

Canadian Historical Association

CHA Summary of Findings Regarding Library and Archives Canada

Prepared for the Royal Society of Canada's Expert Panel on 'The Status of and Future of Canada's Libraries and Archives' - Halifax, November 9th, 2012.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This document focuses specifically on what members of the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) have to report about Library and Archives Canada (LAC). We have a vested interest in the status and future of this national institution as users who have made it their career to build our country's collective knowledge of the past. We have also long provided our professional services to advise LAC as to what documents should be kept, sought and acquired. We have had frank conversations with past and present LAC officials and shared our concerns with them. However we believe that these speak to wider issues that are relevant in any conversation about memory institutions more generally such as the ones you have engaged in with Canadians across the country.

LAC is critical to the preservation, and more to the point, the never-ending process of creation, of Canada's 'national memory.' It stands as one the largest national repository of primary source documents and most complete collection of secondary sources, visual documents, newspapers etc. in Canada. In addition, LAC has a direct and significant impact on other Canadian archives and libraries.

LAC's mandate is to (a) provide national leadership and focus to library and archives; (b) cooperate and work with other groups to strengthen the whole of Canada's heritage; (c) be a national public learning institution; and (d) be a leader in government information management.

2.0 CONTEXT

We recognize that under the federal government's increasing budgetary constraints - out of LAC officials' control - cuts have had to be made. Notably since the Spring of 2012, 20% of its work force has been cut (about 200 positions). To date, LAC budget has been reduced by \$9.6 million over three years, roughly 10% of LAC's total planned spending for 2012-2013.¹

Although we have urged LAC officials to impress upon the government the importance of keeping budgets at a level that do not threaten its capacity to fulfill its mandate, we cannot expect that things will remain as before. In effect, a new reality has emerged in recent years, with respect to the LAC's ability fulfill its role.

¹ For a detailed description of the Federal government's budget cuts in the Spring of 2012 and ensuing cuts undertaken by LAC see the websites of the advocacy group Voices-Voix (www.voices-voix.ca) and of the Ontario Library Association (www.accessola.org)

However, in reference to one of the questions you ask of all participants, we are not in a position to suggest ways in which LAC 'could attract funding adequate to meet the expectations of their users.'

We are also aware that document management policies/practices are in a state of major transformation, especially due to technological advances, namely digitization and the increasing number of 'born-digital' documents. We recognize that change is the way of the future.

In short, we want to make clear that we are not being nostalgic for a time that once was.

But certain things have not changed and that includes LAC's mandate with respect to accessibility and dissemination of knowledge as reiterated as recently as 2012 in the Library and Archives Canada Act, 2012:

'Goals of Library and Archives Canada'

7 (a)'To preserve the documentary heritage of Canada for the benefit of present and future generations.'

(b): 'to make that heritage known to Canadians and to anyone with an interest in Canada and to facilitate access to it.'

'Power of Librarian and Archivist'

8(d): 'provide information, consultation and research and lending services, as well as any other services for the purpose of facilitating access to the documentary heritage.'

3.0 FINDINGS

In our consultations with colleagues across Canada, we found that LAC's policies and initiatives in recent years have caused a deterioration in the institution's ability to deliver on sections 7 (b) and 8(d) quoted above, and its larger role, cited in Section 1.

Most recently in February of this year, LAC's Inter-library Loan Program (ILLP) was cancelled.

Furthermore, two problems have been in evidence for years - namely the deterioration of LAC's AMICUS national bibliographic service, and the shrinkage of LAC's acquisitions program.

Further deterioration will ensue from the following:

- The cancellation of the National Archives Development Program.
- The manner in which digitization is being implemented.
- The introduction of "The Whole of Society Approach" to guide it in its acquisitions, and in its preservation initiatives.
- The mechanisms that LAC has put in place, so far, to engage with stakeholders, including its own archivists and librarians, and users across the country including historians.

Details follow below.

3.1 Cancellation of LAC's Interlibrary Loan Program (2012)

In our view, LAC's decision to cancel the ILLP conflicts directly with its mandate of providing Canadians access to their documentary heritage. The services offered through inter-library loans by LAC cannot be replicated elsewhere.

The reasons given for this cancellation are:

- Cuts had to be made somewhere to protect the viability of LAC's core operations, and in LAC management's view, the ILLP constituted a peripheral service.
- Cuts were also justified, in the context of LAC's modernization plan: specifically digitization. All documents, it is argued, would eventually be available to users via the web, rendering the ILLP redundant. More on this below.
- LAC also argues that because ILL requests were going down, it was a logical place to cut costs.

Based on the statistics made public by LAC, it does indeed appear that ILL requests have gone down by 75% since the mid-1990s.

*We will be looking into why in more depth by further consultations with our members but discussions so far as brought out that :

We believe that this decline is among other factors, attributable to deterioration in two areas:

(a) AMICUS: from all accounts (including our consultations with users such as historians and university librarians) the decrease in requests seems closely linked to serious problems with LAC's AMICUS bibliographic system. It provides, among other things, national search services, record distribution and resource sharing. AMICUS receives about 1.5 million requests over the web. It has not been brought up to date since 1995 and as a result has not kept pace with technological advances² As such, its database is outdated and worse still, according to many, unreliable - not offering an accurate record of LAC's holdings, or those of other major Canadian libraries. In fact, university librarians we have consulted report that AMICUS has become for them a catalogue 'of last resort.' Instead they rely on WorldCat. Furthermore, the problem is having wider worrisome repercussions: many libraries have simply given up on reporting their new holdings (or reporting those they no longer hold) as the reporting process is too laborious and the results are not always satisfactory further contributing to AMICUS's unreliability.

LAC officials have twice (in 2005 and 2008) attempted to bring AMICUS up to date but without any success. LAC is apparently still working on it. In 2012, it formed an advisory group to discuss how to bring AMICUS up-to-date. For the time being, it appears that the main way users can establish whether LAC has a document they need is badly out of date. Furthermore, this means that LAC's new policy of Lender of Last Resort whereby only items unavailable through other institutions will be loaned out is also unreliable. In light of the above, can a reduction in requests be that surprising?

²See www.accessola.org.

As one of our members put it LAC may be confusing cause and effect: 'A drop in demand may be an indication of the increasingly poor infrastructure and systems that make it difficult to determine what is available rather than evidence that users are not interested in the material. A number of people have expressed the sentiment that LAC seems to be quietly but deliberately driving away researchers from the main building...'.

(b) Acquisitions: We believe that a further reason for a reduction in ILL requests lies in LAC's decreasing number of acquisitions, most notably for historical publications (2005: \$500,333; 2012: \$28,237). A 10 month moratorium on acquisitions which ended officially in January 2010 and budget cuts has meant missed opportunities to acquire rare books, etc.

(c) Finally, the laying off a significant proportion of its staff working with non-digital records has also reduced ready user access to holdings. These cuts included 21 of the 61 archivists and archival assistants that deal with non-governmental records. 50% of circulation staff for analogue holdings, 9 of 31 cataloguing librarians, plus two of five team leaders, 19 of 56 library technicians and clerks working the collection of publications.

We invited our members to send us their reactions to the cancellation of the ILL and how it had or would affect their work. Over fifty of our members have provided details regarding the impacts, to date of the cancellation of the ILLP. What was so striking about their feedback is that they all in effect make the same points.

Access to Information

Access to information is already being affected for a wide range of users who do not live in Ottawa (or nearby) due to travel costs. This includes university-based historians (funded or otherwise), graduate students, teachers at the high school and undergraduate levels, and independent or retired researchers.

Select Quotations from feedback sent to us by members:

-The 'cancellation' has made LAC a local Ottawa Library.' (#19)

-It 'will become a privilege for those having the financial resources to go to Ottawa.'

Quality, Type and Timeliness of Research

What is written about - what history is recorded- is largely shaped by largely the level of public access to certain documents. Soon, the developments mentioned above will also affect the quality of research produced- researchers will be working with effective fewer information resources. The timeliness of dissemination of research results, including the publication of research findings, will also be affected. In turn, this can delay the public's access to new findings about our past- the most recent/up to date historical research. For graduate students, the

problem is particularly acute, because MA students have an average of 2 years to complete their thesis, and Ph.D. students, 4 to 5 years.

Select Quotations from feedback sent to us by members:

- Cancellation 'ruined one of his research project for lack of access to LAC material' (#9)
- 'Frankly, I could not have written (...) book without the help of LAC's ILL' (#31)
- Access to LAC material 'was crucial to my development as a historian' (#2)
- ILL 'was important to the training of students in research techniques' (#28)
- The cancellation 'entrenches bias towards Ontario and Quebec.'

All of the above means that researchers across Canada have already begun to lose access to the single most important repository of Canada's documentary heritage.

Note: The above remarks are relevant to non-digitized material at LAC, which means the lion's share of LAC's collection.

1-According to their website, LAC holds 20 million books, periodicals, newspapers, microfilms, literary texts and government publications plus millions of other types of documents (such as film, art, musical items and more). This includes:

- Rare documents, and books available nowhere else.
- Newspapers: They have an extensive collection of smaller Canadian newspapers (one of the best collections). LAC would lend entire issues of a journal, even a run of them— most Canadian libraries will not do this.
- Theses: going back to 1965 up to 1997. (By the way, there is also a concern that older ones in this collection will not be digitized.)
- Microfilm: -Genealogical material which university libraries might not hold.
- Out of print Canadian novels.

2-LAC offered longer loan periods , unmatched lending servings:

- LAC used to lend entire issues of a journal, even a run of them— most Canadian libraries will not do this.
- LAC would lend up to 12 reels at a time. Most locations will only lend 4- 6 reels at a time.
- Larger quantities of documents to be loaned.

-Ability to renew loans

-Ability to consult from home (reducing research costs)

3- LAC did not charge for photocopies whereas most other Canadian libraries charge for photocopies.

The ILLP Cancellation's Effects on University Libraries

One respondent noted "at my university (a small liberal arts based institution) library and archive holdings were built around the expectation that LAC files could be ordered through the ILL." Libraries establish collection development policies to focus on the areas that they can predict will have strong interest, but there will always be a demand for material that might fall outside of those areas. Budget and space limitations are two of the reasons that libraries are limited in what they can acquire. Interlibrary Loans grew as a resource sharing solution, especially during times when budgets underwent severe cuts – libraries worked together to share their resources with each other.

Recommendation regarding the ILL:

That it be reinstated

3.2 Cancellation of the National Archival Development Program.

In April 2012, LAC cancelled the National Archival Development Program (NAPD). It was a 1.7 million contribution program administered by the non-for profit Canadian Council of Archives (CCA) for LAC and distributed to Canada's 13 archive councils. This program provided support to 800 archives over the past 26 years. NAPD reached out more specifically to small local organization rather than provincial or national organizations. About 90 projects across Canada had to be cancelled. The key is that it was decentralized and helped smaller organizations take advantage of synergies across the country. The work that it did is hard to do for large organization like LAC which is not very nimble in adapting to these kinds of needs. It was acting like an antenna for LAC in knowing what the archives required in the provinces.

This being said, we are hopeful as a result of a statement made by James Moore that the NAPD may be reinstated.

Recommendation regarding NADP:

That it be reinstated

3.3 Digitization

3.3.1 Overview

LAC officials have not denied that services cutbacks are depriving Canadians of a valuable service, but claim that through its 'process of modernization' (digitization), it will eliminate all these negative consequences.

Our members are not opposed to digitization in principle as a way to ensure/facilitate/improve access. Historians have been doing digitization of their own. In fact, there is a new emerging field called 'digital history'. Debates are taking place in various places (including scholarly publications) over best practices, the future of born digital sources, and how these will affect the ability of historians of the future to analyze the past. In other words, we are working in tandem with panels such as yours to assess how digitization will affect our collective memory.

If there is much that is unknown, there is much that is known.

We know that we are in a **period of transition** – and one that is going to be with us for a long time. In turn, this means that memory institutions including LAC need to take measures which address the challenges that come with this “protracted transition”.

This includes more public discussions about timelines, process, selection criteria, and who will be responsible for digitization.

3.3.2 Timelines and Process

Digitization of LAC's collection of documents and books will take decades and be very costly.

We were told that 70% of users regularly consult 10% of LAC's holdings (mostly on military, natives, transportation and immigration) for a total of 500 million pages. Of these 50 million pages have been digitized. (50 million others have been digitized by third party organizations). This leaves 400 million documents. In other words, as of now 10% of documents consulted by 70% of users will digitized in 10 to 12 years. Taking into account that only 1.7 million pages can be digitized annually, clearly, digitization will take a long time before it will lead to full accessibility to our national documentary heritage.

In fact, the timeline can only increase, in the wake of the fact that LAC has reduced its budget and staffing for this activity (by 50%). One thing appears clear: for the foreseeable future, digitization cannot be viewed as an alternative to ILL, or presented more generally as a panacea for all the problems our memory institutions face today.

As one of our members pointed out: the 'two programs [digitization and ILL] will need to overlap for many years in order to maintain accessibility and levels of service.'

More information must be given to the public about LAC's projected timelines for digitization.

3.3.3 Who Will Undertake the Digitization?

The issue of transparency brings us to LAC's recent partnering with private companies - for example, Ancestry.ca - and other organizations such as the not-for-profit organization Canadiana.org to assist them in accelerating the digitization of its holdings.

Last summer (2013) LAC's website made public its partnership with Ancestry.ca – an American based company – to make the 1921 census public on its website. Although access is free of charge, the reasons for engaging in this private-public partnership are not clear and nor are the terms of the agreement. More specifically, it is not clear why LAC needed to get this company

involved as it already had a digitized copy of the Census developed in conjunction with various Canadian university partners. This suggests that the Canadian taxpayer has indirectly paid for the digitization of the census previous to any agreement LAC might have reached with Ancestry.ca – a seemingly wasteful use of public funds.

Furthermore, it is also unclear why LAC did not tap into the wide ranging experience and knowledge held by experts who already work for the civil service. Passing over this know-how means that LAC might eventually lose a precious source of easily accessible and paid for 'in-house' capability.

This being said, our members are not opposed to private-public partnerships in principle, recognizing that they do indeed accelerate the process. At the same time, too many questions remain unanswered as a result of the fact that LAC is not making it a practice to make public the terms of reference agreed upon with organizations such as Ancestry.ca with respect to the process of selection, the methodology and the priorities that were agreed upon.

Of course we understand that certain financial commercially sensitive terms cannot be revealed and would have to be redacted but the process should not. In the case of private-public partnerships, LAC needs to make clear whether there was there a bidding process. What criteria were used to choose one partner over the other? How does the work and the cost of the winning partner compare to those of the work done in house? Who will decide what documents get digitized and why? Will professional archivists and other experts including historians be consulted? Who will make up indexes, catalogues? Will these be freely accessible? Libraries must pay for the digitized Canadiana documents but how will that impact accessibility? And what of the experience accumulated by Canadiana? Will it be accessible as is that of in-house archivists ?

In the case of Canadiana, we understand that LAC guarantees the NGO 10 years of exclusive rights to monetize the collections in exchange for making them accessible on-line. Costs it is claimed will be funded out of revenues.

-However, if costs to Canadiana, in time and materials of meeting that 10% quota exceed the revenues it obtain from users how will the shortfall be made up ? Will it be raising users fees or will they close the gap with a cash compensation from LAC? Or, is there a third option? There is no reason for that to be confidential.

From what we understand, LAC was taken aback by the questions raised by our members, and by the outright opposition coming from other quarters, about these 'partnerships' with Ancestry.com and Canadiana. We believe that it all comes down to transparency. Users, and Canadians as a whole, have a right to know who is making decisions, and why, about their national documentary heritage.

3.3.4 Recommendations Regarding Digitization:

(1) There needs to be a policy in place (in parallel with digitization) which provides researchers/users with a timeline that will allow them to know what is being digitized, in what

order and expected dates of completion. Without this users cannot determine if their research projects are 'doable.'

(2) In addition, LAC should make public on its website (and others across the country) what documents have been digitized and which are next in line (provide a schedule).

Transparency may not improve access, but it will allow users to at least plan ahead, and get a better sense of LAC's selection criteria.

(3) In future, users should be consulted about, and LAC should make public in a timely fashion, the criteria that determine what outside company/organization will be hired and why during the digitization. Without this information, they can likely expect future criticisms and questions.

3.3 Evaluation and Acquisition Policy

Issues of transparency are also raised by our members when questions emerge over what criteria are being used by LAC to determine what documents should or should not be acquired or preserved. As it stands, LAC has recently produced an *Evaluation and Acquisition Policy* inspired by its *Whole of Society Approach* model. And apparently decisions as to what documents should be preserved will be based on five criteria including society, significance, sustainability, suitability and sufficiency. However a year ago CHA had initially been invited to send representatives to sit on advisory committees to advise LAC officials in the document selection process. As it stands, nothing has transpired from these initial exchanges and we are left wondering if non-LAC expertise will be solicited. Overall, the policy as it stands raises too many unanswered questions. We do know however that Canadians have little to go by in order to know how their country's central archival institution makes decisions regarding what they define as our 'documentary heritage' - what documents they plan to preserve, acquire, pass over and why.

3.4 Consultation

An overall lack of transparency and consultation is clearly an issue. There have been some consultation initiatives, namely the Stakeholders Forum which was replaced by Pan-Canadian Documentary Heritage Forum both in 2011 . These brought together a wide range of stakeholders including archivists, librarians and historians from across Canada. We felt these offered an effective way to keep abreast of LAC modernization plans, learn how they were being implemented and why. The theme of the PCDH forum was "Setting the Course for Information Resources for Canada in 2017." Its objective was to identify the steps needed to equip our institutions and organizations for the future needs of Canadians. But other than the setting up of working groups following these meetings, here again, there is no evidence that these initiatives have led to concrete measures. Furthermore, the PCDHN meetings have occurred infrequently, are subject to cancellation (such as the May 2012 meeting), and one of the original five forums, the Trusted Digital Repository TDR forum, seems to have disappeared altogether. They have no defined budget, no apparent fixed timelines or milestones, and no system of independent evaluation to determine its effectiveness in addressing the needs of

archival specialists and users across the country. (In fact the Forum initiative appears to be in a state of limbo as a result of the numerous cuts to LAC's programs. Hence the participation of core stakeholders is being undermined.)

Recommendations Regarding Consultation

Reinstate the Pan-Canadian Documentary Heritage Network (PCDHN) and establish permanent and regular consultation forums, planned in advance with fixed timelines and milestones. These would offer decision-makers at LAC an efficient method to obtain feedback from users and other concerned professionals at large while allowing stakeholders to become better informed about LAC's on-going modernization initiatives.