public accountability and ongoing value. To hold that agency to account, archivists need to help the agency protect its high-risk records as part of a comprehensive institutional recordkeeping program. These organizations should not, as a rule, be allowed to transfer recordkeeping responsibility to collections-oriented repositories. But in the event of the demise of the agency, their archives must be protected by an appropriate custodial institution, one that recognizes the need to protect the materials for their evidential importance, not just for their cultural or heritage value.<sup>31</sup>

31 Noteworthy Canadian crises of accountability – from the treatment of Aboriginal children in residential schools, to the management of infected Red Cross blood supplies, to the misidentification of the oil products involved in the Lac-Mégantic, QC, train explosion – highlight the importance of ensuring that society can hold high-risk public- and private-sector agencies to account. For more on the story of the abuse of children in Aboriginal residential schools, see the website of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3>. The story of “tainted blood” (it was found that the

A similar but less regulated approach would support the recordkeeping needs of other agencies, whose records may have high but time-limited accountability and enduring value. Examples may include service industries, local businesses, and professional or social organizations, whose work intersects with elements of society but whose operations do not present the same high risk. Ideally, these records would be managed within institutional frameworks, but if those agencies close, their archives may find their way into collections-oriented repositories, which again should protect them for both evidential and informational value.

Still other records creators, while absolutely important to society, are not high-risk entities. Individuals and families, artists, and academics create records that speak volumes about their lives and times. The importance of these creators to society is not as much legal as cultural. The records of these creators may live outside of traditional institutions, “in the wild” of personal or community recordkeeping systems. Preserving these materials in collections-oriented repositories is an option if the creators do not choose to manage those records themselves, but the archivist still needs to intervene in the process of records creation and management in order to help the creator ensure that the records are protected with their authenticity intact.

### Total Breakdown

Once we have changed our assumptions about our role – refocusing on records, not archives, recognizing that we must work as part of information management teams, and accepting the need to manage records according to risk – we then have to confront the reality that total archives, and an all-encompassing, post-creation, custodial archival system, will no longer serve society’s needs in the twenty-first century. The archival community needs to promote two separate but complementary approaches to records and archives management. The first is for archivists to play a much more central role in institutional recordkeeping in order to protect high-risk records and archives, with accountability as a priority. The second is for archivists to support the protection of records through

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Canadian Red Cross had not properly screened blood donations for viruses known to cause AIDS or hepatitis C, and that Canadian Blood Committee records were inappropriately destroyed) is told in André Picard, *The Gift of Death: Confronting Canada's Tainted Blood Tragedy* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1995). The causes of the Lac-Mégantic derailment, which killed forty-seven people in Quebec on 6 July 2013, are still being investigated by Canada’s Transportation Safety Board. The board announced in October 2013 that the crude oil held in the train that derailed was improperly identified as a less hazardous substance; questions about accountability and recordkeeping are being raised as part of the investigation. See Monique Beaudin, “Crude Oil in Lac-Mégantic Derailment Was Mislabelled, Transportation Safety Board Says,” *Montreal Gazette*, 7 October 2013, <http://www.montrealgazette.com/Crude+M%C3%A9gantic+derailment+mislabelled+Transportation+Safety+Board+says/8898364/story.html>.

a range of custodial and non-custodial mechanisms, particularly for lower-risk records and for records housed outside of institutional recordkeeping systems.

### ***Managing Records for Accountability***

To help governments and organizations manage records for accountability, archivists need to play a central role in institutional recordkeeping. Those responsibilities should not be confused with duties to history and culture if that confusion leads to a diminishment in accountable records care. This means that the total archives approach, which blends the management of agency archives with the care of collected archives, must give way to a separation of duties, particularly for high-risk records. The archivist, well educated in the records and archives discipline, working as part of a cohesive team, will bring an appreciation for the broader value of records for accountability, identity, and memory, regardless of any specific job description.

The argument that government repositories should not collect private archives is not premised on a belief that agency archives hold more inherent value than collected archives. But if a public-sector agency is directly responsible for both institutional records care and for the collection of non-sponsor archives, and if both tasks are to be administered out of the same office and draw on the same pool of resources, then that agency will be forced to juggle competing mandates. If the government prioritizes institutional records care, as it must to provide accountability, the care of collected archives will have to come second. If it emphasizes the collections over its high-risk institutional records, public accountability weakens. Why not recognize and support the different types of risk associated with managing agency archives and protecting collected archives, particularly for public-sector records? Separating the tasks allows each to be defined and executed distinctly, which is better than mixing the two and undermining both.

### ***Managing Records for Identity and Memory***

It is neither possible nor reasonable to require all records creators to manage their own records and archives in perpetuity. If records are essential to providing accountability, the creator of those records should be urged, if not actually required, to ensure that those records are protected. If the records creator abdicates that responsibility, other agencies, including custodial institutions and archival collectives, need to step into the breach. But if the creator of lower-risk records wants to transfer materials into archival custody and the receiving institution can manage the acquisition, the outcome is positive for all concerned, not least for posterity. If, however, records creators do not want to transfer their records into custodial care, or do not want to transfer them *yet*, archivists should help those creators understand how to manage their records effectively so that

they remain authentic, reliable, and valuable now and into the future, whether or not the materials ever find their way into a custodial environment. This role is advisory, not custodial, and it must be performed much earlier in the record-keeping process, before records are in real danger.

### **Getting from Here to There**

How can archivists achieve this shift in direction? Before considering how to cross the bridge from the present to the future, let us look at the materials needed to build that bridge. The next step is to reimagine traditional notions of records and archives care. In a new records and archives future:

- Recordkeeping will be understood as a core responsibility, not an option, particularly for high-risk records creators.
- The physical archival repository will transform as patterns of access and use change, particularly as digital records are managed outside of traditional archival frameworks.
- Collaboration among knowledge institutions will enhance the role of archives for identity and memory, but institutional recordkeeping for accountability will not be compromised.
- Archival description will be flexible, emphasizing records context while accommodating inevitable changes in content and structure.
- Third-party input, crowdsourcing, and partnerships will be accepted as valuable inputs into archival work.
- The public will be actively engaged in the archival mission, helping to ensure that records and archives serve accountability, identity, and memory.

### ***The Duty to Document***

Emphasizing institutional records management is essential in a digital age in order to ensure that high-risk records creators accept their responsibility not just to *keep* quality records but to *make* quality records in the first place. Politicians and bureaucrats should not be able to use personal email accounts to conduct government business if that use bypasses legislated access requirements. Publicly accountable agents should not be allowed to destroy documentary evidence in contempt of legally binding retention requirements; severe penalties should be instituted for violations. Agencies should also be required to document how they create, manage, and dispose of their records, so that both business operations and recordkeeping practices remain fully transparent.<sup>32</sup>

32 The recent discovery that civil servants and politicians in British Columbia have allegedly been using personal email accounts to conduct government business, and that Ontario

As federal, provincial, and territorial information and privacy commissioners argued in October 2013, when they called for the modernization of access legislation across the country, Canada's access laws are seriously out of date.<sup>33</sup> Existing legislation requires public agencies to provide access to information (i.e., records) if they have that information and if the content is not protected by specific exclusions. But the laws in Canada and elsewhere around the world rarely require agencies to make records in the first place, only to make records available if they exist. There has been increasing demand for enforcement of a "duty to document," in part to offset the unintended consequence of access legislation, which has produced a decidedly negative effect on the quality of, or very existence of, records.<sup>34</sup>

Even though archivists need to be key players in supporting public-sector accountability, that role is often well out of the reach of the archivist in the

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government officials have apparently destroyed email messages in an effort to cover up controversial decisions, illuminate the inadequacy of current government recordkeeping requirements. In British Columbia, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police are investigating the Liberal government's handling of its "Draft Multicultural Strategic Outreach Plan." Among the various news stories outlining the case, see The Canadian Press, "RCMP, Prosecutor Investigate B.C. Liberal Government's Ethnic Votes Plan," *Maclean's*, 27 September 2013, <http://www2.macleans.ca/2013/09/27/rcmp-prosecutor-investigate-b-c-liberal-governments-ethnic-votes-plan/>. The Ontario Provincial Police are investigating the destruction of government emails associated with plans to build gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga, ON. News stories on the matter include Keith Leslie, "Mass Deletion of Ontario Gas Plant Emails by Senior Liberal Staff Now a Police Investigation," *National Post*, 6 July 2013, <http://news.nationalpost.com/2013/06/07/mass-deletion-of-ontario-gas-plant-emails-by-senior-liberals-staff-now-a-police-investigation/>.

- 33 On 9 October 2013, Canada's information and privacy commissioners and ombudspersons issued a resolution pressing government to modernize access and privacy laws; see "Canada's Access to Information and Privacy Guardians Urge Government to Modernize Laws," News Release, Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 9 October 2013, [http://www.priv.gc.ca/media/nr-c/2013/nr-c\\_131009\\_e.asp](http://www.priv.gc.ca/media/nr-c/2013/nr-c_131009_e.asp).
- 34 In 2006, the Government of Canada's Department of Justice issued *Strengthening the Access to Information Act: A Discussion of Ideas Intrinsic to the Reform of the Access to Information Act* (Ottawa, 2006), <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/atip-airp/atia-lai/index.html>, which includes specific discussion of the concept of a duty to document. In light of the "gas plants" scandal in Ontario, the province's Information and Privacy Commissioner also called for formalization of the duty to document in *Deleting Accountability: Record Management Practices of Political Staff – A Special Investigation Report* (Toronto: Information and Privacy Commissioner, Ontario, 2013), <http://www.ipc.on.ca/english/Decisions-and-Resolutions/Decisions-and-Resolutions-Summary/?id=9181>. Several articles have addressed the impact of Canadian access legislation on archival management, including Kerry Badgley, Margaret J. Dixon, and Paulette Dozois, "In Search of the Chill: Access to Information and Record-Keeping in the Government of Canada," *Archivaria* 55 (Spring 2003): 1–19. Elaine Goh, a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia, is currently researching the role and impact of archival legislation on records management. Her dissertation research is being conducted under the provisional title "From the Trenches: An Exploratory Study of the Impact of Archival Legislation on Records Management in Commonwealth Countries" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, in process).

total archives/archival system. In that model, the senior archival official often sits at the top of a custodial institution, the administrative placement of which may change (from heritage to culture to leisure, for instance) depending on the government's perception of the role of archives. Removing the archivist from the traditional history-oriented, custodial environment and emphasizing professional responsibility for supporting accountable and transparent recordkeeping would increase the likelihood that records, particularly high-risk records, will be protected, regardless of form.

The duty to document would be accompanied by an institutional responsibility to ensure that records remain accountable and usable over time. While archivists are to be applauded for long advocating the use of recordkeeping standards, the extent to which those standards are actually applied is debatable. As Donald Force argues, the relationship between recordkeeping standards and the legal admissibility of documentary evidence needs to be strengthened in order to establish a firm legal basis for the effective management of organizational records. Otherwise, he contends, records and archives practitioners will continue to work "diligently but blindly, as they struggle to formalize procedures that help their organizations create authentic and reliable records that might be accepted as evidence in a court of law."<sup>35</sup>

To support these accountability mechanisms, national or provincial (or, for that matter, municipal, regional, or corporate) archivists should not be positioned primarily as heads of custodial institutions. Instead, these roles should be redefined. As their agency's "records commissioners," similar in standing to the positions of information commissioner or privacy commissioner, these record-keepers would be responsible for ensuring that the sponsor agency creates and keeps documentary evidence of its actions, transactions, and decisions, making that evidence available as widely as possible.<sup>36</sup>

### ***The Place(s) of Archives***

Managing high-risk records to support accountability will naturally shift archival practice away from the custodial, collections-oriented, "supermarket"

35 Donald C. Force, "Pursuing the 'Usual and Ordinary Course of Business': An Exploratory Study of the Role of Recordkeeping Standards in the Use of Records as Evidence in Canada" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2013), 187.

36 Donald Savoie, a professor of public administration at the Université de Moncton, in New Brunswick, has discussed the idea of departmental "accounting officers." While his concept is somewhat different from the "records commissioner" idea suggested here, Savoie offers valuable insights into the need for, and lack of, accountability at different levels of government. See Donald J. Savoie, *Breaking the Bargain: Public Servants, Ministers, and Parliament* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), especially chap. 10. See also his 2013 work, *Whatever Happened to the Music Teacher? How Government Decides and Why* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013).

approach that defined total archives and the archival system. But lower-risk records still need protection, to support identity and memory as much as, or more than, accountability. In a digital world, those lower-risk records, many of which are created and used outside of institutional structures, will not be housed within traditional repositories for all (or any) of their existence. To preserve these virtual, dispersed documentary sources, archivists need to develop sustainable but flexible mechanisms for physical and digital preservation.

There will always be a need for the archives as place, but the bricks-and-mortar physical facility – the archives as storeroom – can be redefined. Archival repositories do not need to be on the main street of town. Rather, they can and should be built where the holdings are going to be safe from environmental or physical harm. To facilitate access, traditional, centralized reading rooms can be joined by, and sometimes supplanted by, decentralized reference facilities, storefront operations, shared reference offices, and online reference and access services. Information kiosks, travelling exhibits, and archival social media offer creative options for physical and virtual reference, access, and outreach.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, there is still a physical reality to the preservation of digital records and archives. Archivists have emphasized the need to establish trusted digital repositories (TDRs). These digital storehouses and server farms need to be supported by structured work processes for ingesting and preserving digital records. They also need reliable power supplies, robust backup systems, and vigorous security protocols. The archivist can guide high-risk agencies to make sound decisions about digital storage, favouring institutional digital repositories, for example, if they are more secure than offshore cloud computing or unregulated third-party solutions.

But what of the records created by lower-risk agencies? What about the digital holdings acquired by a closet-sized community repository, whose operations are sustained only through the goodwill of volunteer staff working a handful of hours a week? Despite the creation of leading-edge open source digital preservation tools such as the Canadian-based Archivematica digital preservation system, custodial archival institutions still have to develop the operational framework to ensure that they can manage their digital collections for the long term.

37 Another strategy is to partner with museums, libraries, and information centres to increase the scope of public services. The traditional, centralized reference room may still play a role, particularly to provide access to legacy analog records, but digital technologies open up the opportunity for diverse access strategies. Examinations of new approaches to reference service include Elizabeth Yakel, "Thinking Inside and Outside the Boxes: Archival Reference Services at the Turn of the Century," *Archivaria* 49 (Spring 2000): 140–60; and Lora J. Davis, "Providing Virtual Services to All: A Mixed-Method Analysis of the Website Accessibility of Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries (PACSL) Member Repositories," *American Archivist* 75, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2012): 35–55. See also Kate Theimer, ed., *A Different Kind of Web: New Connections between Archives and Our Users* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011).



Is it cost-effective to require that each custodial institution builds and maintains its own expensive and technologically sophisticated TDR? Public funding may not help; rather, it may exacerbate the problem of digital preservation by supporting ever more scattered, marginalized, and resource-dependent repositories. The layers of coordination required to turn these disparate parts into a cohesive whole would challenge even the most robust “system,” failing to achieve the mythical objective of comprehensive, controlled digital archival management.<sup>38</sup>

One alternative could be for archival institutions to develop collaborative and co-operative arrangements for digital (and analog) storage, sharing the cost and easing the technological burden. Harkening back to the findings of the Symons Commission in the 1970s, it is tempting to suggest that the ideal partners for collaborative initiatives might be research institutions such as university or college libraries and special collections. After all, their core mandate is to collect and preserve sources of information and evidence – publications, archives, ephemera, grey literature – specifically to support research and the dissemination of knowledge. And as institutions with a specific research mandate, they have the scope to access public and private funds out of the reach of government or community institutions. Regardless of institutional affiliations, however, any collaborative arrangements must be sustainable, which means they must be structured to allow participants to join, and to leave, with minimal risk to any of the other participants. Strategies that depend heavily on external funding will not help participants escape supermarket-oriented total archives/archival system strategies, which are no longer sustainable.<sup>39</sup>

38 For more on the Archivemata digital preservation tool, see the Artefactual Systems website, <http://www.artefactual.com/>. I am grateful to Peter Van Garderen and Evelyn McLellan for sharing their ideas about Archivemata and digital preservation.

39 Many libraries have already undertaken collaborative initiatives to centralize or share physical storage facilities, offering a model for archivists. For instance, Western University, in London, Ontario and the University of Alberta have established co-operative strategies for archival and library storage, and a consortium of university libraries in Nova Scotia is examining co-operative storage arrangements for physical books. Part of the Nova Scotia approach would include rationalizing collections to remove unnecessary duplications, which would be less feasible in an archival setting. See James Bradshaw, “University Libraries Clear Their Shelves,” *The Globe and Mail*, 25 October 2013, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/nova-scotia-university-libraries-move-to-a-books-on-demand-model/article15071817/>. Digital collaboration is also taking shape, as evidenced by the work of the Council of Prairie and Pacific University Libraries (COPPUL), which has established a Digital Preservation Working Group to investigate options for information sharing and collaboration. In January 2014, COPPUL signed an agreement with Artefactual Systems to establish a series of Archivemata cloud-hosted sites to support digital preservation and online access. For more on the working group, see the COPPUL website, <http://www.coppul.ca/jointprojects/DPWG.html>. I am grateful to Evelyn McLellan for providing background on COPPUL and on this Archivemata initiative.

### *Collaboration or Convergence?*

In considering new models for records preservation, one must be wary of the trend toward the convergence of libraries, archives, and museums (LAMs). Advocates of convergence argue that the public wants and needs access to content, and that breaking down the boundaries between different information-oriented institutions can only enhance that access, creating consolidated “one-stop shopping” for knowledge sources. But the difficulty arises when trying to put the square peg of accountability into the round hole of culture.

Libraries emphasize the dissemination of knowledge, providing access to pre-organized information. Museums foster individual and community understanding by managing, mediating, and interpreting objects. Archival institutions preserve archives to support two intertwined outcomes: the protection of accountability and the fostering of identity and memory. While the cultural value of archives as tools for identity and memory may be acknowledged in a converged institution, protecting records for accountability becomes much more problematic. How can a government archivist located within a merged institution serve as an agent of accountability if he or she is answerable to a museum director, a department of heritage, or an office of leisure services? As Robert VanderBerg warns, archival institutions are most at risk in LAM convergence, and he asks whether it is “sufficient to sit comfortably in the shadow of libraries and museums.” Instead, he urges archivists to “boldly assert the essential recordkeeping functions that form the core of the discipline and distinguish archives within the information field.”<sup>40</sup>

Before contemplating the merger of a library and archives, a museum and archives, or all three, the task of agency archives care – the risk-based approach to caring for the institution’s own records – should be disconnected from non-institutional archival acquisition, through legislative or organizational change if necessary. This reorientation of archival services opens the door to the creation of separate institutions, particularly in the public sector, with one agency managing government records and another caring for private archives. If the latter institution, with its focus on the collection of lower-risk records to support identity and memory, then merges with a library or a museum, it will be much easier to coordinate information and knowledge services and to foster community heritage and culture.<sup>41</sup>

40 Robert VanderBerg, “Converging Libraries, Archives and Museums: Overcoming Distinctions, but for What Gain?” *Archives and Manuscripts* 40, no. 3 (November 2012): 144.

41 Of course, full convergence may still be unachievable. “Full convergence” generally refers to the merging not only of “front of house” services, such as reference, exhibits, and public programming, but also of “back of house” operations, such as appraisal, arrangement, and description. The examples of failed or incomplete efforts to integrate library, museum, and

**Context: The Archival Contribution**

In Canada and internationally, archivists have been preoccupied for decades with the creation and dissemination of standardized archival descriptions. But while archivists are describing hundreds of archives in physical custody, organizations and individuals are creating, storing, and using millions, if not billions, of new digital records each day. Attempting total control in archival description in the digital age is ultimately self-defeating. The standards prescribed in *Rules for Archival Description (RAD)* falter against the reality that, even more than analog archives, digital archives do not come together neatly, ready to be described as complete and closed fonds.

Descriptive tools such as *RAD* and the *General International Standard Archival Description*, or *ISAD(G)* (which are more valuable as administrative resources than descriptive ones), need to be reimagined for a digital world. The complexity of these standards excludes all but a handful of professionals from the task of description. But drawing a line between “records” and “archives” and then waiting for archival aggregates to come into custody before they are described risks standing by while some large portion of those materials is lost. As Richard Dancy notes, *RAD* is “increasingly isolated and idiosyncratic ... ill equipped to adjust to new archival realities – the influx of digital objects, the need for more flexible relational models of description, and calls for an expanded notion of archival context.” Likewise, Geoffrey Yeo argues that “relying on our ability to identify a [conceptual] fonds with a physical collection is a very imperfect way of protecting it.”<sup>42</sup>

Archivists need to rethink descriptive standards and priorities, particularly to support the management of records and archives outside of custodial care ... in the wild. First, archivists need to encourage records creators to capture

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archives cataloguing and descriptive systems are a small example of the monumental challenge of full convergence. When the initial fervour for convergence recedes, perhaps it will be replaced by an emphasis on collaboration, with a focus on enhanced service without the need to abandon the operational principles behind each discipline. Following the strategy suggested here, the most logical next reorganization at Library and Archives Canada would be to separate the archives and library again, moving non-institutional archival acquisition and preservation into the library's portfolio and repositioning government records and archives management so that recordkeeping is more closely linked with public-sector accountability and transparency. Moving LAC's entire operation into the portfolio of the new Canadian Museum of History, an idea that has apparently been suggested, would absolutely defeat the essential goal of protecting public-sector records and archives for accountability, marginalizing that archival role even more than it is now. For a discussion of issues related to collaboration and convergence, see Diane Zorich, Günter Waibel, and Ricky Erway, *Beyond the Silos of the LAMs: Collaboration Among Libraries, Archives and Museums* (Dublin, OH: OCLC Research, 2008).

- 42 Richard Dancy, “RAD Past, Present, and Future,” *Archivaria* 74 (Spring 2012): 41. Geoffrey Yeo, “The Conceptual Fonds and the Physical Collection,” *Archivaria* 73 (Spring 2012): 75.

essential metadata at the time records are created, using a minimum number of data elements as found in metadata schema such as Dublin Core. Second, archivists need to help develop mechanisms for allowing digital records to be “organized” into any manner of virtual groupings so that users can find them, recognizing that provenance and original order are not writ in stone but can be fluid concepts, particularly in the digital environment.<sup>43</sup> To achieve these changes, archivists need to rethink the fundamental custodial orientation of descriptive standards, taking the bold step to expand descriptive practice beyond the intellectual control of aggregate archives in custodial care. Archival description is a value-added service, but that value is diminished if contextual information is only applied to an ever-smaller portion of archives coming into physical custody.

Describing records that have not been “collected,” physically or electronically, requires separating creator, content, and context further than before. A flexible records description – created in active collaboration between archivists, records creators, and users – would include information about the life and work of agencies or individuals *and* information about their records and archives (and, ultimately, publications, artifacts, events, and so on). Archivists could provide contextual information, identifying the “who,” “where,” “why,” and “how” of social actors and their actions, even if the “what” – the tangible archival documents – is not encompassed in its entirety within a complete and closed fonds. Creators of records could add information about or links to their own materials, and researchers could contribute their own inputs, creating connections between groups of records based on any manner of subject or theme. This participatory approach to description would broaden the descriptive network while helping archivists with the quest to identify and protect valuable documentary evidence within and outside of custodial environments.<sup>44</sup>

43 For my discussion of the concept of the fonds, see Laura Millar, “The Death of the Fonds and the Resurrection of Provenance: Archival Context in Space and Time,” *Archivaria* 53 (Spring 2002): 1–15. Heather MacNeil rethinks original order in “Archivalterity: Rethinking Original Order,” *Archivaria* 66 (Fall 2008): 1–24. Geoffrey Yeo considers arrangement and description of digital archives in “Bringing Things Together: Aggregate Records in a Digital Age,” *Archivaria* 74 (Fall 2012): 43–91. For one of a growing number of articles challenging the traditional perception of provenance, see Tom Nesmith, “The Concept of Societal Provenance and Records of Nineteenth-Century Aboriginal–European Relations in Western Canada: Implications for Archival Theory and Practice,” *Archival Science* 6 (2006).

44 For those who lament participatory description or other types of crowdsourcing as diminishing the authority of descriptive records – or, more to the point, the authority of the creators of those descriptions – it is worth noting that crowdsourcing has been around much longer than the Internet – centuries longer, in fact. One example of public participation in the creation of an authoritative information source was the compilation of the *Oxford English Dictionary* in the late 1800s, a story told in Simon Winchester’s *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the Making of the Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998). An even earlier example took place when the British Ordnance Survey started creating maps of Ireland in the 1820s to 1840s. The Royal Engineers, responsible for

### ***Third Parties and First Principles***

Archivists can also increase access by supporting collaborative third-party contributions to digitization, description, and access. Protests against commercial involvement in archival digitization and description are misguided. Without third-party involvement, many archival institutions would be left with a growing volume of undescribed physical and digital holdings, which are, by virtue of their inaccessibility, as good as lost. That strategy is not fair to the user, particularly in those areas where third-party participation generates popular outputs, such as digitized and indexed genealogical records. As the commercial success of Ancestry.com demonstrates, the public wants access to those records and is willing to pay accordingly. Archivists need to accept the reality and embrace the opportunity.<sup>45</sup>

As long as third-party inputs meet appropriate (not excessive) standards for preservation, metadata management, and description, and as long as clear and reasonable time limits are set on access restrictions, why not delegate tasks to willing parties and maximize on the investment? The third party is motivated to undertake the work, knowing it has a chance to recoup its investment and make some profit, and the archival institution is left with digitized content that it might never otherwise have the time or resources to prepare. Archivists regularly accept complete restrictions on archival donations for decades or more. In comparison, is a decade of limited access to digital products, with open access to original materials, really such a hardship, especially for a profession that aspires to preserve holdings “forever”?

### ***Teachable Moments***

Innovative approaches to description and access will help increase access to archives, and they may help raise awareness of the value of archival service. But archivists must seek other avenues for awareness raising in order to change the custodial dynamic and encourage better preservation of archives for accountability, identity, and memory. Successful awareness raising in a digital

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the mapping and survey work, involved Irish citizens, priests, landholders, and local officials in the identification of place names, largely to counter local fears that the British government was using the mapping exercise to exact some measure of control over the population. See Rachel Hewitt, *Map of a Nation: A Biography of the Ordnance Survey* (London: Granta, 2011). Historian and journalist Tom Standage examines the long history of information sharing in *Writing on the Wall: Social Media – the First 2,000 Years* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

- 45 For a recent case study of digitization in Australia that demonstrates the potential of third-party participation, see Christine Yeats and Alan Ventress, “Third Party Digitisation at State Records New South Wales: A Positive Approach in a Time of Change,” *Archives and Manuscripts* 40, no. 3 (November 2012): 217–22.

age requires focusing not on the value of archival institutions or on the archival profession but on the importance of records and archives and the need to protect records for the present and the future.

While archivists, as part of our jobs, will develop awareness-raising initiatives to suit our particular custodial environment, archivists as a professional community should be advocating more vigorously for documentary accountability and historicity, just as librarians promote literacy and freedom of speech and educators stress the relationship between learning, individual maturity, and social responsibility. Archivists need to create closer links with records creators and users, and we need to foster much stronger relationships with organizations that share a common interest in protecting records and archives for accountability, identity, and memory. For example, we could work more closely with international human rights groups, such as Transparency International or the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, or with watchdog agencies, from the Fraser Institute to the Canadian Civil Liberties Association to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, to raise awareness of the relationship between records, accountability, and rights. We could also work much more closely with our traditional allies, such as historians, genealogists, lawyers, and journalists, to strengthen partnerships and forge coalitions. We need to bring our message to business associations, chambers of commerce, arts organizations, and community groups. Records are everywhere; archivists should be everywhere.

Even outside of formal partnerships, archivists need to take advantage of any opportunity to increase awareness of the importance of caring for records and archives. Every time a news story breaks about a Facebook privacy invasion, the misuse of personal data, or lost or damaged electronic records, archivists should be front and centre: tweeting, writing letters to the editor, protesting to members of Parliament. But good news should be celebrated, too. Every time a local business, government, or community group uses historical photographs in a display, publishes a story with an archival angle, or provides financial support for an event with an archival twist, we should be giving thanks, publicly. Records creators and users need to see the relationship between stories in the news, their own recordkeeping practices, and our belief that archives help sustain a just, democratic, and civilized society.

### **Taking the First Step**

I have been arguing that “we” should do this and “we” should do that to fashion this new and more integrated archival system. But who are “we”? We talk of an “archival community,” but like the “international community” or the “literary community” or the “ethnic community,” it is a term so all-encompassing as to be near meaningless. And “we” in the archival community can only do so much, whoever we are. We hope our political leaders will understand why managing records and archives for accountability, identity, and memory is so important.

But we, especially working archivists and particularly those in the public sector, are not readily afforded the opportunity to lobby for change. Instead, we rely on our professional associations to speak on our behalf. We also turn to our educators to instill core principles in students, so that they can carry our vision forward. And we hope and expect that our colleagues will follow professional standards and guidelines, setting a best-practice example across institutions. It is by sharpening our focus in those realms – profession, education, and practice – that we can start to make change.

### ***Divide and Be Conquered***

The Canadian archival community today consists of two national archival associations, a dozen provincial and territorial associations or councils, and a large handful of national and regional branches of an international records management association. This alphabet soup of organizations is joined by a range of “Friends of Archives” groups across the country. Despite the tremendous hard work and true dedication of all the people involved, the archival community risks collapsing under the weight of all these disparate and disconnected groups. Training initiatives are duplicated; conferences conflict and overlap. Layers of administration and bureaucracy build on each other. The need to share scarce funds leaves each group weaker as a result. And our associations distinguish “archives” so severely from “records” that many practitioners are forced to choose one membership over another or pay the price with their pocketbook. Worse, the multitude of organizations, along with the entrenched division between the two “sides” of the records/archives divide, creates a treacherous us-versus-them dynamic, which must be overcome if we are to break out of our professional logjam.

Our national archival association – the Association of Canadian Archivists – needs to be *the* national leader for our profession. And it needs to expand its scope dramatically. A Canadian Association for Records and Archives would represent the interests of both individuals and institutions. It would also be an advocate for greater understanding of the role of records and archives for accountability, identity, and memory, and it would promote the importance of managing records *and* archives services for today and for the future. As the focal point for professional development, outreach, and awareness raising in both records and archives management, this association would liaise with educators to provide continuing studies opportunities, while recognizing the central role of universities and colleges in delivering pre-appointment education. Ideally, it would be truly national, which means fully bilingual and fully representative of the interests of both the anglophone and francophone communities.

This blending of records and archives associations has already taken place in the United Kingdom, with the merger in 2010 of the Society of Archivists, the National Council on Archives, and the Association of Chief Archivists in

Local Government into an Archives and Records Association (ARA). The ARA defines itself as the lead professional body for archivists, archive conservators, and records managers in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Another useful model is the Canadian Library Association (CLA), which supports the library and information profession but also promotes libraries as institutions and advocates actively for literacy and intellectual freedom. The CLA focuses not just on the value of libraries but on the value of the written word.<sup>46</sup>

To achieve this integrated result, however, archivists will have to deal with three uncomfortably large elephants in the room: L'Association des Archivistes du Québec, which represents archivists in the province of Quebec; the Canadian Council of Archives, which represents archival institutions in Canada; and the biggest pachyderm in the place, the 27,000-member strong Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA International), which bills itself as "THE resource when it comes to managing your organization's information."<sup>47</sup> Of course, David slew Goliath. I do not believe, however, that we are out to slay enemies but to forge much, much closer relationships.

While a national records and archives association will transform the vision of the profession, there is scope for other, more intentionally public-facing groups to help deliver the message that records and archives support society. "Friends of Archives" organizations associated with national, provincial, and territorial archives play an important role in raising awareness of and funds for archival work. A similar association, independent of any specific repository, could promote the value of records and archives across Canada while remaining free of professional or institutional ties. Such an organization could help facilitate archival acquisitions, coordinate fundraising for archival initiatives, conduct research into topics such as preservation or access, and disseminate awareness-raising tools for records creators, users, custodians, and the public at large. This association could also serve as a clearing house for information about archival and records issues, including news and current events stories. To make the organization truly public, it should be led by representatives from the broad spectrum of records and archives stakeholders, such as historians, genealogists, lawyers, librarians, social and physical scientists, economists, information technology specialists, journalists, and others.<sup>48</sup>

46 For details about the ARA, see <http://www.archives.org.uk/>. For more information about the CLA, see <http://www.cla.ca//AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home>.

47 For more about ARMA, see <http://www.arma.org/>.

48 A useful model is found in the British Records Association (BRA), which supports the preservation of archives in the United Kingdom. The BRA's motto, "Working for Archives," emphasizes the task of protecting documentary materials, not promoting individual archival institutions or archival practitioners. For more on the BRA, see <http://www.britishrecordsassociation.org.uk/>.



*Educating Team Players*

Canada is known for its dedicated archival studies programs, which have produced graduates working in records and archives positions around the world. Over the thirty-plus years since these programs first started, there has been an ongoing struggle among educators about whether to focus more or less attention on archives or records, information management or historical archives care, and digital or analog preservation. The debates are valuable, and they will continue, but it is important to remember that Canada's archival studies graduates have met with considerable success in Canada and internationally. They have secured positions in both traditional and non-traditional environments, from provincial archivists to senior records administrators, information commissioners, municipal managers, city clerks, business analysts, and records and archives consultants. We should be proud of our educational achievements, and prouder still of our graduates.

The most important action for educators today is to ensure that we are not teaching "cowboys" but instead embracing the best of the "pit crew" approach. This means inculcating in students an appreciation for the broad spectrum of records and archives duties while allowing necessary specialization, on the assumption that the graduates of these programs will bring their particular skills to a holistic and integrated system. And when archivists are facing solitude, our professional association should be at the ready to help provide some semblance of team support in the absence of a real team in the workplace.

Still, not every person working in an archival setting will come into the job with formal qualifications. It has always been thus. But it is less the case than in years past, and records and archives are better protected for the inputs of well-educated professionals. My hope is that if the archives profession advocates a risk-based approach to recordkeeping, we can promote the idea that high-risk records environments require the services of well-qualified practitioners. We can then also acknowledge that in lower-risk situations, records creators may not be able to engage specialist services, but they will still benefit from our advice. By providing guidance to records creators, archivists can help prolong the life of digital records, particularly while still-nascent storage technologies and methodologies evolve.

To provide this advisory support, archivists need to embrace the notion of client-based services and freelance consulting work, similar to the roles played by lawyers and accountants. If the goal of archival service is to preserve society's documentary memory, not to sustain archival institutions, then consulting should become an acceptable career option. The aim is not to provide alternative archival employment in a changing economy but rather to offer assistance to organizations, individuals, and communities who cannot afford to hire full-time records and archives specialists, or who do not wish to relinquish their archives to the control of some outside custodial agency.

Not providing basic training, guidance, and support to records creators, community groups, or local associations – perhaps in the belief that a custodial approach is best or that records creators will not understand the nuances of appraisal, description, or preservation – is an abdication of the goal of records and archives service in the digital age. Our focus should not be on sustaining the archival institution but on ensuring that society can protect and access its documentary evidence. Without good care of records today, especially digital records, there is no guarantee that archives will survive tomorrow. Public awareness, advocacy, and advice are among the most important services our national association and our educators can offer.

### ***Our Standard Bearers***

Canada's national, provincial, and territorial archivists – our records commissioners – have a central role to play as the “first ministers” of recordkeeping. As representatives of the profession within their institutions, they will provide leadership by example, including adopting and promoting best practice standards for recordkeeping. They will also support the recruitment of qualified practitioners and ongoing professional development to create the best environment possible for records and archives care. Government recordkeepers can also offer their institutions as test sites for software development, digital preservation initiatives, or description projects. As representatives of the archival profession, our senior government records professionals should be standard bearers for records protection and access. But it is not their job to lead the profession; our national association must stand at the front of that line.

### **Cheque, Please**

Somebody has to pay the bills. The current funding crisis in Canada has highlighted the risks faced by archival institutions and associations across the country. But asking for the return of NADP funds without changing the outdated custodial model simply perpetuates an unsustainable system. We need to look at new and different approaches to paying for records and archives services.

National, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments have to accept the financial responsibility attached to quality records care. It may be an easier pill to swallow if institutional records responsibilities are clearly delineated, from a risk perspective, and not muddled by a confusing overlap with cultural/heritage duties. The separation of agency archives care and collected archives care may actually enhance opportunities for private-sector funding by distinguishing cultural and heritage roles and opening the door more widely to corporate and foundation support.

If high-risk organizations are required to keep their critical records as long as needed for accountability, and to transfer them in good order to appropriate

repositories only at the end of the organization's life, tax incentives for giving those archives away inappropriately will have to be reconsidered. Financial sweeteners could be added to encourage corporations to preserve their archives and make them publicly available, just as organizations in many countries benefit financially from support for arts and culture through tax credit schemes. Enforcement is required, though, to ensure compliance with recordkeeping requirements. Significant penalties must be assessed for infractions.<sup>49</sup>

Collections-based archival institutions should be able to receive some measure of government funding. As entities that support culture, heritage, and identity, they deserve the recognition and assistance afforded to publicly supported museums, galleries, and artistic and cultural groups. As mentioned earlier, there is logic in emphasizing the role of university special collections and research institutes in the collection and preservation of lower-risk but high-value archives. These institutions are built on a research-oriented mandate, and they have easier access to public and private funds than central governments or often insecure community groups. But this money should come with as little bureaucratic red tape as possible, which means reconsidering complex, redundant federated funding structures.

Ultimately, though, we have to ask if it is in anyone's best interest to prop up archival institutions that are on the edge of collapse. Co-operation, collaboration, and strategic planning will help identify threatened repositories. Solutions may include reconfiguring administrative structures, facilitating partnerships, or – the last but sometimes inevitable choice – transferring holdings to more viable care until or unless more stable systems are in place. If the priority is on service, not institutions, then financial resources must be used to protect records and archives so that they remain available, not to keep institutions alive if the consequence is diminished records care.<sup>50</sup>

49 The federal *Cultural Property Export and Import Act* specifically addresses the removal of cultural property, including archives, from Canadian shores. Within Canada, cultural property regulations allow for the provision of tax receipts for archival donations, but the processes involved in completing the application are sometimes so onerous that they cost the archival institution more in time and resources than the institution can really afford. And in the end, one has to ask again what consequences accrue if high-risk creating agencies transfer high-accountability archives to a third party, the custodial repository. See Canada, "Justice Laws: Consolidated Acts," *Cultural Property Export and Import Act*, R.S.C., 1985, c. C-51, <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-51/>.

50 Ironically, given the universal perception that archival institutions are woefully underfunded, the subject of archival economics is very poorly represented in our professional literature. Aside from the articles by Beyea and Sweeney, cited earlier, another recent article is Louise Ray et al., "Funding Archive Services in England and Wales: Institutional Realities and Professional Perceptions," *Archives and Records* 34, no. 2 (2013): 1–25.

## Turning Risk into Opportunity

*Accountability, identity, and memory.* They are the symbols of a civilized society. Records and archives help communities achieve accountability, foster their own identity – or identities – and preserve their collective memory. Archivists can support the creation, protection, and use of records and archives by turning away from custodial approaches. Everyone today is his or her own recordkeeper. Every voice deserves the chance to be heard, and it is not the archivist's place to pick and choose. The archivist of today can provide advice and guidance, helping individuals and communities preserve and nurture their own documentary heritage, for their benefit and for the benefit of society as a whole.

In his now famous and (let us be honest) vastly overworked words, Arthur Doughty claimed that archives are our most precious national asset, the gift of one generation to another. In a country that boasts the Rocky Mountains, the Bay of Fundy, the Nahanni River, and the fjords of Gros Morne, that is a pretty bold statement. But the Rockies have stayed safely in their place for some 75 million years, while our archives – particularly our digital records – are infinitely younger and far less secure. But they are a precious commodity, and one that we must protect particularly because they are so fragile. Consequently, I have to dispute Doughty's suggestion that archives are "the gift of one generation to another." We cannot simply think of archival care as a service to our descendants. If we do not manage records today, we will not have archives to leave to the next generation. Some gift.

Responsible records stewardship now will help create a society that supports accountability, values its identity, and cherishes its memory. I believe that protecting records and archives in order to help construct and sustain that enlightened society is the *true* gift of one generation to another. To get there, Canadian archivists need to pursue a dramatic new course. We built the total archives concept and the archival system in times when we as a nation felt insecure and immature, and we relied on government-led, collective, and comprehensive strategies to gain control over our documentary heritage. The strategies were right at the time, but they do not suit the Canada of today, which is mature, sophisticated, democratic, and economically stable. We need to reinvent our archival system for today's Canada, recognizing the mutability and fragility of digital records and the importance of respecting and supporting the diversity of identities and communities and memories across our land. Strategically, we need to embrace cross-disciplinary collaboration, assess and prioritize risk before choosing tactics, and focus our efforts on two separate but interrelated goals – managing records for accountability and protecting records for memory and identity – so that we can build the bridge to effective records and archives care for years to come.

Someday this strategy will have to be reimagined. One can dream that, in a decade or two, today's digital problems will have found reasonable solutions.

Some new all-powerful technology may emerge, solving everyone's problems. Or we may see a move to adopt more tangible records technologies – a return to pen and ink perhaps?<sup>51</sup> Maybe then archivists will be able to step back from today's urgent need to prioritize recordkeeping, collaboration, and public awareness. But for the moment, the digital black hole looms large, and maintaining status quo operations will not keep institutions or records from being sucked in and torn apart. Fundamental change is essential.

Holding on to archival institutions may be the problem. Reimagining archival service will be the solution.

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51 The notion that analog will come back into fashion is not frivolous, though clay tablets are perhaps not an immediate option. January 2014 saw the launch of a new Android-based Polaroid digital camera – the Socialmatic – which produces wallet-sized photographic prints and lets users share images with apps. See Hayley Tsukayama, “Watch Out Apple: Polaroid Is Taking Aim at the Tablet Market,” *The Washington Post*, 9 January 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/watch-out-apple-polaroid-is-taking-aim-at-the-tablet-market/2014/01/09/ed815bd4-7943-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/watch-out-apple-polaroid-is-taking-aim-at-the-tablet-market/2014/01/09/ed815bd4-7943-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6_story.html). The return to a technology first invented in the 1940s suggests that users may still value the physical as well as the digital. The eternal archival question, then, comes back to haunt us – which *is* the original?

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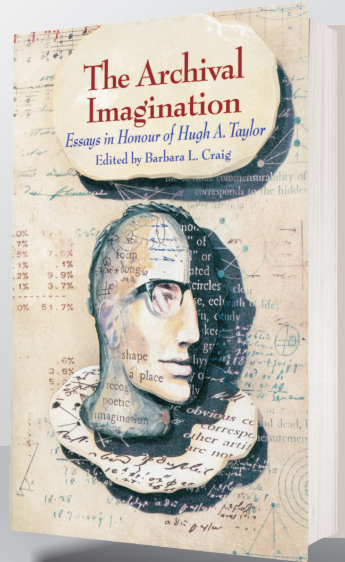
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