

Anyone who grew up in Ontario will certainly have a strong sense of nostalgia when looking through this beautiful book, and anyone who has ever worked for an elected or appointed board will certainly enjoy a few chuckles when reading it. But *The Best Gift* is obviously more than an illustrated romp though an interesting aspect of Ontario library history. It is a solid piece of scholarship which warrants attention and emulation. It is to be hoped that this book will prove to be a seminal work. There is clearly a need for other investigations of the effects of the Carnegie grant programme on small town politics and culture, expressed in the same intelligent, intelligible, and confident style.

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**Canadian Archives in 1982: Survey of the Heritage Institutions.** PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF CANADA, Planning and Programme Evaluation. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1985. v, 18 p. ISBN 0-662-53659-2.

In 1982, Statistics Canada undertook a survey of heritage institutions in Canada. This booklet contains some material from the survey which pertains to archives. In their foreword, Françoise Houle and William Smith claim that although the material in this report was aggregated for the senior management at the Public Archives, its publication would be helpful to others involved in archival work. This study, whose unstated purpose appears to be to illustrate that archives are underfunded in comparison to other heritage institutions attempts to draw very broad comparisons from often scantily explained statistics gathered from an extremely heterogeneous population.

It would, no doubt, be very useful for all who work in archives to have some idea of the range of archival institutions in Canada, the services they provide, the facilities within which they are located, and the funding they receive or generate. It is questionable, however, to attempt to learn much of value by comparing archives to all other heritage institutions (defined for the purposes of this number-gathering mission as "those publicly and privately owned institutions and parks whose purpose is to acquire, preserve, study, interpret and make accessible to the public, for its instruction and enjoyment, objects, specimens, documents, buildings and land areas of educational and cultural value.") The problems with using such highly aggregated data are many. For example, in comparing staff sizes across heritage institutions, the point is made that while heritage institutions in general have an average staff size of twenty-nine people, archives, including the PAC, average twelve; excluding the PAC, the average archival staff would be five. Obviously, the average size of staff for all heritage institutions would also diminish significantly if the employees of the National Gallery, all National Museums, and all Parks Canada Historic Sites and Park employees were excluded from the total. What, then, is the point of this comparison? The authors of the report are on much safer ground, statistically as well as intuitively, when they inform us that archives provide more reprography services to their clientele than any other kind of heritage institution surveyed.

Even in using statistics to compare only archival institutions, the report sometimes provides poorly explained data. A breakdown of archives by mandate (provincial, municipal, religious, corporate, and so on) purports to provide figures on average annual wages in the institutions. Are these numbers generated from both full and part time employees' wage figures? Do the archives used in the survey of annual wages include

archives which are not open year-round or on a five-day-a-week basis? Not only is it misleading to compare archives to all other heritage institutions, it is also rather pointless to generate crude averages, as this report sometimes does, to describe an archival community which encompasses institutions as large as the PAC and as small as local archives which might be staffed by volunteers and open only one or two days a week.

The nine tables in the report do attempt in some cases to group archives into categories based on a variety of criteria. Perhaps the most meaningful of these tables are the last two. One illustrates the types of services provided by archives across the country and the types of programmes pursued. As would be expected, most archives provide for public research activities and many provide reprography services. The final table in the publication illustrates that when all Canadian archives are viewed together, the majority operate on annual budgets of less than \$20,000. It would seem that much of what is presented in this report tends to reinforce general impressions of archives in Canada. It might be most useful at this stage if a more textured and precise analysis of some basic data could be undertaken. After all, is it meaningful to compare the budget or service provided by a religious archives to those of a regional or municipal archives? It might make more sense to compare archives within classes rather than across classes, as long as the confidentiality of the specific archives analysed could be insured. Such an exercise would, of course, require time and money. The document at hand was generated for a specific planning exercise at the Public Archives. It is perhaps unreasonable to expect such a degree of detail here, although the authors of the report hope to undertake a more comprehensive analysis of the data gathered by Statistics Canada for publication at some future date. It does nonetheless lead one to question the initial purpose of the publication of this report. How useful is the information contained to the archival community at large?

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**Guide to the Smithsonian Archives. ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.** Number 4. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983. xxxiv, 431 p.

This is the third edition of a guide which first came out in 1978. It covers two distinct types of holdings: the records of the Smithsonian Institution itself and the personal papers of Smithsonian administrators and curators. The first part provides a fairly detailed description of the record units of the Smithsonian Institution including those of the Board of Regents, Office of the Secretary, other administrative bodies, the various national museums (Natural History, History and Technology, and American Art) along with each of their subdivisions, and the smaller bodies associated with the Smithsonian. Each unit is described by an inventory giving a brief administrative history, the main function of the particular unit, a very short list of major sub-series in the record unit, a brief description of the finding aids available, and any special conditions such as access restrictions or microfilm copies. The *Guide* also has a useful history of each subdivision or record unit. Any large government organization such as the Smithsonian, which has existed since 1846, has undergone numerous administrative changes which are difficult to retrace. This guide helps to make sense of these continual changes.