

indexes should be prepared for archival collections created in a more conventional way.

The computerized indexes are sometimes also justified on the grounds that among the rapidly increasing number of researchers visiting the archives there are more and more who are doing what can best be described as hit and run research. These researchers want a few facts quickly, preferably colourful or, even better, scandalous, to provide the basic materials for another potboiler for the popular press, complete with respectable-looking footnotes. The computerized indexes can accommodate large numbers of people quickly, providing researchers with quick and specific references to subjects of interest to them. Those intent on justifying the next archival budget submission feel vindicated by pointing to the increased number of researchers coming to the archives.

A distinction should be made, however, between this sort of thing and sound scholarship. Sound scholarship, in my opinion, will best be served in the future, as it has been in the past, by archivists who really know their collections, and by finding aids and inventories which clearly indicate the provenance, internal arrangement and content of archival collections. Archivists must be careful lest, in their effort to learn new techniques, they forget old virtues and principles. It would be sad if archivists ceased to regard scholarship as their highest priority and became instead very efficient technical officers who, with the help of the computer, daily manipulate mountains of detailed but uninterpreted factual material for the convenience of superficial researchers.

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The Historical Photograph

Perhaps no record is more consistently misused than the historical photograph. It is not that photographs are neglected—quite the reverse. Users are plentiful and tend to be wildly enthusiastic. But how often does the archivist find himself helping to compile a portfolio of “historic” scenes for the nostalgia market or selecting illustrations for a text which is in all other respects ready for the printer? Concerned archivists across the country must have appreciated, therefore, the appearance in *Archivaria*, Volume 1, No. 2, of two substantial items which address themselves to the use of historical photographs.

Archivists enjoy a symbiotic relationship with researchers and historical documents which, while it is for many the most satisfying aspect

of archival work, is simultaneously productive of many tensions. One of these is a result of the recent explosion of interest in Canadian culture which has increased enormously the demand for sources of information. This development has brought archivists into contact with an unprecedented number and variety of users and is causing attention to be focussed on an issue hitherto of marginal importance. To what extent are we, as archivists, responsible for the informed use of the material in our custody?

That there is professional disagreement on this subject was made clear during a recent discussion on "Publishing Archival Sources."¹ It was equally clear that few archivists had thought through their position. Some were evidently inclined to exercise the power of veto over the use of material in cases where they suspected its use might be discreditable. While understandable because of those bad experiences which most archivists have had, surely it is more important to avoid the dangers inherent in censorship than to prevent occasional irresponsibility in publishing. Aside from the moral question, many archivists representing public institutions may well face a problem in law should an attempt to restrict access to material be made on arbitrary grounds.

However, archivists justifiably feel that the knowledge gained through their special relationship to the source material qualifies them to advise on its most effective and appropriate use.

In a review article,² which should be required reading for archivists, authors and publishers alike, Richard Huyda evaluates the results achieved by two recent books which rely heavily on visual documentation. His comments provide invaluable insights and much-needed guidance on the honest and aesthetic presentation of pictorial evidence. He suggests, very reasonably, that the archivist's role should be to "advise, support and encourage researchers, but not fail to offer criticism and praise when warranted by publications."³ This is a responsible position and one which is consistent with the archivist's function of facilitating use of the material in his care. It proposes a role, however, that most archivists are ill-equipped to play with regard to their photographic holdings.

Peter Robertson's article, "More Than Meets the Eye,"⁴ is an attempt to remedy this situation by providing a basic education in the use of historical photographs. As an experienced (and published) photo-archivist, he undertakes to reveal the limitations of photographs and thus "promote

1 Association of Canadian Archivists. Annual Conference, Laval University, 1976. Session of 2 June 1976.

2 Richard J. Huyda, "Macdonald's World: Visual Approaches," *Archivaria*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 1976), pp. 95-100.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

4 Peter Robertson, "More Than Meets the Eye," *Archivaria*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Summer 1976), pp. 33-43.

their intelligent use as historical documents.’’⁵ Such an article needed to be written. Few researchers⁶ or archivists take photographic evidence seriously enough to ask questions of it which they would automatically put to more traditional primary sources. For what purpose was the record created, when, by whom, and in what context?

The article correctly identifies the central problem and contains some useful information and sound advice. Moreover, in the absence of any other more comprehensive treatment, it is likely to become a standard reference for the growing number of archivists concerned with this subject. It is all the more necessary, therefore, to be aware that the author has himself fallen into some of those very traps which he is at pains to point out to others.

While clearly believing that photographs should be approached as any other primary source, Robertson on several occasions appears unsure of what this implies. He recognizes that a picture cannot be employed meaningfully unless its original purpose, its creator and its context are understood, but two of his captions⁷ reveal a readiness to apply moral and value judgements inappropriate to the time and context in which the pictures were originally presented.

It is idle to criticize a wartime publicity still for not identifying the soldiers or their units. The picture and caption achieved their original purpose, to reassure the home audience that “our boys” were in good spirits “over there”. The caption Robertson would apparently prefer would have constituted a treasonable offense. Similarly, it is pointless to wish that the remarks on the Indian students had never been made. Far from distorting the information conveyed by these photographs, the captions are an integral and very important part of the historical evidence. It is not important that archivists approve, only that they understand. The role of archivists is precisely to help others avoid misunderstanding, and hence often misusing, the sources in their care.

The author tends to overstate his case in a manner which is likely to confuse many of his readers. He implies, for instance, that a newspaper photo-editor is engaging in a nefarious practice by printing only one in ten of the photographs submitted to him. Anyone who knows how a news-photographer works—taking many shots of the same subject from a variety of angles and distances, and using different lighting, to ensure that

5 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

6 I am aware of two exceptions: Harold Meyer and Richard Wade, *Chicago, Growth of a Metropolis*, 1969; and Robert Harney and Harold Troper, *Immigrants: A Portrait of the Urban Experience, 1890-1930*, 1975.

7 Robertson, “More Than Meets the Eye,” pp. 38-39.

he has at least one usable end-product—might be surprised that the percentage was not lower. While he may sometimes indulge in dishonest manipulation (as in the case of the Robert Stanfield football fumble) the photo-editor is more often simply selecting the most appropriate photograph for the purpose at hand—just as an historian selects from the sources and data available to him.

An archivist should be concerned with acquiring, maintaining and making available for use those materials from which such selections are made. It is not part of his professional duties to interpret the sources in his care and unless he is also (as few are) an historian, he should refrain from doing so. He must remember that he exists to serve all others who would use his sources, be they researchers working in different disciplines with different needs, or researchers working in the same discipline with conflicting interpretations of the same sources. The archivist must not allow himself to prejudice the work of others by imposing on his sources his own personal values and standards.

In making the essentially valid point that the photographic evidence of a particular event or location is often inaccurate or misleading because it is incomplete,⁸ the author inadvertently demonstrates the dangers of ignoring his own very good advice.

First, it is not true that the picture of slum conditions in Toronto was “taken by an anonymous photographer.”⁹ It was produced, as was the majority of the City of Toronto’s photograph collection, by the Public Works Department’s Photography and Blueprinting Section. The identity of the individual photographer is Arthur S. Goss, the City’s official photographer from 1911 until his death in 1940, and *de facto* photographer for several years before that.

Nor is it fair to say that “consigned to the files at City Hall, it was unavailable to contradict the image of the city spread by photographs such as those taken by Frank Micklethwaite.”¹⁰ The picture is one of a series of well over one hundred photographs commissioned between 1911 and 1919 by the City’s Medical Officer of Health (Dr. Charles Hastings, a public health expert of international reputation) to document the abominable conditions in which a portion of Toronto’s population was forced to live. Some of these pictures were used to illustrate Dr. Hastings’ *Report of the Medical Health Officer Dealing with the Recent Investigation of Slum Conditions in Toronto*.¹¹

8 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

11 Toronto, Department of Health. *Report of the Medical Health Officer Dealing with the Recent Investigation of Slum Conditions in Toronto*, 1911.

The appearance of this report certainly did not go unnoticed. Hastings was a popular and colourful figure on the Toronto scene and employed his image to good effect in publicizing his concern for public health. In his official capacity, of course, he was able not only to describe but also to implement change in social conditions. As late as 1918¹² the Bureau of Municipal Research was quoting the conclusions drawn in his 1911 report.

Others too were publishing photographs of poor social conditions in Toronto. *Jack Canuck*, a popular newspaper which first appeared in 1911 (and was censored during World War I), regularly covered the subject of health and Dr. Hastings' work, and printed its own pictures of housing conditions. The editor was able to claim that 50,000 people read his issue of March 1, 1912.¹³ The Toronto Bureau of Municipal Research, founded in 1914 on the New York model, was similarly concerned, most notably in its illustrated report on housing conditions in *The Ward*.¹⁴

Social conditions were also a favourite subject of William James, an early Toronto news photographer whose collection of approximately 6,000 photographs dated between 1905 and the early 1930s has recently been acquired by the City of Toronto Archives. It has not yet been determined how extensively these pictures were published, but James is known to have sold many of his pictures to the *Toronto Daily Star*.

As a consequence, I cannot agree that "the Canadian social conscience of the time was not reflected in photographs."¹⁵ It is clear that in Toronto at least, in the period 1911 to 1919, several agencies were demonstrating a social conscience and using photographs to add weight to their arguments.

Archivaria is to be commended for introducing serious discussion of a neglected topic. There is no doubt that archivists should be encouraging the informed use of historical photographs, but if they are to do so they must themselves work to appreciate and understand these records as they already (I trust) appreciate and understand the more traditional primary sources. Richard Huyda and Peter Robertson have performed a valuable service by provoking archivists to a further and deeper consideration of this important subject.

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12 Toronto. Bureau of Municipal Research. *What is "The Ward" Going to do with Toronto?*, Toronto, 1918.

13 *Jack Canuck*, 8 March 1912.

14 Toronto. Bureau of Municipal Research. *What is "The Ward" Going to do with Toronto?*

15 Robertson, "More Than Meets the Eye," p. 37, footnote 7.