

## CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Earlier this year, in an editorial and questionnaire in the Archives Section Bulletin, I revived the almost perennial question of the separation of the Archives Section from the Canadian Historical Association. This was done not so much to seek a mandate for one course of action or another but hopefully to stimulate discussion concerning the future of the Archives Section as our national professional body. Indeed, the questionnaires returned indicated no clear consensus. Only forty-two members out of a membership of 330 replied. Of these, twenty favoured immediate separation, eleven opposed separation entirely and eleven others felt that separation should come in time but that the Section was not strong enough to stand alone at present. Twenty-five of those replying to the questionnaire had participated actively in the work of the Section or had attended its annual meetings, and of these sixteen were either against separation or advised waiting.

The views expressed on all sides were emphatic. Those in favour of immediate separation stressed their sense of professional identity and felt that a separate association could provide the focus for the professional concerns of all Canadian archivists be they involved in historical manuscripts, records management or cartographical, pictorial or sound archives. Such a separate association could establish ties both with historians and with researchers in a variety of other disciplines who are now utilizing archival resources. Those who opposed separation emphasized the scholarly aspects of the archivist's task, referring to the warm and traditional ties between archivists and historians. The Roosevelt Library case was cited as an example of the dangers inherent in moving too far apart. Canadian archives and the Canadian historical profession have developed together, often in a state of mutual interdependence. Though this relationship may be changing as both mature, many archivists continue to find these ties important.

Reflecting differences in outlook, temperament and the concerns of a variety of institutions, these differences are not easily reconciled. As more than one veteran of previous Section debates on the topic of separation remarked: "The recurring argument over the role and identity of archivists normally generates more heat than light."

What is of importance in my opinion, and in the opinion of all the forty-two who replied to the questionnaire, is that we develop a strong national professional body. Whether it is an association or section is largely irrelevant at this stage. The organizational problems we face in running an effective national group remain the same in either case. The annual meeting of the Section focussed on these intensely practical organizational problems this year at McGill University. In formal discussions at an extended business meeting, in the many committee meetings and in informal groups, archivists from across the country discussed the types of programmes they want a professional body to perform.

The suggestions took many forms, but one of the most promising was that of fostering the development of regional groupings of archivists. The Prairie Archivists have had four annual meetings. Usually held on a

week end, these meetings have enabled all archivists in a region, few of whom can afford or can be spared to attend a national meeting, to meet and discuss their problems with colleagues from nearby repositories. If similar groups can be encouraged in British Columbia, Ontario and the Maritimes with close ties and perhaps formal representation on the national executive, archivists across the country could be actively involved in the work of the national body to a much greater degree than has hitherto been possible. Similarly, much closer ties should be developed between the Archives Section and L'Association des Archivistes de Quebec.

Other topics discussed in June included the format of our annual meetings, the importance of working committee sessions, the changes perceptible in the structure of the C.H.A., the need for more archivists to write on professional subjects, and the varying alternatives in archival education. Many useful ideas emerged for action by our executive and our committees. But, as the ideas came forward and the discussion progressed, the consensus of opinion was clear: we have much to do to become the type of national professional organization we want. The problems before us as a section or as an association are much the same. In dealing with them, we are limited only by our imagination and our enthusiasm. The goodwill and active participation of every archivist in Canada is needed.

- Ian E. Wilson  
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