

Introduction

Towards an Understanding of the Archival Discipline in Québec¹

Lorraine Gadoury, *Archivaria*'s French-language Editor, first proposed a special issue of the journal at the meeting of the Editorial Board held in Winnipeg in June 2001. The aim was to offer English-language readers a glimpse into Québec's French-language archival literature by translating a selection of the finest articles published over the last few years. In February 2002, a committee consisting of Lorraine Gadoury, representing *Archivaria*, Robert Nahué, representing the Association des archivistes du Québec (AAQ), and Denise Rioux, representing the journal *Archives*, began the task of choosing articles.

Committee members first set the time frame, establishing 1992 to 2002 as the period of their focus. They then proceeded to review the publications where noteworthy articles in archival science had appeared, including the journal *Archives*, and the proceedings from both the AAQ's annual conference and the seminars hosted by the Groupe interdisciplinaire de recherche en archivistique (GIRA). The most intriguing articles identified in this preliminary assessment were then discussed at a series of committee meetings, where members commented on each text. It was decided not to try to identify articles addressing the various archival functions; rather, selection should be based on the intrinsic quality of an article.

In January 2003 a preliminary list of sixteen articles was presented to Candace Loewen and Robert McIntosh, a former and future general editor of *Archivaria*, to make the final selection for publication. They looked for the texts they considered to be most relevant to anglophone readers in light of articles previously published in *Archivaria*. A total of eight were selected.

1 We would like to thank Normand Charbonneau, Robert McIntosh, and Yuri Shimpó for their insightful comments. Note on translation: the term "l'archivistique" is commonly encountered in the archival literature in French. There is no equivalent term in English. It has been translated variously throughout this special issue as the archival discipline (the expression used here), archival science, the archival profession, or archival practices, depending on the context.

These texts, originally published in Québec between 1994 and 2001, are re-published here in English translation.

The Distinctiveness of the Archival Discipline in Québec

Archival science in Québec, although relatively young, has rapidly evolved from a field of practice to an autonomous profession, distancing itself from its earlier status as an auxiliary field of history. Over several decades, it has developed a scholarly body of literature (detailing its foundations, principles, and rules) and its own methods and practices. The distinctiveness of the archival profession in Québec arises from its position at the crossroads of traditional European practices based on the concept of the fonds and respect des fonds, and North American methods of records management. Its broad vision encompasses the document life cycle, integrating the concepts, methods, standards, and practices of traditional archival science with those of records management to create a single comprehensive profession. This approach, which sets the archival discipline apart from its North American and European counterparts, has the advantage of “merging into a single profession both the administrative and scholarly uses of records.”²

Some archivists have recently explained the essential features of the archival discipline in Québec by highlighting the notion of an integrated approach to records:

This ensures the uniformity and continuity of activities within a framework of legislation, policy and standards for the management of records. This global approach aims to meet three essential objectives:

- to ensure uniformity and continuity of the archivist’s activities regarding an organization’s documents in respecting the principle of the life cycle of a record and the concepts of primary and secondary value;
- to ensure records management and archival activities are undertaken within an organization’s framework of legislation, policy and standards for the management of records; and
- to integrate primary and secondary values into a broader definition of records.³

This broad definition of records encompasses “all documents, regardless of age, type of medium (including machine-readable and computerized docu-

2 Michel Champagne and Denys Chouinard, *Le traitement d’un fonds d’archives: ses documents historiques* (La Pocatière, 1987), p. 4. Note on translation: the term “archives” in French encompasses current, semi-active, and historical records. It has generally been translated in this special issue as “records” – unless the context appears to indicate the use of “archives” for the English translation.

3 Jean-Yves Rousseau, Carol Couture, and contributors, *Les fondements de la discipline archivistique* (Sainte-Foy, 1994), pp. 50–51.

ments), or value (administrative, legal, financial, evidential), containing recorded information (e.g., information that is created, sent, or received within the context of corporate or individual activities). The archival discipline unites the principles, standards, and techniques governing archival and records management functions (e.g., creation, appraisal, accessioning, classification, description, accessibility, preservation)."⁴

A similar definition of the term “records” is found in *Loi Québec’s sur les archives*. Importantly, this definition encompasses the comprehensive vision of the profession and of the discipline endorsed by the professional members of the Association des archivistes du Québec and reflected in the university curricula used to educate these professionals. The AAQ has a membership of approximately 600 professionals in the field of recorded information. It unites records managers with archivists, all of whom work with active, semi-active, or historical records. In many organizations, a single team of professionals is responsible for documents throughout their life cycle.

Archival education at universities in Québec reflects this total archives concept at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Undergraduate certificates have been granted since the early 1980s at the Université de Montréal’s École de bibliothéconomie et des sciences de l’information (EBSI) (from 1983), at the Université du Québec à Montréal (from 1983), and at Université Laval (from 1985–1986). Masters programs are offered at EBSI (from 1983) and Laval (from 1988).⁵ A doctoral program in information science has been offered by EBSI since 1997. Recently, both EBSI and the Université du Québec à Rimouski (Lévis campus) have added a digital information management certificate.

Québec archival science has another distinct feature: the *Loi sur les archives* confers a major role to the Archives nationales du Québec (ANQ) in the management of the life cycle of documents originating from government departments and agencies. In fact, public sector bodies (central government departments and agencies) and para-governmental organisms (notably education, health and social services, and municipalities) are required by the legislation to create retention schedules so as to manage their records and plan the transfer of documents to those authorities responsible for the preservation of historical documents. From its inception the ANQ has worked to create and develop basic retention schedules for all public and para-public bodies in cooperation with representatives from these sectors. These document management tools establish retention periods for documents common to all organiza-

4 Ibid., p. 2. Note on translation: in this special issue the commonly used expression “information organique et consignée” has been translated as “recorded information.” Strictly speaking, the meaning of the term is more limited in French, meaning “recorded information that is created, sent, or received within the context of corporate or individual activities.”

5 Louise Gagnon-Arguin, *L’archivistique : son histoire ses acteurs depuis 1960* (Sainte-Foy, 1992), pp. 181–83.

tions in a sector or sub-sector and must be approved by the ANQ. They are the cornerstone used by individual organizations to develop their own retention schedules. Organizations are forbidden to destroy any document without the express consent and authorization of the ANQ; similarly, no document can be destroyed in the absence of a retention schedule approved by the ANQ.

These strict regulations ensure that the Archives nationales du Québec play a proactive role in the management of public sector documents, from the beginning of the life cycle of recorded information. The ANQ has a direct influence on the management of active and semi-active public records as the mandated authority for the preservation of the nation's memory. The ANQ's mission is to oversee the life cycle of document management to ensure that the best records are accessioned and that their acquisition follows a pre-established schedule for permanent preservation. The Québec system is unique in its decentralization: archival records are preserved in the region where they were created. A network of ANQ archives centres, accredited private archives centres, and regional coordination councils constitute the system.

How does the archival profession in Québec compare to its anglophone North American and French counterparts? First, the total archives concept is not universally accepted by our North American colleagues. Outside of Québec, the concepts of fonds and respect des fonds are not essential elements in the management of recorded information by individuals or corporate bodies. While the theory of the life cycle of a record is shared by both North American records managers and archivists, these two professions remain distinct, each with their own preferred realm of either document or archives management. Records managers are concerned with the management of active and semi-active records and archivists with the management of historical records. Both professions have nonetheless formed close ties, especially with respect to the disposition of active records. But archivists working at national or provincial/territorial archives often only exercise an advisory function with document creators. With respect to the use of records, links exist between business needs and research use, but they remain separate objectives, managed by distinct groups of professionals.

Differences between the archival discipline in Québec and in France are particularly evident in the role undertaken by French archivists in the management cycle of recorded information. Although the term "archives" is recognized under French law (*Loi sur les archives*, 3 January 1979), its practical application tends to address only records to be preserved permanently. The theory of the document life cycle is recognized but the manner of its implementation varies. The management of active and semi-active records is distinct from the management of historical records: they are complementary rather than continuous steps. Consequently archivists are responsible only for historical documents, those which have lost their primary value.

Although the job title "records manager" does not exist in France, there are

concerted efforts made to ensure that information is managed prior to the archival (inactive) stage in the life of a record. In France, “on-loan archivists” are sent from the Archives nationales to government departments and agencies. Their work focuses on the disposition of active records. Responsibility for the management of active and semi-active records lies solely with the departments and agencies.

A legal framework, established by the 1979 legislation and an Order in Council passed on 3 December 1979, defines the mandate of the Archives nationales. The regulations constitute the cornerstone of a co-operative effort between the public archival services and document creators and describe the ways in which agreements are established between the two.⁶ Although a relevant legal framework exists, its practical application has not reached the majority of departments and agencies; in fact, only fifteen used the agreements in 2004.⁷

Experienced French archivists report that archivists on loan to departments and agencies are mainly assigned the task of consultant.⁸ It appears that a comprehensive records management policy for active records, applied across all French government departments and agencies, does not exist. Policies or guidelines for information creation are virtually absent, although the involvement of on-loan archivists seems to be increasing within government departments and agencies in France.

We hope that this brief overview of its basic elements has allowed the reader to begin to see the distinguishing features of the archival discipline in Québec. These characteristics are responsible for the distinctiveness of the Québec system vis-à-vis its anglophone North American and French counterparts.

Archival Publications in Québec

Research in the archival discipline in Québec is different from English Canada in that it is often communicated through the publication of books. We introduce very briefly here the most important texts published in Québec since the 1980s.

Under the direction of Carol Couture and Jean-Yves Rousseau, with contributions from Jacques Ducharme, Marlène Gagnon, and Denise Pélissier, the book entitled *Les archives au XX^e siècle: une réponse aux besoins de l'administration et de la recherche* (Montréal, 1982) focussed on the life cycle of

6 Report of Mr. Guy Braibant, *Les archives en France* (Paris, 1996), p. 20; available at <<http://les.rapports.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/BRP/964093000/0000.pdf>>.

7 “Le Ministère, la Mission des Archives nationales – Présentation.” Available at: <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/rubriques/c/c2_le_ministere/c230_man/Archives_Nationales_Nationales-Presentation>.

8 Jean Favier, ed., *La pratique archivistique française* (Paris, 1993), p. 239.

records from creation to their use in research. This work was translated into English and published in 1988 under the title *The Life of a Document. A Global Approach to Archives and Records Management* (it was also published in Spanish the same year).

Les instruments de recherche pour les archives (La Pocatière, 1984), written by Louis Cardinal, Victorin Chabot, Jacques Ducharme, Gilles Janson and Georges Lapointe, soon followed. The authors aimed to describe every manner of finding aid, at all levels (archival repository, fonds, etc.), for units such as files, reels, registers, disks, or items, as well as guides and indexes. Topics included general principles for planning, defining, and describing records, with examples of finding aids. *Le traitement d'un fonds d'archives. Ses documents historiques* (La Pocatière, 1987), written by Michel Champagne and Denys Chouinard, described the procedures used to select, arrange, describe, and index archives. In light of the adoption of the *Rules for Archival Description* (RAD) and the strides made in computer science, these two books are somewhat dated. Their publication, however, marked an important milestone for archival science in Québec at the time. In his preface to *Le traitement d'un fonds d'archives*, Jacques Ducharme stated that: "the archival discipline has long been relegated to the role of an auxiliary branch of history ... it has now been emancipated from its mother discipline and progressed from a minor field of study to an autonomous discipline."⁹

Since the early 1990s there has been a considerable increase in publications on the subject of the archival discipline in Québec. The majority have been written by noted archival professionals.

In 1992, a year marked by the XII International Congress on Archives in Montreal and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Association des archivistes du Québec, two very important texts appeared. First, the journal *Archives* published a special issue entitled *L'expérience québécoise*, featuring fourteen articles reflecting the archival landscape in Québec, addressing subjects such as the history of the AAQ, of the ANQ, and of archival legislation; archival training; and the state of archives within government, religious, and educational institutions, municipalities, hospitals, private agencies, and historical societies. The issue included the new AAQ Code of Ethics, which it was felt would "no doubt represent an additional cohesive element for members of the Association and will contribute to enhancing the professional image of the AAQ."¹⁰

L'archivistique. Son histoire, ses acteurs depuis 1960 (Sainte-Foy, 1992) was the second major text of that year. Written by Louise Gagnon-Arguin, it traces the evolution of the discipline within its political, social, and cultural contexts as well as the institutions shaping the years 1960 to 1988. The author

9 Champagne and Chouinard, *Le traitement d'un fonds d'archives*, p. 3.

10 *Archives* 24, nos. 1–2 (Summer-Fall 1992), p. 3.

examines the archival profession with an emphasis on the AAQ, its leadership, and its publications. Finally, the author looks at archival education and research and considers the future of the discipline. She concludes that the profession of archivist and the scholarly discipline both exhibited at that time – around 1990 – evident signs of development: public recognition, a clear mission, and a sense of attachment to professional association. Gagnon-Arguin believed there remained room for improvement in areas such as education, a code of ethics, and the development of professional standards.

*La normalisation en archivistique. Un pas de plus dans l'évolution d'une discipline (Mélanges Jacques-Ducharme)*¹¹ also appeared in 1992 as an anthology of texts. The book was a collaborative work in recognition of Jacques Ducharme and described the most recent developments in standards, crucial in the evolution of the profession at that time.

The increasing specialization of the archival discipline in Québec was reflected in numerous publications after 1990. One such publication is the text entitled *La gestion des archives informatiques*.¹² The book presents a synopsis of the study commissioned by Québec universities, conducted by archivists and computer scientists. The object of the study was to establish methods for the management of electronic documents. A series of recommendations were proposed in three main areas: arrangement and retrieval of documents, the lifespan and identification of data of permanent value, and physical preservation standards for electronic documents found in various media.

Une histoire de l'archivistique, by Paul Delsalle, published in 1998, takes as its focus the origin and evolution of the discipline worldwide, from its beginnings to the twentieth century. James M. Turner's *Images en mouvement. Stockage. Repérage. Indexation* (Sainte-Foy, 1998) proposes a method to improve the intellectual control of audio-visual documents (film, videos, television programs, computer-generated images) so as to help users retrieve information.

Louise Gagnon-Arguin, in collaboration with Hélène Vien, offers readers a comprehensive study of the eighty most important documents produced and used in administration. *Typologie des documents des organisations. De la création à la conservation* groups documents into seven categories: constitutional, meeting, management, human resources and employee relations, communication, accounting and financial, and legal. This book will surely interest document producers and users, as the authors describe all types of documents, regardless of media. The authors are concerned principally with "the form that characterizes these documents and provides them with their individuality."¹³ The text is important to the study of contemporary diplomatics and contains

11 Anthology published under the direction of Carol Couture (Québec, 1992).

12 Jean-Yves Rousseau, ed., *Conférence des recteurs et des principaux des universités du Québec* (Québec, 1994).

13 Louise Gagnon-Arguin and Hélène Vien, *Typologie des documents des organisations* (Sainte-Foy, 1998), p. 1.

an analytical table for each type of document, in which the context, content, and preservation of each record is described.

Under the direction of Normand Charbonneau and Mario Robert, the publication *La gestion des archives photographiques* (Sainte-Foy, 2001) outlines the history of photography and basic photographic techniques. Numerous contributors pay particular attention to the North American and Québécois contexts of photography. The authors review the various archival functions as they apply to this medium: acquisition, monetary appraisal, arrangement, selection, description, indexing. They then proceed to tackle the issue of preservation and concentrate their research on outreach and users. The book is enriched by numerous examples and case studies.

La gestion d'un centre d'archives. Mélanges en l'honneur de Robert Garon (Sainte-Foy, 2003) was published recently. Edited by Louise Gagnon-Arguin and Jacques Grimard, the book outlines principles and frameworks for managing an archive. It then proceeds to study the issues of resources and operations. A third section focuses on the users of archives: a manager, an historian, and three administrators explain their needs. The final section describes management challenges in various archives: the Archives nationales du Québec, university archives, the archives of the City of Montréal, and religious archives.

Two major comprehensive texts have been published by archival scholars. They offer an overview of contemporary archival science and a guide to students and archival professionals. The first, *Les fondements de la discipline archivistique* (Sainte-Foy, 1994), written by Jean-Yves Rousseau, Carol Couture, and other contributors, examines the theoretical aspects of the profession. In the introduction, the authors note that social circumstances play a major role in the evolution of the archival discipline and profession. The volume of information increases exponentially on an increasingly diversified range of media. This rapid change results in a heightened need for professionals who can propose and implement comprehensive solutions for the management of this information in all its dimensions.

The first section of the text deals with the place of the archival discipline in society: its origins, evolution, and role today. The second section looks at principles and foundations: respect des fonds and the archival fonds itself, the life cycle of documents, the levels of description (series, units such as files, reels, registers, disks, etc., and items), and legislation. The third section tackles the issue of the archival context, with particular emphasis on the characteristics of North American archives, the types of archival media, and archival training. A detailed bibliography is included in the text. While this book focuses on the origins of the discipline, it clearly also seeks both to define the archival discipline in Québec and the place occupied by the archivist. The authors conclude that the archivist holds an important place in modern society, even though he/she must continue to advocate so as to solidify his/her knowledge and accep-

tance. "Everything culminates in one objective: to occupy a recognized and credible place in society."¹⁴

Les fonctions de l'archivistique contemporaine (Sainte-Foy, 1999), written by Carol Couture with other contributors, is a practical text. Its objective is to describe the archival functions "which the archivist can perform appropriately in all types of environments and in all institutions, be they large or small, public or private."¹⁵ Numerous individuals contribute to this book. In the introduction, Couture addresses archival management policy. The following eight chapters examine archival functions in detail: needs analysis, information creation (and the role of the archivist), appraisal (with special emphasis on the development and use of retention schedules), growth (in other words, acquisition), arrangement, description and indexing, outreach, and finally preservation. A detailed bibliography is included in the book.

The evolution of the archival discipline has been rapid. The authors of *Les fonctions de l'archivistique contemporaine* believe that "increasingly detailed and applied research, quality scholarly texts, an increase in university training, and a professional environment in a state of constant evolution," as well as the accelerated development of technology, have propelled archival science into a full-fledged, autonomous discipline, one "essential to society."¹⁶

The majority of texts discussed above adopt a distinctive perspective, based on a global integrated approach to the archival discipline. Conversely, Michel Roberge subscribes to traditional North American practices in records management which concentrate on the management of active and semi-active records. Roberge favours an approach focussing on business needs rather than a total and integrated perspective that takes into account the needs of managers as well as those of researchers, and that encompasses the entire life cycle of documents.¹⁷

The texts published to date mark the development and evolution of the discipline and reflect the vitality of archival research in Québec, but they represent only the tip of the iceberg. University research findings are also contributing to the discipline's development. Doctoral dissertations addressing archival topics are undertaken within a variety of university programs. Some of the more important unpublished doctoral dissertations include: Sylvain Sénécal, *La lecture et la description archivistique du document* (Sémiologie, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1997), Jean-Yves Rousseau, *Étude descrip-*

14 Rousseau, Couture, and contributors, *Les fondements de la discipline archivistique*, p. 278.

15 Carol Couture and contributors, *Les fonctions de l'archivistique contemporaine* (Sainte-Foy, 1999), p. xii.

16 Ibid., pp. 471–72.

17 Michel Roberge, *La gestion des documents administratifs* (La Pocatière, 1983); *La gestion de l'information administrative* (Québec, 1992); *L'essentiel de la gestion documentaire* (Québec, 2002).

tive de la contribution du stage à la formation professionnelle initiale des archivistes au Québec de 1983 à 1994 (Didactique, Université de Montréal, 1997), Robert Nahuet, *La vision minimaliste du principe de respect des fonds, le cas des archives de l'Université Laval* (History, Université Laval, 1996), and more recently, Christine Dufour, *Étude du rôle des professionnels de l'information dans les systèmes d'information Web du Gouvernement fédéral canadien* (Information Sciences, EBSI, Université de Montréal, 2004).

The Archives nationales du Québec has also contributed to the archival literature with numerous texts relevant to practitioners. Examples include the extremely popular *Normes et procédures archivistiques* (6th ed., 1996) and the *Guide d'imagerie numérique – Numérisation de l'information consignée sur des supports traditionnels* (1998).¹⁸

Québec's Perspective on Archival Science

The eight articles published in this special issue of *Archivaria* addressing archival science in Québec offer a range of perspectives on this new and dynamic discipline. Carol Couture's article published in 2000–2001 outlines the events that have shaped the evolution of the archival discipline in Québec and marked it in a unique manner.¹⁹ The article by Carol Couture and Daniel Ducharme reviews the archival literature of the 1990s in both French and English dedicated to research issues.²⁰ Gilles Héon's article goes back to the seventeenth century in order to describe the development of the judicial framework used today in Québec, created to ensure the management and preservation of public and private records.²¹

Our review of the literature revealed numerous articles devoted to records appraisal. This key archival function has generated great interest within the discipline. Carol Couture's article, published in 1996–97,²² examines the subject thoroughly in comparing German, English, American, and English-Canadian methods of appraisal and proposing a series of principles and a theoretical basis for appraisal. James Lambert affirms that it is the responsibility of the archivist to ensure a “just” and representative appraisal of an institu-

18 To view the publications of the ANQ, visit their Web site at: <<http://www.anq.gouv.qc.ca/conseil/publications.htm>>.

19 Carol Couture, “Un bilan de l'évolution de l'archivistique québécoise,” *Archives* 32, no. 1 (2000–2001), pp. 37–48.

20 Carol Couture and Daniel Ducharme, “La recherche en archivistique: un état de la question,” *Archives* 30, nos. 3–4 (1998–1999), pp. 11–38.

21 Gilles Héon, “Les Archives nationales du Québec: la mémoire de la nation,” *Archives* 27, no. 2 (Autumn 1995), pp. 3–15.

22 Carol Couture, “L'évaluation des archives: état de la question,” *Archives* 28, no. 1 (1996–1997), pp. 3–31.

tion's records.²³ Normand Charbonneau develops a theory of appraisal in the context of selecting photographs. He proposes an approach based on archival values and on appraisal criteria, taking into account document creators and stakeholders.²⁴

The last two articles examine different aspects of the contemporary archival discipline dealing with information technologies. Sylvain Sénécal examines the relevance of the idea of the archival fonds in the context of the Internet and the Web.²⁵ Jacques Grimard's article underlines the fragility of electronic records and underscores the importance of preserving both the media and the documentary memory – the content.²⁶

We hope you will enjoy reading these articles.

Lorraine Gadoury and Robert Nahuet
Guest Editors

23 James Lambert, "L'évaluation des archives et la direction d'un organisme," *Actes du 2^e symposium du GIRA* (1994), pp. 135–47.

24 Normand Charbonneau, "Le tri des photographies," *Archives* 30, no. 2 (1998–1999), pp. 29–42. Revised and republished as a chapter (entitled "Tri") in Normand Charbonneau and Mario Robert, eds., *La gestion des archives photographiques* (Montréal, 2001), pp. 99–122.

25 Sylvain Sénécal, "Les effets du Web sur les archives," *Les Actes du XXVIII^e congrès de l'AAQ* (1999), pp. 102–112.

26 Jacques Grimard, "Gérer la préservation à long terme des archives électroniques ou préserver le médium et le message," *Archives* 27, no. 4 (1996), pp. 21–34.