

# *Canadian Archives: Reports and Responses*

## **The Symons Report\***

*As a measure of comparison with the Wilson Report and professional responses to its recommendations, Archivaria reprints the Symons Report recommendations of 1975 and the official Association of Canadian Archivists' responses to these as published in Occasional Paper No. 1 (November 1978).*

### LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 The Commission recommends that the archives and archivists of Canada undertake a programme to promote public awareness of the potential value of private papers and other archival material, and that the universities of Canada co-operate in this programme in various appropriate ways.
- 2 The Commission recommends that the preparation of a national guide to all known archival resources in Canada be immediately undertaken under the leadership of the Public Archives of Canada in co-operation with other federal, provincial and private archives. The Commission recommends that adequate funds to support this important project be made available by Federal and Provincial Governments.
- 3 The Commission recommends that all Canadian universities participate, in ways appropriate to their character and region, in the preparation of a comprehensive national guide to archival resources.
- 4 The Commission recommends the creation of a national network of regional archives.
- 5 The Commission recommends: that, in many cases, the regional archive be located within the local university and be administered by it; that every university give consideration to the possibility of undertaking such a role in the proposed national network of regional archives; and that, in all cases, close ties be established between the university and the regional archive.
- 6 The Commission recommends that every university assume certain minimal archive services relating to the records of the university itself and to those of the members of its staff, including basic data and research findings that might be of considerable value to future students and researchers.
- 7 The Commission recommends that the universities acquire archival material in microform from the major national and provincial archives, which will enable them to support a markedly wider variety of teaching and research and, at the same time, will assist in the process of archival diffusion within their particular regions.

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\*T.H.B. Symons, *To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies* (Ottawa, 1975), 4 vols.

- 8 The Commission recommends that the universities provide leadership toward the development of the archival resources of their regions and that they collect, process and maintain original archival materials that is of local or regional significance or associated with fields of special interest to the university or to certain of its faculty.
- 9 The Commission strongly recommends to Federal and Provincial Governments that archives be considered an essential element of a university's academic development and of its role as a public institution, and that adequate funding be provided specifically for this important facet of the university's work.
- 10 The Commission recommends that the university system, in co-operation and in consultation with leading Canadian archivists and archival institutions, take immediate steps to ensure the rapid establishment of graduate programmes to train professional archivists in both of our official languages. The minimum requirement is for two separate programmes, one at a major university of each language, or for one programme at a major bilingual university.
- 11 The Commission recommends that the university system explore the needs of Canadian archives and other institutions for trained professional conservators and take steps to meet the needs that exist for teaching and training in this field.
- 12 The Commission recommends that Canadian universities offer graduate students and senior undergraduates in any discipline a credit or non-credit course in archival procedures and methods.
- 13 The Commission recommends that Canadian universities take fuller advantage of opportunities to have archivists on campus as visiting lecturers or advisors in Canadian studies.
- 14 The Commission recommends to the Federal Government that it immediately undertake, in close co-operation with the Dominion Archivist, to draft a new and expanded legislative mandate for the Public Archives of Canada, to replace the act of 1912, and that such legislation be presented to Parliament at the earliest opportunity.
- 15 The Commission recommends to the Federal Government that planning now go forward for the expanded physical capacity that will be required to house the Public Archives of Canada.
- 16 The Commission recommends that responsible officials of the Public Archives and the National Library, and of the Department of the Secretary of State, seriously explore the possibility that the new space to be provided might house storage and administrative space for one or both of these institutions, making it then possible for some of the public rooms and research facilities of both to be retained under one roof.
- 17 The Commission recommends that the new building be located immediately adjacent to the present National Library building.
- 18 The Commission recommends that the diffusion programme of the Public Archives be continued and expanded.
- 19 The Commission recommends to the Federal Government that adequate funds be made available to the Public Archives to permit the appointment of liaison officers, whose duties would include assistance in the organization and description of holdings of small institutions and contact with universities and research centres.
- 20 The Commission commends the Public Archives for the preparation of the *Union List of Manuscripts in Canadian Repositories* and the *National Union Catalogue of Maps* and recommends to the Federal Government that adequate funds be made

available to complete the latter project as soon as possible and to prepare revised editions of both works at regular intervals, perhaps every four years.

- 21 The Commission recommends that appropriate federal and provincial parliamentary committees study the question of the ownership, disposition and preservation of records, documents and papers related to the public service of men and women prominent in Governmental affairs, and recommend procedures and guidelines that might apply in such matters.
- 22 The Commission recommends to the Federal Government that the National Film Archives now be established on a permanent basis, as a division of the Public Archives of Canada, and that it be formally granted exclusive authority under the Dominion Archivist for the selection, acquisition and conservation of film and television resources of enduring historical, cultural or social value to Canada, with authority to document and diffuse these resources for scholarly and cultural purposes.
- 23 The Commission recommends to the Federal Government that either the Public Archives or the Copyright Act be amended to require the deposit with the National Film Archives of at least one copy of every Canadian film, either produced or distributed in Canada.
- 24 The Commission recommends to the Federal Government that sufficient funds be made immediately available to the National Film Archives for the acquisition and preservation of those film documents in the greatest danger of being destroyed or damaged, in particular the 35 mm film existing only on cellulose nitrate base.
- 25 The Commission recommends that business corporations and organizations develop sound records management and archival programmes to be administered either internally or through the facilities of an established archival institution.
- 26 The Commission recommends that Canadian businesses avail themselves of the archival advisory services offered by the Business Records Committee of the Public Archives of Canada.
- 27 The Commission recommends to the Federal Government that a parliamentary committee or other appropriate committee of inquiry be asked to study problems relating to the disposition of the business records and papers of international corporations operating in Canada, and to propose appropriate legislative controls upon the export of such documents. The committee might also wish to consider the application of such controls to other international organizations operating in Canada, including labour unions, charitable and cultural associations, and the like.
- 28 The Commission recommends the formation of a Committee on the Development of Native Archival Resources with representatives from the archival, academic and native communities, as well as from appropriate Government agencies and private bodies. The task of the committee should be to survey the present state of Canadian archival resources for native studies, to assess future needs, and to develop proposals and procedures for the future development of native archives. Such a committee could perhaps be formed under the aegis of the new Society of Canadian Archivists, in full co-operation with the groups named above.
- 29 The Commission recommends to the Federal Government, to the Canada Council, and to the Social Science Research Council that they explore the possibility of providing adequate funds to support the preparation of a comprehensive index for at least one leading English-language daily newspaper in each region of Canada, and that similar funds should be made available to support the existing French-language index.

- 30 The Commission recommends to the Federal Government, and to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs in particular, that in the current revision of copyright legislation special consideration be given to the status of archival material and that the new act permit the most liberal use of unpublished documents, for non-commercial purposes.
- 31 As noted in its chapter on Canadian studies abroad, the Commission strongly supports the microfilm and retrieval programmes now being conducted abroad by the Public Archives of Canada of documentary and other archival materials that bear upon the history and affairs of this country. It recommends that substantially increased financial resources be made available to the Public Archives to enable it to broaden and accelerate its excellent work in this field.

## The Symons Report and Canadian Archives

The future quality of Canadian studies is directly linked to the conditions and resources of Canadian archives. It is not too much to say that Canadian Archives are the foundation of Canadian studies.\*

### ARCHIVES AND CANADIAN STUDIES

Professor Symons appropriately prefaces his chapter "Archives and Canadian Studies" with Sir Arthur Doughty's oft-quoted aphorism that a nation's cultural progress can be measured by the deference it pays to its recorded heritage, and goes on to recognize archives not simply as a precious national asset but as the *sine qua non* of Canadian Studies. The fact that Professor Symons chooses to restate this self-evident truth suggests that a surprising number of his academic colleagues may be unmindful of the fundamental importance of records to all scholarship.

Archives have been studied and reported on in other contexts, most notably in the report of the Massey Commission in the mid - 1950's; the Symons *Report* represents the first time that archives have been discussed in any report dealing with Canadian universities. Archivists throughout Canada are grateful to Professor Symons for calling attention to the community of interest that exists between those who use archival resources on the one hand and those who exercise stewardship over them on the other.

In the Canadian context, archives are both institutions and documents. As institutions, they house, preserve and make accessible our recorded heritage. Archives as documents are the records of activity, whether public or private, corporate or individual. In the words of Sir Hilary Jenkinson:

A document which may be said to belong to the class of Archives is one which *was drawn up or used in the course of an administrative or executive transaction (whether public or private) of which itself formed a part; and subsequently preserved in their own custody for their own information by the person or persons responsible for that transaction and their legitimate successors.*

To this Definition we may add a corollary. Archives were not drawn up in the interest or for the information of Posterity.†

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\*Symons, II, p. 69

†Hilary Jenkinson, *A Manual of Archives Administration* (London: 1937), p. 11.

Thus Jenkinson defined a direct relationship between organizations or individuals and the records of their activities. The documents which make up archives were created initially to serve administrative ends, and accrued naturally over a period of time. Their potential usefulness as cultural resources was rarely a factor in their creation.

The Symons *Report* conveys quite a different sense of archives as materials that can be collected according to a subject or regional specialization, or be divided in terms of theme and format. This is akin to the librarian's conceptual framework of building collections, pulling together discrete items and organizing them according to a standard classification of human knowledge.

While Professor Symons' approach is inappropriate for archives, he has expressed the scholar's valid concern that the widest possible range of documentary materials be preserved for future research. He has also identified some basic problems in the Canadian archival programmes, including low or negative public awareness, inadequate reference tools, and the lack of a suitable framework for future archival development. The *Report's* solutions are a public awareness programme, the development of a national guide to archival resources and the creation of a national network of regional archives based in the university system.

We agree with Professor Symons that public awareness of archives must be broadened. Archives as repositories have existed far too long in the shadow of other more easily identified document-collecting agencies and archivists as document specialists in the shadow of other more familiar curatorial professions. Archives and archivists will have to generate much of this publicity themselves, but they will continue to need support from bodies such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Further development and rationalization of the Canadian archival network is required to fulfill the record-keeping needs of Canadians. In gearing his *Report* to the university community, Professor Symons has recommended that the universities play a pivotal role in this rationalization. In responding to the *Report*, the Association of Canadian Archivists wishes to emphasize the importance of proper archival administration to all members of the community, including the universities. In order to present our views as clearly as possible our remarks are organized with the following questions in mind:

1. What is the nature of archival records?
2. Who are the present and possible future sponsors of archival programs, and what are their motives?
3. Who has custody of archival records?
4. What systems or networks are possible and necessary for the future?

#### THE NATURE OF ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

The Symons *Report* mentions most types of records that may be made and preserved: textual (manuscripts, typescripts); graphic (pictures, maps, plans, silent film); sound (audio tape, discs, punch tape); and the various combinations that have been developed (video tape, sound film and microfilm). However, the *Report* usually refers to records in contexts which divorce them from their roots. They are seen as grist for scholarly research, subject to collections development, which, as the *Report* uses the term, is the library-oriented assembly of materials for scholarly use, not the accretion of archival materials resulting from effective records administration.

No complete understanding of archives is possible without an appreciation of what constitutes archival material. Archives are chiefly the non-current substantive records of the institutions or individuals they document. Their basic nature is that they are func-

tional; they result from the activities of individuals acting collectively pursuant to certain powers with which they have been invested, or on their own behalf as individuals. As Professor Symons noted, these records may take a variety of forms; they all share a common definition as archives.

For the archivist, the functional integrity of records has precedence over the form they take. Archivists regard with suspicion repositories masquerading under the name of 'archives' which concentrate on the form rather than the substance of archives as records. Although various forms of records present peculiar problems of storage and handling, archival principle should not be overturned by separating records from their functional roots.

Administrative records in all formats are created in the first instance to serve a specific purpose. Once that purpose has been accomplished, they may have a secondary value as reference material, and later, historical source material. Their usefulness is enhanced if the relationship to the original transaction remains apparent. The obvious way of assuring this association is to identify the record with the office where it originated and to maintain the original administrative order of the documents. This respect for provenance and the original order retains important evidential value for legal, administrative and historical purposes.

Public records are kept even after they no longer have any administrative value to civil servants or to politicians. In the same way, records kept by business and other organizations ensure the continuity of their respective operations, and in the process reveal much about the economic, political, social, cultural and intellectual history of the country. As do governments and organizations, individuals also create records. Although these are not specifically "administrative" or "official" records, they resemble them strongly, in that they arise in the course of a variety of personal activities. They are no less organic accretions than corporate, public or private records. Like corporate records, they possess functional integrity. Springing as they do from a single identified source, they too are amenable to treatment according to principles of provenance and respect for the original order.

Despite these similarities, individuals seldom establish their own archives. Nor, perhaps, should they do so, unless they and their descendants are willing to provide the records with the care they require. It is more frequent and common, and more desirable, to encourage an individual to deposit his records in an existing archives. Such a repository might be public or private. Indeed, where possible, the functional records of an organization should be augmented by the private records of the individuals associated with that organization. For the same reason, both the private and public records of public officials should be deposited in the public archives of the government the officials served. Because there are few functional archives, personal records, even more than public or corporate records, have suffered from disfunctional, thematic approaches. Nonetheless, a unit of personal records should never be broken up or dispersed, regardless of the number of activities represented. It possesses an internal integrity revolving around the life of its creator.

#### SPONSORS AND MOTIVES

The Symons *Report* deals extensively with the archival institutions that have been most familiar to Canadian scholars in the past, and rarely emphasizes archives for other than scholarly purposes. Within the framework created by the Commission's goal of increased self-knowledge, concerns are expressed, and roles created, for three types of archives: national, university and regional. In the Commission's view these archives can promote self-knowledge by increasing public awareness of their importance, by participating in the creation of a national guide to archival resources, and by developing a national network of regional archives to respond to public and scholarly need.

The *Report* preoccupied with the role of the Government of Canada through the Public Archives, and with the universities' roles as centres of regional archives. The *Report* ignores the mandate of provincial archives as sponsors of archival activity, and neglects municipal archives. Even the Universities, with few exceptions, are given little credit for their initiatives. The *Report* encourages business, universities, ethnic communities and native peoples to show more concern for their records. No mention is made of the accomplishments of religious organizations in preserving their records. Altogether the *Report* seems unaware of the variety of sponsoring bodies as reflected in the Association of Canadian Archivists' *Directory of Canadian Archival Repositories* (1977), which lists 294 sponsors from all sectors of society.

Just as the actual and potential sponsors of archives are more numerous and varied than the Symons *Report* indicates, so too are the motives for supporting archival activity. The *Report* does not deal with other than cultural motives for archives.

The archival role of the federal and provincial governments has always had a dual nature. Public archives have preserved both the administrative records of the state and the private records of its citizens, whether individual or corporate. This "total archives" concept has led to public repositories with diverse holdings. Although the acquisition of material was prompted initially by cultural considerations, the establishment of records management programmes has resulted in recent years in the preservation of large volumes of government records. This emphasis on preserving the records of the sponsoring organization has transformed what were essentially cultural agencies into functional archives. However, the situation is far from satisfying. Despite the technical revolution and the development of cost-saving records management programmes, many Canadian governments, particularly at the local level, still do not provide for the responsible handling and preservation of significant records. Existing government archives have also been seriously underfunded, with the result that valuable government records have been destroyed or dispersed. It is important that the body creating records maintains continuous custody of them, preferably by sponsoring fully functional records management/archives programmes. A break in custody often results in sporadic series of records, poor physical and intellectual controls and alienation of public control over the records of public business. In today's world, the principal motive for government archives should be to fulfill the obligation to be accountable to and protect the interest of the people governed.

Though cultural considerations were once valid enough reasons for some governments and other publicly-supported bodies to establish archives, other reasoning is needed to justify corporate archives, such as the desirability of providing legal, fiscal and administrative memories of past activity, the usefulness of archival materials in advertising and public relations and the need to ensure that the achievements of the private sector are recorded. But incentives, such as tax rebates or employment assistance schemes, might also be instituted to encourage corporate bodies to invest in ongoing archival programmes.

Canadian universities have made significant contributions to the preparation of our documentary heritage, but university archival activity has largely been a matter of collecting special archives to support teaching or research programmes, while the institution's own records have often been neglected. Professor Symons emphasizes that every university should establish an archives for its own records. As publicly funded institutions, universities should be obliged to establish functional archives to house and make available both administrative records and private papers of faculty and staff. Governments should be prepared to make appropriate funding available to support such activities. Those universities that have acquired private, non-university records should ensure that such records are made available at convenient times to the general public.

## THE CUSTODIANS OF ARCHIVES

Since Canadian studies depend on archives, the quality of these studies is tied directly to the expertise and professionalism of those who ensure the continuing preservation of Canadian records. The diversity of repositories which acquire archives is matched by the variety of persons who have custody of archival materials.

Their qualifications vary widely, from the fully professional to the amateur. It is only within the major archives that any consistency of approach to qualifications and employment standards of archivists has been applied. There, an archivist can be relatively certain of the sponsor's long-term commitment to archival activity, and thus be assured of purposeful employment, a regular salary, good working conditions and opportunities for continued professional development. Outside these institutions, archivists are viewed as clerks, are poorly paid in relation to their colleagues in government archives, and have little opportunity to apply archival principles to the records in their custody.

Most Canadian archivists received their first training from the introductory courses given by the Public Archives of Canada and the former Archives Section of the Canadian Historical Association. Although such courses are useful and should continue, they will never be adequate for the comprehensive education of archivists. Conducted on an in-house basis, they can perform a practical function of importance to all archivists.

Workshops and seminars can provide continuing education, as they are a useful way of keeping abreast of new developments and of upgrading qualifications in special areas. The major archives could sponsor week-long seminars on various subjects such as management techniques, budgeting, public relations with funding agencies, or the design and construction of archives buildings. Regional associations of archivists could sponsor practical workshops dealing with such matters as acquiring, processing and servicing records. In cooperation with local or provincial archives, or the schools of continuing education of the local university or community college, the regional associations could also sponsor special workshops dealing with religious, business, university or ethnic archives. They could also co-operate with the local or regional branches of museums and historical societies to offer joint seminars on the exhibition or conservation of heritage materials. The opportunities are immense, but there is a long way to go before the ideal situation is attained and proper education provides archivists with the means to be recognized as professionals.

The need for a graduate level program of archival studies is evident. Any program will have to draw on the archival profession's unique body of knowledge and skills, incorporate the relevant contributions from the related fields of library and information-science, computer systems, management and public administration, law, and other academic disciplines; and be directed by knowledgeable and experienced archivists. Conservators are desperately needed to insure preservation of archives already stored in our repositories. The demand for conservation measures will only grow and can hardly be met until education of specialists in archival conservation is provided by our universities.

As well as indicating the need for universities to educate archivists, the Symons *Report* points to other teaching areas where the university can promote archival awareness. Undergraduates should be made familiar with the use of archives and archival material and the importance of good record keeping practice should be impressed on persons enrolled in the various professional faculties, which would foster an awareness of the importance and uses of archives. Such courses should become integral parts of the academic program of every Canadian university.



## SYSTEMS AND NETWORKS

The Symons *Report* proposes a national network of regional archives located within universities, and emphasizes the need for an improved system of describing archival sources to inform researchers of the location of significant records. In addition to these two major recommendations, the *Report* makes several other proposals to develop archival programmes on a national level for the collection of film and video tape, the diffusion of federal archives, the description of small institutions' holdings, the collection of archives of native peoples and the creation of a comprehensive index to at least one newspaper from each region of the country.

All these recommendations derive from the *Report's* concern for resources for Canadian studies rather than from a consideration of the proper way to go about the administration of archives. As this paper has already stressed, sound development of archives should be based whenever possible in an institutional setting where valuable records are created. In the long run, efforts directed towards establishing institutionally-based programmes will encourage the awareness and coordination of archives that Professor Symons hopes to see come about.

There is an irony in proposing a pivotal role for universities as the location of regional archives when our universities have had a poor record in caring for their own archives. Moreover, as the *Report* recognizes, there is a role for universities in the education of custodians and in spreading awareness of the value and uses of archives. Systems and networks will depend on sound identification, organization and preservation of records, which can only come from a well-defined and consistently applied methodology. In short, only archives run by knowledgeable custodians capable of instituting standard procedures will ultimately bring us to our goal of linking repositories and their holdings in co-operative networks and systems.

Any vision of the future will include a network of repositories, but it is doubtful whether such a network can or should be imposed in a uniform way in every region of the country. Our federal, provincial and municipal governments all have a role to play in financing and co-ordinating systems and networks, but in every case there ought to be emphasis on the encouragement of archival programmes on the part of public and private agencies responsible for the creation of records having archival value. All the extension and rationalization of facilities, the upgrading of custodial skills and development of networks discussed in the *Report* and in this paper will require an increased financial commitment from Canadians before sufficient resources are available to provide archives services to all parts of the country.

A network of archives firmly founded on the principles of modern archives administration should have little difficulty developing systems to link description of source materials in union lists, inventories and guides. Much work remains to be done to bring the benefits of automatic data processing to archives, but improvements in the description of archives must first flow from sound administration at the institutional level. It is a matter of working from the bottom up rather than from the top down.

## CONCLUSION

The Symons *Report* is a landmark in Canadian history, challenging universities and all Canadians to take notice of themselves. Archives are the record of our activities as a country, the basis for studying our past, understanding our present and planning our future. The Association of Canadian Archivists, together with other associations of archivists, is committed to exploring and articulating Canadian archival requirements. With the help of people like Professor Symons who recognize and publicize the significance of archives, we can ensure Canadians an even greater opportunity to learn about themselves.