

**RESPONSE TO THE CALL FROM THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CANADA
RE: THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES IN CANADA**

On behalf of the 3300 members of The Ontario Genealogical Society (OGS), I thank you for undertaking this review and for seeking the views of collective and individual stakeholders.

Our Society's mission is to: "encourage, bring together and assist those interested in the pursuit of family history and to preserve our Ontario genealogical heritage."

To that end, our Society as a whole and our 33 geographic Branches and Special Interest Groups independently provide:

- advocacy for the identification, collection, preservation, protection of, and access to items and materials of value to the country's genealogical heritage -- such as censuses, land records and wills, as well as maps, art and literature -- with a particular focus on those related to Ontario;
- a strong sense of community to foster networking and collaboration; and,
- educational opportunities through local meetings and seminars, webinars, the OGS annual conference and OGS publications.

Let me begin by thanking the numerous librarians and archivists who, over past decades, have worked for the organized collection, preservation and public access to the many archival holdings which represent our shared Canadian record. OGS members recognize and applaud their efforts in providing for the availability of records from past generations to inform those of the future. Our members also appreciate the many hours given in sharing their professional skills and expertise in assisting family historians to discover their past – locating, accessing and understanding records; and, using new technologies as each is developed.

SERVICES

Feedback from our members indicates that service varies from one locale to another. While most are pleased with the service, many are skeptical of what the future may hold as the number of service personnel at all levels in libraries and archives has been reduced significantly and now tends to be comprised of more "clerks" or "attendants" than "professionals." This becomes more and more obvious as funding is cut and as staff members leaving through attrition are replaced by lesser-skilled individuals who direct users to "how-to" documents which often they are unable to explain. There is still a strong need for qualified specialists.

Members continue to access local history through available newspaper files as well as other heritage materials, archival documents and artifacts pertaining to the local area. They understand that many pieces of information are now available online; however, not all local information is now or likely will be online at least in the near future. Nor do a number of our members or the public at large have means to access electronic information which touches on the very real and problematic issue of a digital divide. Where at all possible, these records and artifacts should continue to be housed locally among those whose history they represent.

In a number of localities libraries, archives and museums are housed separately; in other situations, they successfully co-habit, either dually or collectively. These situations seem to have been very successful as the institutions partner to meet client needs. Funds received from the discontinued *National Archival Development Program* were largely responsible for the success of many of these arrangements. Our Society was extremely concerned about the sudden withdrawal of this program and the immediate and long-term impact on our local, smaller archives and their partner museums and libraries.

A number of our OGS groups also use library or archive facilities for their monthly general meetings, executive meetings and periodic lectures or seminars which often take advantage of the available computers and other media equipment. Some even have arrangements to house their library holdings in the body of the public library or within a separate space set aside for the Branch through an agreement with the Library Board.

Our members continue to mourn the loss of the Library and Archives Canada Inter-library Loan System as it once was. This is one concrete example of the reductions in services creating barriers to genealogical research as now researchers are required to travel to distant repositories to use materials which they once could access locally. Some suggested a Union Catalogue which would make all users everywhere aware of the location of specific material and how it might be accessed and, while consideration should be given to this idea, it needs to be broadened to make material more easily available to users.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND AWARENESS

Those libraries and archives represented by our member feedback, and those within my personal experience, have made great strides in community outreach. There is a continuous stream of activities and programs for all ages. This is particularly good in the case of our youth. However, with the lack of library expertise and experiences within our schools, understanding the value of libraries and archives is severely lacking. This could lead to an underestimation of the importance of these institutions and subsequently reduced interest in their related professions as careers.

Our more technical members comment on the fact that in this age of multimedia and social networking, more and more libraries and archives should consider increasing their visibility through these means – upgraded websites, Facebook, Twitter, and related avenues -- to connect to current and future generations. Many, but not all, have taken advantage of these techniques depending upon their staff expertise and available staff time and funding. OGS members do, however, realize the difficulties in delivering services to generations with widely varied experiences and expertise in technology.

Improved transparency can also lead to improved exposure. The more that is known about a facility and its related personnel and programs, the more open people are to availing themselves of the services. Like OGS, libraries and archives have not historically extolled their own strengths; doing so may increase the visibility and offerings of these institutions. These

steps, of course, continue to be dependent upon staff time and funding. Given the choice, most institutions will put their time and dollars toward services to the public rather than toward promoting themselves which is just the nature and priority of the people behind the scenes.

NEW DIRECTIONS (DIGITIZATION, EDUCATION, RESOURCES)

Digitization

Like librarians and archivists, OGS is concerned about the increasing lack of space to house these archival documents and the processes required to make decisions and carry out plans to determine alternate ways to preserve and store them. Like many other institutions and organizations, OGS included, archives are behind in technical advancements. Even though “the writing was on the wall”, we were all remiss in seeing the impending future as it related to our various roles in preserving this history. Now, how do we ensure past records are digitized (or alternate processes developed) to preserve them for the future and also continue to preserve current records that will one day represent our history? How do we begin to archive what is now being referred to as “born-digital” documents which never were in paper form? That is, how do we catch up with the past without losing our present for the future?

How can a plan for the future be developed when we have no idea how documents of any kind might be able to be stored? File types change; media change. Is it possible to store files in the “cloud” in a format that will be accessible years from now, or will staff constantly be resaving files to updated formats? Paper does not have this problem but space is now at a premium in all institutions, I am sure.

We, of course, are not privy to the plans and details of either the current budgets or those required to accomplish this but we recognize it is a huge undertaking with diminished resources.

Education

Few of our members know about the current educational programs for librarians and archivists. Needless to say, it is crucial that students in these programs be trained in current and emerging models of program delivery. Too often, in other professions, instructors are those who have been out of the system for a while and are not current in their understanding of the requirements. Academic institutions should ensure that courses deliver relevant information for the future. Professional development for current staff should be strengthened and ongoing. Connections need to be re-established/strengthened in both elementary and secondary schools as well as colleges and universities. From these institutions will come the next generation of librarians and archivists; from them will come the next generation of ideas and solutions.

There is also a need to educate the public on an ongoing basis to remind them that although many items are available online, not all archival documents may be accessed that way. Hopefully, librarianship courses and additional professional development presentations prepare staff to explain this point to our library and archive users and to direct them to other off-line or

lesser known collections. Users might also be directed to local organizations such as OGS or other genealogical and historical groups who might assist them in locating resources and in sound genealogical practices to ensure researchers are equipped to locate and understand the right resources for the right families. Perhaps working with local genealogical societies and/or other heritage organizations to digitize and index their local resources would be advantageous, as well.

Resources

I am sure that ideas stated in the scope of this paper have already been considered by those in the profession. To accomplish these initiatives requires strategic, sustained funding and a long-term plan. With current and proposed budgetary restraints it is difficult to determine more than short-term actions; with only interim planning, it is not possible to accomplish what must occur to protect the future of Canada's history.

Funding and experienced decision-makers are a must. Too often, lately, we see decisions being made solely on a business model basis. While financial sustainability is important, decisions should not be made for the future of Canada's past without the direction of those with experience and expertise in how to preserve and protect it. Qualified, experienced archivists are not only a must for the day-to-day operations of the system but also as a part of providing input into the long-term planning. So too, technicians from a variety of fields will be required to assist in setting a course to ensure the results of actions taken today will be usable or easily transferrable in the future.

It is highly unlikely that these institutions will survive without creating networks and/or partnerships – with each other; with the heritage community; with other community organizations; with the private sector; and, with commercial companies. It will be important to protect the ownership, privacy and accessibility of these archival documents. This can no longer be done in isolation; nor can fundraising be accomplished alone. It is a new world in all sectors of the population and libraries and archives have not been spared.

SUMMARY

In summary, I again, on behalf of our members, applaud the historical actions of our librarians and archivists and appreciate the opportunity to respond to this call for ideas.

We strongly believe there continues to be a need for an active library and archival community. The face of that community and the service it provides will change over time depending upon the decisions made to facilitate the preservation of and access to our printed or electronic word.

Hopefully funding, partnerships, training and professional development can be made available to prepare our library and archival communities for making decisions to ensure our country's identity and history will be passed on and inspire future generations to do likewise.

Respectfully submitted by:

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