

Saskatchewan Archives Board

SUBMISSION TO THE ROYAL SOCIETY EXPERT PANEL ON THE STATUS AND FUTURE OF CANADA'S LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

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Regina, Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Archives Board is a third party agency serving the Government of Saskatchewan and the people of the province through an eight-member Board of Directors and a professional staff of 41 managers, archivists and support personnel. The Archives operates six office and records storage sites in Regina and Saskatoon and receives an annual operating grant from the Province, which in 2013/14 stands at \$4.4 million.

The Archives Act, 2004 defines the mandate of the Province's archive:

- To acquire and preserve public and private records of significance to Saskatchewan and to facilitate access to those records
- To be the permanent repository of public and court records
- To facilitate the management of public and court records
- To encourage and support archival activities and the archival community

The Archives Act, 2004

The mission of Saskatchewan Archives is to:

- To acquire, manage, preserve and make accessible records of significance that reflect the rights and activities of Saskatchewan's people - those of public and private organizations and those of individuals
- To foster government accountability and transparency by advancing and facilitating responsible records management in the public sector
- To promote and assist the many uses of the documentary records of Saskatchewan
- To engage the people of Saskatchewan with their documentary heritage and to foster an understanding of our collective identity

- To provide leadership and support for the on-going development of archival work

Services

The services provided by the Saskatchewan Archives include

- Research services to government clients, academics, teachers, family historians, media clients, the legal profession and the general public (in-person, web, correspondence)
- Record donation services to the public
- Collection and processing of official records of enduring historical value
- Records management services (advisory, records scheduling and disposition) to government ministries, boards, agencies and Crown corporations
- Records management advisory services to Provincial Courts and to the Legislative Assembly
- Records management services to Members of the Legislative Assembly, Ministers of the Crown and to the Premier
- Advice on access and privacy issues to government and to the broader community
- Outreach and advisory services through participation in province-wide archival community activities, public tours, school presentations, exhibits (virtual and traditional) and open house events

Fundamental to service delivery is our evaluation of available resources, critical institutional priorities and the factors impacting the delivery and sustainability of our core mandate. The challenge exists in the complex task of balancing the management of the ongoing preservation, access to and description of our analogue holdings with the establishment of a framework for the acquisition of digital archives, the launching of a digital preservation program and the prioritization of our Permanent Collection to allow for the digitization of those archival collections most at risk. Service

delivery must continue while the evaluation of program effectiveness takes place.

The emphasis for many archives in terms of web-delivery has been placed on describing services, explaining policy and building archival description catalogues, while contributing to provincial and national catalogues, and launching exhibits to promote awareness of holdings. As time and resources permit, there is increasing web-presentation of digitized archival materials, yet this continues to occur primarily through special projects, year-end allocation of resources or in response to anniversary events. The result is a smattering of often thematic presentations, rarely complete fonds and frequently limited context to the archival record, its creator or its custodial history. In the rush to make our holdings available to users, we are eroding the framework essential to archival research.

Canadians interested in archival material want to see records on-line. They want to piece together the varied materials that tell the story of their family, particular events, individuals, organizations, and historical timelines. They rarely stop to think where the record comes from, why it exists in the first place, or why it is important that this documentary evidence continues to exist into the future. “Just digitize” is seen as an easy solution without consideration of the infrastructure, resources, labour-intensity, associated costs and immense challenge in getting records onto platforms for discovery. Personal use of digital technology in the creation of records has clouded public understanding of archival preservation.

Funders want confirmation and the assurance that when archival services are required, they will be delivered. Public access to material is fundamental and yet the relationship is not necessarily drawn to resources for longer reference hours or for services delivered through social media / online. Government clients want to know that ‘their records’ exist when required, for FOI requests, for program development, for policy research. Most however, see their provincial archive as a ‘records storage’ facility – not as a centre for historical preservation, custodial management on behalf

of the Crown, public research, education, artistic creation or for the discovery of our province's history.

Community Outreach and Awareness

The majority of Canadians has limited awareness of the role of archives in their community, in news headlines they watch and hear, in legal activity reported through Courts, in commemorations of anniversary events, in traditions that are marked annually, in statistical analysis and reports delivered by experts in their fields. There exists a detachment from the delivery of information and the evidence of the documentary record itself. There is also a conceptual disconnect between the 'dusty' records image of archives and the on-line viewing of archival records.

Canadians researching their family histories increasingly know of archives through Ancestry.ca, FamilySearch or similar 'gathering places' where pieces of stories are brought together and personalized. How aware Canadians are of the particular archives holding the pieces, or the diversity of archival institutions that contain the pieces, or the incompleteness of the pieces themselves to fonds or to total holdings are issues that should focus our attention. There is a danger in the value of archives being equated by how many records are available on-line. Canadians need to know that the historical record is at risk and 'being digitized' does not guarantee a continued future existence.

We measure the impact of our services through user comments, through inquiry lines, through participation in special events and through on-line hits. Refinement and definition of emphasis on service delivery occurs through annual work plans and strategic planning sessions. Limited operating budgets and resources continue to limit delivery and strip-down services to the very core of our mandates. We are asked to limit our FTE footprint while records become unplayable and indiscernible. The physical loss of these records results in the permanent loss of evidence and memory. They leave no footprint at all.

Archives build community by providing the documentary evidence to the past; the essential knowledge of paths taken provides the foundation for future social, political and historical understanding and accountability. Public memory consists of stories; archives substantiate, recreate and identify new avenues for thought. The very uniqueness of the archival record and how each researcher approaches the record confirms the possibility of new stories and new engagements with memory.

New Directions

Digitization

The major challenges related to born-digital material for the Saskatchewan Archives centre on securing the necessary funding to build a sustainable framework for a Trusted Digital Repository. Similar to the annual requests for additional physical storage for analogue records, is the request for storage and preservation capacity to receive the increasing born-digital archival material offered to us by donors or created within government for transfer to our custody through the records scheduling system. As Government explores records management options for electronic records, the Archives needs to be an active partner in ensuring safe transfer and on-going preservation of digital material.

The digitization of analogue material requires an annually-funded digitization program that systematically addresses archival records at risk in our repositories. Recent activity and discussion has highlighted film, video and audio records which are disappearing through poor environmental storage conditions, the lack of playback equipment and the lack of expertise to manage the ongoing needs of the varied and record-specific formats. Risk grows as well for fragile, faded or mouldy paper records and photographs. Risk assessments identify the greatest risk factors and assess costs, yet the results serve more to present the overwhelming

challenge facing archival preservation management than to provide a concrete plan for action that attracts and holds the attention of funders.

A paperless future? This remains largely unimaginable for most archives. Even if the dollars flow for a digitization program, there will never be, nor should there be, the total digitization of archival holdings. Directed and prioritized preservation will exist well into the future. While the born-digital record is quickly overtaking the acquisition of traditional analogue archival records, our repositories will not 'empty' of analogue collections at any great rate. There is increasing discussion, as there needs to be, surrounding the de-accessioning of 'original' records following digitization. Does the record exist for informational value only or does there continue to be an intrinsic archival (as distinguished from artefactual) value to the record in its original form. Not every record holds a continued historical value, but this assessment needs to be made over time and each outcome documented as part of the custodial history accompanying the record (whether in original or digital form). The brick-and-mortar archive will continue, dependent on the rate of digitization and the success of digital preservation. But essential to this scenario is also the user. Will the 'emerging' researcher armed with countless search tools still value context, sifting through records to piece together the evidence of new thought? Will exploring the records of past creators hold value or will the information itself suffice?

Education

The education of future archivists shows promise in the shift to knowledge of the fundamentals of born-digital records and in the growing emphasis on preservation management. Ideally, an archive like the Saskatchewan Archives continues to hire staff from a diversity of disciplines to effectively build an expertise base that reflects social, political, scientific, educational and historical thought, while still grounded in the fundamentals of research. Conversations around professional competency requirements are important if we are to achieve a recognized standard outside of our own limited

archival communities. The practicality of a work environment focused on achieving much with limited resources still faces the new archivist regardless of his/her skill set and remains a key challenge to job satisfaction, employee retention and career performance.

Resources

To begin to realize the aspirations of our users, the Saskatchewan Archives would require funding for staffing resources to reinstate full reference hours, Monday through Friday service (estimated at \$198K); to establish a digitization program for the Archives (estimated at a start-up cost of \$5.3 million with annual costs of \$2.73 million); and to establish the capacity to acquire born-digital records through the development of a TDR (estimated at an initial \$630K). The total increase to the Archives' annual grant would be at the rate of 139% for this initial change to the status quo, with a maintained annual rate of a 73% increase in our budget (by \$3.32 million to \$7.63 million annually) to offer these services long-term. Faced with the management of six locations in two cities, the provision of services by the Archives is also substantially impeded by rising accommodation costs at market values.

With adequate funding, the Saskatchewan Archives could begin to act upon the findings of its July 2013 CCI Risk Management Report, provide full in-person services to the research public, increase web access to holdings, and deliver services for the acquisition of born-digital records from the public and the secure and effective transfer of records from the Government of Saskatchewan. Additionally, to address community awareness among the general population, we would benefit greatly from the services of a Communications Officer position.

Conclusion

The challenges are daunting, but as custodian of the province's historical memory the Archives examines the possible, investigates the most efficient

means of providing Canadians access to their records, and explores ways to generate awareness of the role and value of archives. The preservation of the collective memory of Canadians depends on us; future generations will not know what is lost.