

Canadian Government Policy and the Archives of Ethnic Minorities

Canada is a nation of people from many lands living on Aboriginal territory. One would think then that the collection and description of private records produced by the various ethnic minority groups that together make up a significant percentage of Canada would be important components of public archival policy. This has not actually been the case. This paper will discuss three cases of government funding that led to the acquisition and description of private records of ethnic minorities and examine the ultimate effect of these programs.

First let us consider the collection of the records of private individuals. For that to occur a number of conditions need to exist before the records can come to an archives. People must have the creation of records as part of their culture. They must have the personal interest and means to create those records. They must make a decision to preserve the records they create. Then someone, either the creator, their descendants or their executors, must decide to preserve the records outside of the family, although in some cases researchers might be able to access records which are preserved by families, as happens in England. But more commonly, there must be an accumulation of records, an ability and means to preserve them and finally trust by the creator and/or their surrogates in the institutions that wish to collect their records.

With the records of private organizations, there is far more likely to be regular creation of records but the organization must still make a decision to preserve and accumulate those records, as often officers of the organization hold records they produce in their homes or other places external to the organization. Once the records have been brought together, the organization must either look after the records themselves or trust another institution enough to donate their records to them.

Let us turn then to ethnic minorities in Canada. In the 1920s and 30s, the Canadian Federal government used the school system to assimilate and integrate immigrant children. The aim of public policy was to

make immigrant children like the majority as quickly as possible. Over time however this policy began to wane. With the new social history of the 1960s in Canada, historians began looking for the records of women, average citizens, ethnic minorities, and so on. Just at this point the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was struck in 1963 in response to the "crisis...in the province of Quebec," as Francophones were dissatisfied with their position in Canada and had initiated the so-called "Quiet Revolution."¹ But the commission was also charged to consider "the contribution made by the other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada *and the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution.*"² The commission had a very clear definition of what constituted an "ethnic group." It was not one's ethnic origin or even one's mother tongue "but one's sense of belonging to a group, and the group's collective will to exist."³

The final report of the commission came out in 1970. This was coupled with the Centennial Commission's projects to celebrate the varied nature of Canada's peoples for the 100th Anniversary since Confederation. The two led to Canada becoming the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy in 1971. "By so doing, Canada affirmed the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation."⁴ This policy in turn led the Federal government to offer funds for a number of different programs that would celebrate the different cultures that made up Canada.⁵

By the 1970s we have a number of ethnic minority organizations and individuals who had been operating and living in Canada for enough time to have accumulated records. We have the sudden

¹ Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism: Preliminary Report, 1 February 1965, 13.

² My emphasis.

³ Page 7.

⁴ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/citizenship.asp>

⁵ Walter Neutel, "Geschichte Wie Es Eigentlich Gewesen or The Necessity of Having Ethnic Archives Programmes," *Archivaria* 7 (Winter 1978): 106; <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/emc/1967-centennial-celebrations>.

influx of government funds specifically to support the contributions of these ethnic minorities. The third component of this equation was public archives and their acquisition of private records.

The collection of private records in Canada has had a long history, going back to the founding of the Public Archives of Canada, or PAC, in 1872, when the archives was not responsible for preserving government records and could only collect the records of private citizens. Indeed, Canada has prided itself on its “total archives” approach which at least in the past saw government institutions collecting the records of both government and private citizen.⁶ Prior to this new policy to promote the collection of the archives of ethnic minorities, however, private archives collected by all levels of government tended to be the archives of “great men” such as politicians, church officials and military leaders. But after October 1971 when money for multiculturalism began to flow from the Federal government, the PAC established the National Ethnic Archives Programme.⁷ Although before the program started two archivists were already looking after east and west European archives at the PAC, a separate unit for ethnic archives was established to focus on underrepresented minorities. Even staff of the unit however felt and I quote “this whole thing was temporary, a fad.”⁸ One staff member noted that there was an air of instability or impermanence to the program. Although he did not agree, he said the feeling was “let’s do it for now and then let’s get back to more serious archives like the United Empire Loyalists.” The

⁶ Laura Millar, “Discharging our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada,” *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998), pp. 103–46.

⁷ During these years Saskatchewan, under the leadership of provincial archivist Ian Wilson, was very active in collecting ethnic archives. The Archives also ran provincial conferences on multicultural archives and published a guide to Fransaskois archives. When Wilson moved to head the archives of Ontario, he hired an archivist to develop a multicultural archives program there, in co-operation with the Ontario Multicultural History Society. But these initiatives owed very much to Wilson; few provincial archives were collecting such records. But the but but the Other ethnic community archives, such as the Centre du Patrimoine or the archives at Oseredok, the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre, in Winnipeg, had early starts that predate significant government funding.

⁸ Myron Momryk, interview by author by phone, 16 July 2012, Ottawa.

United Empire Loyalists were individuals in what is now the United States who were loyal to Britain and who settled in Canada after the American Revolution.⁹

Some of the issues with collecting ethnic archives that the staff member shared included certain groups being openly hostile to the government, such as Japanese and Ukrainians interned during the Second World War. Other groups, such as the Doukhobors, were simply suspicious of any government group. Still others were concerned about donating to the national archives in Ottawa as they felt it was too far from their homes or they were worried because the Soviet embassy for example was in Ottawa and they were scared that the Russians would examine their records and harass their relatives back at home. Certain communities, like the Jewish and Mennonite communities, already had their own archives. Dissident groups within the communities however such as B'nai Brith within the Jewish community, did not have their own archives and were looking for a home.

On the flip side, some ethnic groups felt it was an honor for them to be represented in Ottawa, that it would make them more Canadian somehow. Some also felt that having their archives in a neutral institution with professional archivists at no cost to the ethnic communities was a better way to go than paying to look after the records themselves.

Other factors that this Federal archivist felt affected the archives that he was responsible for acquiring included whether the community integrated fairly quickly or not. He also felt political exiles often hung onto their culture particularly if their language was under attack in their own country of origin.

All this being said, the program was quite successful in its endeavors. But to put this program into context, the National Ethnic Programme was not a large undertaking in comparison to the overall

⁹ The description of the United Empire Loyalists according to their official website, is: "those who had been settled in the thirteen colonies at the outbreak of the American Revolution, who remained loyal to and took up the Royal Standard, and who settled in what is now Canada at the end of the war."

collection policies of the PAC. According to Walter Neutel, an archivist in the program in 1978, the PAC provided "less than 1½% of its staff and budget" to the program.¹⁰ Over time however a section that had eight people has been now reduced to a halftime position. In the last five years there have been no acquisitions at all. Mind you, the cuts and moratorium on acquisitions of private records has not been limited to ethnic archives. In fact in the latest cuts to what is now Library and Archives Canada the total amount of private archivists has been reduced by half.

Contrast this program with the Community Historical Recognition Program created by Citizenship and Immigration Canada in 2006.¹¹ The goal of the program was to fund "community-based commemorative and educational projects that provide recognition of the experiences of ethno-cultural communities affected by historical wartime measures and/or immigration restrictions applied in Canada, and that promote these communities' contributions to building Canada." in other words, the Canadian government is paying for the fact that it collected so called "head taxes" specifically from Chinese individuals in order to control their immigration, having spent years exploiting just such people for building railways and mining.¹²

One of the projects arising from this program was "Chinese Canadian Stories: Uncommon Histories from a Common Past." This program was generated because of the personal interest in migration studies of a history professor, Henry Yu, at the University of British Columbia (UBC).¹³ The project was to create a portal at the UBC library for any digitized materials collected by other scholars and community groups who also put in applications to the same fund to commemorate Chinese Canadian stories in their own regions. The portal would also be based in large part on the Wallace B. Chung collection at Rare Books and Special Collections at UBC and would also contain materials from other archives. Over a two year

¹⁰ Neutel, "Ethnic Archives Programs," p. 107.

¹¹ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/programs/index.asp>

¹² Similar programs were also devised for other wronged ethnic minorities.

¹³ Denise Fong, interview by author by phone, 26 July 2012, Vancouver.

period which is close to wrapping up, UBC, backed by technical support at Simon Fraser University (SFU) provided workshops and a set of scanning standards as well as best practices for oral histories to any groups that were actively gathering digital materials.

Thus we see once again that the government had an agenda and they put money forward in order to support that agenda. However in this case, the projects are driven by scholarly researchers and community members. Is the result any better than what was achieved by professional archivists? It is difficult to judge. Although the program only has two more months to go, most of the portal is not functional yet. As anyone who has worked with developers knows, this is fairly typical. Without much of the content available however, one cannot test the site and its contents.

An interview with one of the scholars who participated in gathering the material, however, gives quite an illuminating perspective. For instance, the web site is trilingual in English, French, and Chinese. The UBC project manager felt most Canadian immigration was from Southern China and that most of the participants would be using Cantonese. According to the scholar, however, while Cantonese was certainly one of the language groups among immigrants, others, including Toisan, were dominant among groups. The immigrants, like most groups that came to Canada, were not a homogeneous group. In addition, there were families of mixed ethnicities. For example, in the late 19th century and early 20th century there were men who were not able to go back to China and get a Chinese wife and so married non Chinese women.¹⁴

¹⁴ For example, Charlie Foo (Au Hong Foo), often referred to as the "unofficial Mayor of Winnipeg's Chinatown", married a non-Chinese woman, Frances, in Winnipeg in 1924. (See: "The Biography of Charlie Foo" (pp. 40-41) in Philip Chang, editor, *Winnipeg Chinatown, Celebrating 100 Years, A Remarkable Achievement, 1909-2009* (Winnipeg Chinese Cultural and Community Centre, 2011). Others such as Charlie Wong had a relationship with a Caucasian woman in Winnipeg prior to returning in 1931 to China to marry a Chinese woman. In Charlie Wong's case, his wife and children in China could not return to Canada with him because of the Chinese Exclusion Act, 1923. (See: Joan Harder (Wong), "My Air Pilot Grandfather Charlie Wong" (p. 42-44) in the same book above)

This diversity will be represented in the site by virtue of the materials that were collected. But the scholar also pointed out difficulties in the structure of the project. Despite best efforts to provide digitization standards and training and workshops, the time frames established through the grant structure complicated efforts to collect materials. Also, given that the UBC portal is a web-based archive, questions arose as to preserving the higher resolution files. Overall, there's some anxiety about long-term preservation of the materials. This includes the fate of lower resolution images (that are nonetheless historically valuable) in cases where these are the only ones available to community project leaders but that might not meet the minimum standards of the digital archive. Also of concern, is future sources of funding to ensure continual migration of the archive as technology changes, given that its establishment is linked to a government program that is now completed. Finally, there is the shelf life of the archival quality high resolution files and physical artifacts kept in the possession of the community organizations that, in most instances, do not have the technical or financial means to migrate these as needed particularly because their participation was based on a one time grant). Yet finding alternative archival homes is now made difficult because of the existence of a national digital archive. The funding for UBC was over \$1,000,000 while the projects digitizing the archives received approximately \$20,000 each. The overall project made no plans for what scholars and communities were supposed to do with any archives that families might want to actually donate.

Coordinating efforts for a project of this magnitude would be challenging for any organisation. On top of it, likely the funding was not sufficient for the broad scope of the project, which included producing films, creating educational resources, translating metadata into multiple languages, designing splashy webpages, and so on, in addition to collecting digital archives. Thus what one might argue should be the meat of the project, the capturing of archives useful for the public and scholars to use in the future, was pretty thin. And of course it is always easier to be critical when you're not in charge of a project!

However, it would seem that at the very least the coordination of the archival projects was not properly thought out before the funding program was launched, placing UBC in a difficult position.

My final case study is neither a government funded archival program nor a community/scholarly project but government funding for short term archival projects. That is to say, in the case of the Public Archives of Canada, the funding was to create at least temporarily an ethnic archives. In the second case, the funding was primarily to create a portal and secondarily to collect digitized images of ethnic archives. The National Archival Development Program or NADP was a program to provide funds to small and medium archives and archival associations, a program that was created by Library and Archives Canada or LAC, the successor body to the PAC, in 2006. The NADP replaced all previous funding programs. Its focus was five program objectives which would “contribute to the preservation and greater accessibility of Canada’s archival heritage.”¹⁵ Archival projects under objective number 3 were to “increase the representation of under-represented ethno-cultural groups in Canada’s archival heritage.”¹⁶ It was also to target the records of Aboriginal groups.

How might one understand what represents “under-represented?” Guidelines from the Saskatchewan Council of Archives and Archivists provide a useful interpretation: “Generally, this objective is targeted at representatives of minorities whose records currently are not well documented or accessible in archives: a situation which will vary from province to province. French-Canadians are probably more under-represented in Saskatchewan than they are in New Brunswick, for example. For Ukrainian-Canadians, the reverse likely would be true.” So as an example, in 2008 – 2009, groups whose records were described under this program objective included Acadian; Chinese; Corsican; Dutch; El Salvadorean (sic); Estonian; Finnish; Gaelic; German; Haitian; Hungarian; Nicaraguan; Russian Mennonite; Soviet Jews; Sudanese; Swiss; Ugandan and other African; Ukrainian and Vietnamese. Overall however,

¹⁵ Canadian Council of Archives, “National Archival Development Program Guidelines 2012-2013,” 2011, p. 4.

¹⁶ Cheryl Avery, Jeff O’Brien and Cameron Hart, revision. “The National Archival Development Program (NADP) Frequently Asked Questions,” Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists, 19 November 2011, p. 10.

although there was some confusion in identifying worthy category 3 projects, that category represented a very small proportion of the number of successful NADP projects and even of that small proportion, many of the projects dealt with under-represented Aboriginal groups.

Even though the government was interested in promoting the preservation and accessibility of the records of under-represented ethnic minorities, the take up of this objective was relatively modest. The lowest percentage of overall NADP projects was in the first year of the program, 2006-2007, when only 7.6% of the overall total were devoted to Objective 3. The highest percentage however was only 14.65% in 2007-2008. We can only speculate as to the reasons why, but I would hazard a guess that when you're trying to create a project that meets the funding criteria, most archives would not have a sizable enough amount of records collected from any underrepresented minority to meet the criteria.

So thus we come to today. Has the Federal Government's policy changed from the 1920s? Oddly enough, probably not. On the current website of Citizenship and Immigration Canada there are some telling quotes: "mutual respect helps develop common attitudes." And: "Through multiculturalism, Canada [encourages all Canadians] to integrate into their society."¹⁷ The government is still keen on assimilation, thinly disguised by a nod to multiculturalism. And funding for the NADP, which would encourage smaller archives to focus on underrepresented minorities, was recently eliminated.

What can we conclude then about government funding and its effect on the collection of the records of ethnic minorities? Post-Modernist archival theory has rightly pointed to the role played by archivists in acquiring archival records.¹⁸ But in fact all archival records come to archives through a wide variety of means, not just through the agency of the archivist. And whether those records are of the majority or of minorities, and whether those records come to community archives or to public institutions, the process

¹⁷ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/citizenship.asp> (accessed July 27, 2012)

¹⁸ See writer Jacques Derrida and archivist Tom Nesmith, for example.

is both serendipitous and often haphazard. This is despite the best intentions of communities or archivists to be thorough in their collecting. We need to come to grips with the fact that all archival acquisition is vastly influenced by a complicated mix of wills and intentions involving archivists, creators, the creators' friends, relations and executors, institutions, governments, researchers and myriad other players and factors. The best documentation strategies and plans in the world can never collect more than a portion of the overall worthwhile record.¹⁹ We should not kid ourselves that any collecting program can be thorough and exhaustive.

So given that no acquisition program can ever hope to achieve acquisition of 100% of the permanently valuable records that are created by any group, what is the actual effect of government funding in collection and description by archives? And what can these case studies tell us then about the distinctive role governments play in this mix of influences? The studies can only be suggestive, but they do indeed suggest several things. First, and not surprisingly, acquisition and description programs that are initiated by government policies tend to reflect the interests and goals of those governments. How much of those policies reflect individuals within the elected government and the government bureaucracy versus how much reflects the influence of persons outside the government, such as scholars/historians, consultants, etc. will vary from government to government and will also depend on the leader and how much control that leader has or chooses to exercise.

Second, it will come as no surprise that programs initiated by archives are more likely to be more sound and thorough than those initiated by government departments that are not in the business of handling archives. The National Ethnic Programme at Library and Archives Canada has enjoyed a very good reputation among ethnic groups in Canada. The NADP was singled out by Library and Archives Canada's

¹⁹ For example, out of 231 underrepresented groups that affect public policy in New York, identified by the University at Albany Special Collections & Archives, the records of only 20 were actually acquired by the end of the one year grant program. Brian Keough, "Documenting Diversity: Developing Special Collections of Underdocumented Groups," *Library Collections, Acquisitions, & Technical Services* 26 (2002): 245.

own auditors as being a worthy of continued funding as late as 2010.²⁰ But while one cannot fault the worthwhile intentions of Citizenship and Immigration Canada in documenting communities that have been wronged by Canada, even a cursory examination of the program indicates serious flaws, notably the lack of assurances of concrete plans for long-term storage of digitized archives and the absence of advice for donors who want to contribute their actual records.

Third, while one hesitates to call such government initiatives fads, there are definite tendencies for governments to enthusiastically endorse programs that they eventually are not able to sustain or that incoming governments turn away from. If the programs start and stop, is a fragment of the private archives of a minority group not better than no acquisition at all? What effect does government funding have on the encouragement or discouragement of an ethnic minority group in preserving their own materials? Are archives collected by community members more valuable than those collected by an outsider public archives? In the latter case, they most certainly are, as many writers have suggested, for many reasons, including issues of empowerment, control, accuracy of description, and so on.²¹ But it really comes down to capacity and longevity of the organization. Across Canada many older ethnic organizations are closing their doors as age depletes their ranks and new immigrant groups take their membership to new organizations which are not in any position to begin to collect archives. It is sometimes difficult enough for government funded archives to keep their doors open never mind volunteer run ethnic organizations. And that brings us to my last point.

All of this discussion of government influence on the acquisition and description of private archives is academic and pales into insignificance when we consider the new reality. Many government archives in

²⁰ "Summative Evaluation of the National Archival Development Program," **LAC Evaluation Committee**, 23 November 2010.

²¹ See for example, regarding accuracy of description and empowerment: Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan, "Participatory Appraisal and Arrangement for Multicultural Archival Collections," *Archivaria* 63 (Spring 2007): 87–101; on appropriation of the history of the marginalized see: William T. Hagan, "Archival Captive – The American Indian," *American Archivist*, vol. 41, no. 2 (April 1978), pp. 135–46

Canada have largely backed away from collecting any private archives at all.²² It began some time ago when a number of provincial archives ran out of space and slowed their acquisitions to a halt. This has now been followed as noted before by an almost complete moratorium on acquisitions of private records by Library and Archives Canada. This has been coupled by a stated intention by Library and Archives Canada to offload private fonds onto the provinces and university archives.²³ Space and resources are not limitless and there are more worthy records out there to collect than there are institutions and temporary government funding to handle. It is probably no coincidence that the government funds for the Chinese stories project did not emphasize the collection of physical records in any way. That is to say it was not simply an oversight, but intentional. And perhaps that is what we will be looking at in the future.²⁴ We may well be acquiring virtual surrogates of physical records of not just ethnic minorities but all incoming private records. It is a troubling thought.

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The Reticent Archives: Preserving LGBTTTTIQ Histories

My title comes from the work of a graduate student at York University, whose research took him to the archives in a small town in Saskatchewan where he hoped to find evidence of the history of the local gay community. Instead he found “silences and absences,” yet it was in those very spaces that the archives

²² Laura Millar, “Discharging our Debt: The Evolution of the Total Archives Concept in English Canada,” *Archivaria* 46 (Fall 1998): 103-46.

²³ National Archivist and Librarian Daniel Caron stated before a House of Commons Committee: “We are developing an approach, what we call the agora, where we are discussing—and this has just started—where the physical material should be located...” He has been quite clear in his discussions of moving physical materials to other archives in other venues. House of Commons Committees - CHPC (41-1) - Evidence - Number 017, 6 December 2011. <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=5308478&Language=E&Mode=1> (accessed July 30, 2012).

²⁴ In the same speech before the House of Commons, Caron stated: “You need to understand that acquisitions are made through digital media more and more.” This was to explain why Library and Archives Canada’s budget for acquisitions had decreased. When the House of Commons representative stated that she was talking about old documents, M. Caron stated: “There are indeed fewer old documents than before.” Ibid.

became “full: full of questions [and] power relations.” Ultimately, the experience left him wondering of the LGBT community’s history, “Where do we find ourselves?”²⁵

And so this paper began as a brief exploration of that question. The approach was twofold: to determine the extent to which public archives in Canada have retained a record of the LGBT experience, and to consider the various factors which have or still do affect the collection of those records. My colleague Shelley Sweeney²⁶ and I surveyed Canadian archivists to get a glimpse of current practice in acquisition, description, and access; to try to determine the relationships between archivists and donors, and to ascertain how archivists viewed LGBT materials generally. We reviewed existing descriptions available over ArchivesCanada, the national database of holdings, and its constituent parts from each province and territory; and finally, considered some of the responses to an earlier survey on archivists’ values.²⁷

Two aspects of that early survey were suggestive, providing a broad framework for our more specific enquiry. First: why might we even assume publicly-funded archives²⁸ are acquiring LGBT materials? Our largest LGBT collection can be found in the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives in Toronto – a community-based archives, run by volunteers. In most instances for public archives, collecting LGBT materials would require private-sector acquisition; can we legitimately assume that, collectively, we are managing to do so in a broad and comprehensive manner? In the survey, although just under 55% of archivists agreed to some extent with the statement that “archives document society as a whole,” only 38% agreed without qualification, suggesting most archivists are aware that the issue is complex and there may be gaps in the evidential record.²⁹ As one respondent noted, this question was phrased in a manner which made the results unreliable; but many respondents indicated they had distinguished between the collective and the individual institution. That interpretation coincided with a belief that as a network, archives were acquiring broadly and documenting society comprehensively. More important, perhaps, were archivists’ views on factors which might influence acquisition. A bare majority – 50.71% – agreed to some extent with the statement that “archivists are in control of their acquisitions policies;” but 81.69% agreed that funders or sponsor agencies affected those policies. With this in mind, we would not have been surprised to see a number of respondents citing narrow acquisition mandates, or a move toward accepting sponsor records only, as reasons why LGBT materials had not been collected.

The other interesting feature was a frank acknowledgment: just under 78% of archivists agreed that they could not “avoid subjectivity in their acquisitions policies.” Such self-awareness might in fact help mitigate against uneven collecting practices, but also suggested at least the potential for some archivists to ignore LGBT records through personal bias, either consciously or unconsciously. Discrimination against the LGBT community would hardly be new.

²⁵ Wickenhauser, Joseph. “Finding Ourselves: LGBTQ Archives and the Small Urban Centre.”

²⁶ University Archivist, University of Manitoba, Canada.

²⁷ Although useful, the results in each instance cannot be considered conclusive. The surveys were both conducted over ARCAN-L, the Canadian archivists’ listserv, and were entirely voluntary; in both instances, the sample group was informative but not statistically conclusive. ArchivesCanada is in transition between platforms, and for a variety of reasons Western Canada is better represented than the maritime provinces. Additionally some significant collections – the archives of the University of Toronto, McGill, or the Canadian Lesbian and Gay Archives, for example – have not been added.

²⁸ Referred to hereafter simply as “public archives.”

²⁹ Avery, Cheryl. “Actions, Purpose and Values Survey,” conducted over ARCAN-L.

A full discussion of the shifting attitudes toward the LGBT community is impossible here, but a few dates are important in terms of official Canadian policy. Homosexual activity, particularly between men, had been deemed an “offence” at least as early as 1777³⁰ in what is now Canada. “Gross indecency,” an ill-defined term but one again, specific to activity between men, was entered into the Criminal Code in 1890.³¹ In 1953 the wording was amended to be more inclusive: “*Every one* who commits an act of gross indecency with another person is guilty of an indictable offence...” [emphasis added].³² Another significant change to the law did not begin to take place until 1967, when (then) Justice Minister Pierre Trudeau famously noted that “There’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation... what’s done in private between adults doesn’t concern the Criminal Code.”³³ On 14 May 1969 Bill C-150 was passed, decriminalizing homosexuality.³⁴ Although this did not provide full equality under the law for lesbian and gay Canadians, and certainly did nothing to diminish homophobia and various acts of discrimination, large and small, it was nevertheless a watershed moment.

1969 was notable for two other events: the Stonewall Riots in New York, a “militant assertion of gay rights over [a] six-day period of rioting [against police],” and the subsequent (very visible) establishment of the University of Toronto Homophile Association. Other Canadian organizations soon followed. Throughout the 1970s, however, there were continuing police raids on gay bars, meeting places and bath houses in Canada’s major cities. A “national beacon moment” occurred on 5 February 1981, the day following one such raid on bathhouses in Toronto, when “over 3,000 protestors took to the streets to mobilize against the discriminatory arrests and unlawful invasion of these gay spaces.”³⁵

This history effectively politicized the LGBT individual twice: first through criminalization, then as part of a community actively pursuing human rights. Both criminality and activism have an impact on the nature of the archival record, where that record is retained, and how it is described. And whatever LGBT associations might have existed earlier, the shift in 1969 toward organized advocacy within the community also clearly creates a potential dichotomy between personal records documenting an individual life, and those of a social movement. So to our question: how have Canadian archivists responded?

Several historians argue that archivists have, in fact, actively destroyed LGBT history. Martin Duberman, for example, writes that “all scholarship on sexuality was suspect – curtailed or suspended by archival

³⁰ Kinsman, Gary. *The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, (2nd edition, revised), 1996, p.104.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 102.

³² The wording had previously been “every male person.” See “A History of Canadian Sexual Assault Legislation 1900-2000,” http://www.constancebackhouse.ca/fileadmin/website/gr_indec.htm (accessed 17 July 2012)

³³ A clip of the news scrum with reporters can be viewed at the CBC’s digital archives site: <http://www.cbc.ca/player/Digital+Archives/Politics/Rights+and+Freedoms/Trudeau's+Omnibus+Bill+of+1969/ID/1815590962/> (accessed 17 July 2012).

³⁴ Specifically, in private and between consenting adults over 21 years of age.

³⁵ For useful histories of the LGBT community in Canada, see Neil Richards’ chronology on Saskatchewan Resources for Sexual Diversity (<http://library2.usask.ca/srsd/history.php>) and Graham Stinnett’s essays for the Manitoba Gay and Lesbian Archives (http://www.umanitoba.ca/libraries/units/archives/digital/gay_lesbian/index.html)

custodians;”³⁶ Steven Maynard refers to “conscious and unconscious suppression of lesbian/gay materials in mainstream archives,” and Gary Kinsman suggests that because “same-gender eroticism was stigmatized, historically valuable diaries and letters have not been preserved.” Finally, Marcel Barriault writes that “gay and lesbian materials had often been deemed by archivists to be of little or no historical value.”³⁷ As Lisa Duggan bluntly stated, “lesbians and gay men have had their existence systematically denied and rendered invisible.”³⁸ Clearly, archivists are thought to have been complicit in that loss.

The primary evidence for this is absence: researchers have failed to find early records relating to what is a known history. No written institutional policies against collecting LGBT material have yet been cited. In addition, however, there is anecdotal evidence, and we can rely on it to be truthful: there is no doubt that, in some cases, suppression or destruction of relevant materials occurred. But to what extent? The appraisal decisions of individual archivists made while working through private fonds are not easily quantified; and even less so, are the decisions of donors concerning privacy.

We did not find significant evidence of overt bias on the part of archivists. That said, at least one of the responses was ambiguous at best. One of our questions asked why LGBT materials were not being collected, and one of the answers, “Never been offered any. Never thought of going to look for any in the community. Don't really see the need to document this aspect of society – just as I don't see the need to document heterosexuality,” seemed to couch discrimination in liberal phrases. And, when asked if they would accept sexually explicit material (of any persuasion), at least some archivists recognized their own limits, together with the implication that had for research. For example, one respondent admitted, “I would not accept anything that could constitute child pornography...I know this is a grey area in terms of sexuality studies, but it is not one I am willing to cross.” Although the latter was not related to LGBT materials, both these responses do indicate the types of barriers which archivists can bring to bear on acquisition of any record. On the whole, however, there was a general sense that LGBT records were a valid area for acquisition, and no different from any other type of record in the archives' holdings. When asked if they had the same acquisition and access policies for controversial materials – hetero- or homosexual – archivists overwhelmingly responded in the affirmative. “We don't make distinctions based on subject matter,” one wrote.

However, only 55.88% of respondents indicated they had LGBT materials; and only 26.47% indicated their repository actively collected in that area. A majority (52.94%) indicated LGBT materials had been found in personal papers acquired for other reasons; in such cases, 87.88% indicated those materials would normally be retained. Most (60.61%) would not consult with the donor before making the decision on retention, although many identified privacy as an issue, particularly when uncertain if the donor was fully aware of all the materials in the collection. Two comments in particular, however, stand out: “We inform donors as a matter of standard procedure in situations where appraisal leads to the *removal* of records [emphasis added];” and “We do not destroy material that has archival value because someone

³⁶ Dubernam, Martin Bauml. *About Time: Exploring the Gay Past*. New York: A Sea Horse Book, 1986, xiii. Duberman suggests that in part this was due to sexuality being treated as “a shameful part of our history – diaries bowdlerized, relationships concealed, photographs and letters burned.”

³⁷ Marcel Barriault, “Hard to Dismiss: the Archival Value of Gay Male Erotica and Pornography.” *Archivaria* 68, Fall 2009, p. 225.

³⁸ Stephen Maynard, “‘The Burning, Wilful Evidence’: Lesbian/Gay History and Archival Research.” *Archivaria* 33, Winter 1991-92, p. 196, 198.

does not approve of it.” Both, as opposite approaches, are nevertheless essentially in agreement with another, quite firm, statement: “Retention is solely the decision of the archivist.”

Curiously, if there was a suggestion of bias it was most clearly evident in the response to acquisition of “anti-gay” materials. Only 15% indicated they had records of this kind – although as a means of documenting the LGBT experience, these records, which help identify the nature of discrimination and some social attitudes, are surely useful.

But there are several problems inherent simply in identifying the extent of relevant collections across the country. Not least is a changing lexicon: the Hungarian writer Karoly Maria Benkert first used the word “homosexual” in 1869, but the term did not enter into the English language until the 1890s through the work of Havelock Ellis and in medical literature.³⁹ “Transgender” is another, more recent, example, dating to the late 1980s;⁴⁰ and throughout words such as “gay” or “queer,” have transitioned from non-sexual terms, to slurs, to re-appropriation within the community. All of these shifts have implications for description. More important for the issue of discovery, however, is the extended period when homosexual relationships were identified as criminal behavior. At least until 1969 in Canada, that official categorization would have significantly affected how relevant resources would have been acquired, retained, and described.

For “official” sources, in particular for court records which have proven so useful in documenting gay history, descriptive records – including finding aids – are likely quite generic. Indeed for any large record group – immigration or homestead records, for example – detailed indexes tend to follow, rather than anticipate, high researcher demand. Relevant information within sources like court records would likely not be found by specific descriptive terms provided by an archivist but by those researchers understanding function and willing to spend time searching through the records.

The question of the archival response to personal fonds is even more interesting. Barriault suggests the loss of records was due not to overt censorship on the part of archivists, but to a combination of concern over ethics, privacy, and donor reluctance: “There is much anecdotal evidence ... to suggest that archivists routinely segregated records of a homosexual nature from the fonds they were processing, and returned these materials to the donors or to their heirs.”⁴¹

Nevertheless, one must wonder if there were not also some archivists retaining these records, either by chance or design. The weight of being defined as “criminal” would have demanded a circumspect life to some degree, and may well have resulted in coded language being used by gay men and women in some correspondence – or even in personal diaries; a language which archivists may or may not have interpreted correctly.⁴² Even with clear or more explicit records, how might archivists have dealt with materials which were documenting activities then considered illegal? They almost certainly would not have signaled the fact in their descriptive records, which could have put at risk either the donor or other individuals. It seems reasonable to assume that at least some relevant records remain to be “discovered”

³⁹ Kinsman, p.61.

⁴⁰ K.J. Rawson, “Accessing Transgender //Desiring Queer(er?) Archival Logics.” *Archivaria* 68, Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, Fall 2009, 124-125.

⁴¹ Barriault, p. 225 (see note 17. In that instance, the family appeared eager to suppress evidence of a gay liaison).

⁴² A recent example, popularized through film, are the diaries of Yorkshire landowner Anne Lister, “uncovered” by a historian in the Calderdale archives, England.

in files, hidden under the generic rubric of “correspondence” or “diary.” What is profoundly unlikely, however, is any significant action on the part of archivists to revisit old descriptions and processed collections to create the “thorough, accurate cataloguing” necessary for easy discovery.⁴³ Indeed, when asked about their descriptive practices when dealing with any potentially sensitive materials in LGBT collections, our survey respondents admitted “it usually just gets described at a fonds- or series-level in a general sort of way;” “we describe textual material at the folder level. Therefore, descriptions are usually vague;” and along similar lines, “the records described at the file level (subject files), and the file names don’t create any issues”⁴⁴ i.e., the file titles alone may not provide any useful information for discovery of LGBT content. A number of comments were not reflective on the substance of archival description, but its structure; possibly suggesting a neutral response from many archivists toward LGBT holdings. “Record the title proper and other title information based on the contents of the series, file, item, or publication” was typical of this type of response.⁴⁵

At best we can say that specific language in archival description appears to have followed the broad shifts in public policy relating to the LGBT community. Our survey of materials accessible through ArchivesCanada revealed a relatively modern collection. Based on the first year in inclusive dates, 68% of the collections reflected materials created in 1960 or later. Only 4.16% contained materials dating from before 1900. That survey also revealed a somewhat fragmentary collection: although collectively, these records amounted to 236 m in total, half of the collections were 1 metre or less in extent. We found 77 collections in total.⁴⁶ This amount cannot be considered extensive by any means. Although much work remains to be done in terms of adding descriptions to ArchivesCanada, it does not seem likely that numerous LGBT collections will be added. British Columbia, with 22 collections, has the largest number; but this represents only 0.2% of the BC holdings described online. Saskatchewan, with a smaller population and fewer archives, has 12 LGBT collections and does somewhat better proportionately, but LGBT materials still represent just 1% of the total number of collections as available through online descriptions.⁴⁷

Only 14 of the 77 descriptions we found suggested collections documenting the personal, through the correspondence, diaries, or elements of domestic life of a single individual; and another three – the records of an artist, a poet, and an unpublished literary manuscript – might be considered within this category as well. By contrast, 29 collections related to issues of LGBT history and/or social justice, through the records of LGBT organizations specifically or within other institutions (for example, policies within religious denominations, at universities, etc). Seven collections related to issues of health, most often HIV-AIDS; and ten were print collections (books, newsletters or ephemera), the records of feminist bookstores, or publisher’s records. As noted earlier, only four were records relating to “anti-gay”

⁴³ Suzanne Fischer, “Nota Bene: If You ‘Discover’ Something in an Archive, It’s Not a Discovery.” *The Atlantic*, 19 June 2012, <<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2012/06/nota-bene-if-you-discover-something-in-an-archive-its-not-a-discovery/258538/>> (accessed 19 July 2012).

⁴⁴ Survey results. Shelley Sweeney and Cheryl Avery, survey on Canadian archivists’ collection practices: LGBTTTIQ archives, conducted over ARCAN-L.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Representing English-language descriptions only.

⁴⁷ Figures based on Memory BC feature, “browse archival descriptions,” which lists a total of 10,794 descriptions <<http://memorybc.ca;/informationobject/browse>>; and the administrative site for the Saskatchewan Archival Information Network (SAIN), which lists 1147 public fonds-level descriptions.

sentiment, including large collections such as the *Alberta Report* fonds, records of a weekly newsmagazine with a socially and politically conservative viewpoint.⁴⁸

The difference in the number of collections documenting an individual, and those documenting a social movement, are surely a legacy of the decades of official persecution and continuing discrimination. As discussed, some early collections may contain evidence not overtly signaled in descriptive records. But the opposite might also occur: that descriptive records might be thought to privilege one facet of a life, emphasizing the notion of the homosexual as someone “whose very existence [is] defined by his sexuality.”⁴⁹ And so to another, difficult aspect of acquiring LGBT collections: that of donor reluctance.

The graduate student whose work influenced our title, asked his question – where do we find ourselves? – in the context of the small town, rural LGBT experience, and whether that history would be retained in local archives rather than in larger urban centres. As part of the constraint in establishing a local collection, he mentioned a gay lawyer who had placed an ad in *Perceptions*, published in Saskatoon since 1983 and the longest continuously published gay and lesbian newsmagazine in Canada. When this individual considered the magazine he did so expecting it to be read in Saskatoon and Regina, our province’s larger cities – but suddenly felt uncomfortably “open” when he discovered the magazine was also being kept by his local library/archives.

The reluctance by some individuals to acknowledge aspects of their private life is exacerbated in the LGBT community through historical and continuing discrimination, some of it violent. But such reluctance is not unique: heterosexual donors may feel the same and indeed, archivists may provide them with the option of suppression. One donor noted an archivist had provided him with “the opportunity to excise what he called the embarrassing bits” in a personal fonds; the “letters and diaries, the intimate revelations.” There were precisely the type of record, the donor noted, his “Grandmother... would have consigned to the burning barrel because, she used to say, “they are nobody’s business.”⁵⁰ Donors may excise materials before they reach the archives; consider Henry James’ statement that “a man has a right to determine, in so far as he can, what the world shall know of him and what it shall not.”⁵¹

Donors of every persuasion may have materials they consider “nobody’s business,” but the LGBT situation is unique. Archival literature has highlighted how uncomfortable even LGBT *researchers* may be, simply by undertaking research in public archives – Stephen Maynard refers to his “trepidation,”⁵² and K.J. Rawson notes the numerous “environmental cues” that signal to individuals whether or not they are welcome in an archives.⁵³ One must wonder, then, if archives might not be considered welcoming spaces for research, how easily they could be considered trusted repositories for the documents revealing the personal lives of individuals.

⁴⁸ See John Lund, “Representation of Homosexuality in the *Alberta Report*,” ACA 2009, for an interesting discussion of LGBT images from this fonds.

⁴⁹ Kinsman, p. 68.

⁵⁰ David Carpenter, “Private Life.” *Lights to Each Other*, Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 2004, 33.

⁵¹ As quoted in Andrew Taylor, “‘The same old sausage’: Thomas Carlyle and the James Family,” in *The Carlyles at home and abroad: Essays in honour of Kenneth J. Fielding*. D. Sorensen and R. Tarr, (eds.). England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004, 126.

⁵² Maynard, p. 197.

⁵³ Rawson, p. 127.

It seems clear that absences exist within the collective holdings for LGBT history in Canada's publicly-funded archives, but the spectre of larger and growing absences is looming. The most surprising finding of our survey – certainly the most disturbing – were the number of responses which indicated archivists were taking a passive approach to collecting in general. “We are interested in this material but are not able to be proactive – we accept fonds as they are offered,” wrote one respondent; another “did not have the time or resources to actively pursue” LGBT collections, despite identifying them in an acquisitions strategy. “Collecting is passive generally;” was the consensus. Many apparently were willing to consider LGBT materials but only when specifically offered. It would seem the donor and not the archivist was more influential in determining the holdings of the archives. Only one respondent was proactive:

We acquire material relating to all aspects of Vancouver's history and actively seek out archival material for those communities, such as the [LGBT] ...communities, that we perceive as under-represented in our holdings. In addition, we have a good working relationship with the BC Lesbian and Gay Archives...My comments can be made public. At the City of Vancouver Archives we are proud of [our] acquisition, processing and access practices.⁵⁴

Should this approach really stand out? Should it really be the exception, rather than norm? Passive acquisition, to the point of inertia or complete moratoriums, is a significant issue for archives and one which clearly has implications well beyond LGBT records.

As it stands, the majority of the LGBT holdings we found on ArchivesCanada (44.11%) were in university or college archives. This may reflect a willingness within universities to acquire more “special” collections; and as well undoubtedly reflects the growing trend in LGBT research. As one respondent noted, “Sexual diversity is a research interest among faculty hired by the university in recent years, which has encouraged the acquisition of private archives and collections of printed material that deal with this topic.” Surprisingly, religious archives had the second-highest number of relevant holdings, at 20.5% of the total. Despite the fact that the federal and provincial archives are the largest in the country, their LGBT holdings were not extensive. Instead (at 14.7%) they were tied for third place, together with municipal archives, the group most likely to claim a narrow mandate as the reason why they had not actively pursued LGBT materials.

Several respondents did note limited mandates and particularly stretched resources when indicating why they were not collecting LGBT material: “volume of work,” “do not have the resources,” were typical comments. And indeed, we might look to increasing constraints from sponsor agencies, willing to manage their own records but less inclined to acquire more broadly. Our largest archives, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), recently cut a significant number of positions in the private archives sphere but left those responsible for government records untouched. It has also long signaled its intention that “more will be done in cooperation with Canada's 800 plus archives,” including the possible transfer of existing collections to those institutions “where they will get the greatest use and visibility.”⁵⁵ These statements are generally interpreted by the Canadian archival community to mean the LAC not only will reduce its private-sector acquisition in the future, but de-accession many of its existing non-governmental holdings and disperse them among other institutions. The trend away from active acquisition in private records

⁵⁴ Leslie Mobbs, City Archivist.

⁵⁵ Library and Archives Canada. “Modernization – Myth Busters.” <<http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/about-us/modernization/Pages/Myth-Busters.aspx>> (accessed 17 July 2012).

may well be growing, exacerbated by funding and space issues affecting many Canadian archives. The question is: will universities remain willing and able to acquire broadly as significantly larger, better resourced and better staffed institutions do not? *Should* archives document society as a whole? *Do* they, in fact, do this? In ten years' time these might prove useful questions to ask of Canadian archivists.

The existing LGBT holdings in Canada's publicly-funded archives are not extensive. With passive acquisition, in particular, it is increasingly important for the LGBT "advocate/collector" to help ensure an appropriate record is preserved. Archives exist to reflect society: to ensure authentic, reliable evidence of our lives and actions are preserved. But this is ultimately a joint project: donor and archivist together; and it requires public policy support. Some archivists are trying to acquire a broad spectrum of materials, despite narrowing mandates; but ultimately we cannot retain the record without at least some participation and action by individuals, organizations, and governments who understand the long-term value of retaining our shared history.

So we end where we began: asking of the LGBT community's history, "where do we find ourselves?" The answer, unfortunately, is: still fighting for recognition.

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