

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

During my chairmanship of the Archives' Section for 1972-73 much original work and thinking was done in the areas of copyright and literary rights in unpublished manuscripts, business records, archives training especially for the course we sponsor with the Public Archives of Canada, microfilm reading equipment, oral history and the revision of the Union List of Manuscripts. There is no apparent lack of interested workers; the challenge rather is to articulate the concerns and needs of the increasing numbers of archivists.

The Canadian community of archivists is increasing in numbers. Our archival establishments have grown considerably and have elaborated the need for detailed understanding of specialized records handling, attendant gadgetry and specialized conservation procedures including the use of computerization in our control and description activities. Because this is so, the work of our committees is important.

I cannot be sure how typical I am of archivists in public archives but the demands on me have been such that there is little respite to reflect at length on the broad issues of the Section. A chairman, and indeed the Section as a whole, needs a supportive framework which spreads the load and compensates for the necessity to be immersed in the work of our home archives. As I said to the Prairie Archivists in May, at a formative stage it is fine to be informal but I believe we have to move on now and be a little more organized if there is to be output.

It is heartening to see the natural development of regional archivist groups. Archivists in the Prairie Provinces have coalesced into a group with an annual regional meeting. Archivists on the Pacific coast, in the Maritimes and now in the greater Toronto area are meeting on a regular basis. The most advanced expression of local initiative is that of our fellow archivists in Quebec. These are healthy responses to, and expressions of, emerging new needs.

Other evidence of sensitivity to new needs is given by the renewed consideration in the Section of its relationship to the North American archival scene as well as to the Canadian Historical Association.

Any consideration of the future or the organization of a

group depends on a clear understanding of the purposes and tasks it is expected to accomplish. There are at least five things we expect of the Archives Section.

1. A means of meeting fellow archivists in Canada.
2. A means of working with colleagues on mutual archival problems.
3. A 'spokesman' or standard setter for archives as a discipline and a profession.
4. A communications interface with users of archives.
5. A unified expression or embodiment of the Canadian archival enterprise.

The question these purposes pose for us are two. Do we really want them? Can we really do these things?

These objectives may be seen in terms of the degree of individual involvement, as presenting a gradation from the first requiring involvement of the maximum number of individuals to the last requiring a national organization to whose meetings many would not be able to go for the expense or time required. A regional group is strong for maximum participation but short on comprehensiveness. A national body is strong on representing the profession on issues of general concern such as copyright, co-operation, mobilizing purchasing power for conservation supplies, and establishing training course standards; however in Canada, being the size it is, attendance will at best be representative but not general.

The second purpose, work on mutual archival problems, challenges us in two ways. First, work on complex professional problems really demands face-to-face meeting. Our low output is due to work by mail in which little momentum can be achieved. Second, the people to work on problems of archival practice must be in large part 'rank and file' archivists who at Annual General Meeting time are usually at home minding the shop.

The fourth purpose, a communications interface with the users of archives, in today's context of 'total archives' requires us to widen our horizons. To have meetings simultaneously with the Canadian Historical Association is important if we are to have meaningful contact with users of archives, although we are increasingly conscious of a need to address political scientists, criminologists, school teachers and others too. However, as we prepare to reach out to records managers and the business community, another time of year, another scene than that of a classroom and another context than that of the Learned Societies may be necessary. Exploratory meetings such as these may not be planned six months or more in advance, and will not concern members of the C.H.A.; but might involve people from only a part of the country. A needed departure can be two-day seminars for such areas as records management, use of microfilm and basic conservation of documents. We must

be prepared to think fresh and step out from old formulae.

As implied above we are trying to relate in one organization detailed practical work requiring local, broadly based initiative and an overall national expression of Canadian archival concerns. The Section is not the archival profession but represents the profession as it now exists and insofar as it serves individual archives we will grow in strength. It is therefore a welcome development that archivists are beginning to meet on a regional basis as this can only foster the growth of individuals in the work of archives. It can also provide the output from committees on the basis of which the Section can establish professional guidelines for the use of us all. There might even be reason for the Section to operate as a Council of Archives recommending the most generally acceptable procedures on common archival problems, though it will always remain the prerogative of the individual archives whether or not to implement these.

The challenge to us in the immediate future is the meeting of the needs of both archivists and archival institutions through a framework which allows operating decisions to be made in proper sequence to enable committee work to proceed with confidence in such vital areas as:

- Standards for archival training.
- Submission of our concerns related to copyright and literary rights in unpublished materials.
- The adequate supply of good quality conservation materials.
- Provision of tactful guidance and leadership for the preservation of business records.
- The maturing of our own archival programs with a sound basis of records management where necessary.

It is heartening to realize that there is a lively awareness of the needs and opportunities before us which can only augur well for the growth of archival services to our parent organizations and researchers alike.

A.W. Murdoch
Chairman of the Archives Section,
1972-73.