PUBLIC AWARENESS AND THE IMAGE OF ARCHIVES

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INTRODUCTION

What does the public think of Library and Archives Canada (LAC)? Over the past decade three national surveys have been conducted that provide insight into this question. Such surveys tend to be a litmus test for such issues as the importance attributed to the preservation of our records as well as how and by whom it should be done. Documenting a country's historic record is widely considered to be essential in the transmission of its national identity to future generations. Officially mandated with preserving our documented heritage, the LAC has positioned itself as a key government institution that supports that goal and hence not just a collector of the nation's historic records that is located in its national capital.

The important level of public support for digitizing our legacy invites reflection around what the portability of our records implies for the country's central physical repository. Not only have rapid advances in technology transformed the means by which institutions preserve our documented heritage but they have also changed the manner in which individuals seek access. Digitizing key government documents means far fewer trips to the LAC for researchers residing outside the National Capital Region. But this by no means is the major issue in a broad multidimensional discussion about how best to document our national heritage and the place of national archives in the changing archival landscape.

That which follows will review findings from Canadian public opinion surveys around the preservation of our heritage, views around State support for Canada's Library and Archives and the kinds of things that Canadians collect. Three of the surveys were commissioned by the LAC and another by the Association for Canadian Studies.

LAC AWARENESS

Looking at the public opinion polls conducted over the past decade, a 2005 survey for Library and Archives Canada done by the firm Ipsos Reid revealed that a wide majority of Canadians (95%) say it is important to them personally that

Canada's documentary heritage is preserved for now and for future generations. Three in four (76%) say this is very important, while an additional one in five Canadians (19%) say it is somewhat important. However such unqualified support for the preservation of our documentary heritage cannot be construed as a clear endorsement for the LAC. Drawing such a conclusion risks oversimplifying this increasingly complex debate where several institutions can use the same results to call for support.

The 2005 LAC/Ipsos Reid survey further revealed that those Canadians most likely to stress the importance of preserving Canada's documentary heritage include individuals that have used the services of Library and Archives Canada (92%) compared to those who have not (81%) as well as those who have heard of Library and Archives Canada (84%) compared to those who have not (73%).

But the survey points to relatively low awareness of Library and Archives Canada with just under three in ten (28%) saying they have heard of the LAC which is far less than the share (48%) reported in 2003 that had heard of both the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada (which were merged in December 2004). There is however strong agreement with the mandate of the LAC to collect, preserve and make known and accessible the documentary heritage of Canada. But too few Canadians are aware the LAC is tasked with that mandate. Once advised as such, Canadians offer a fairly accurate array of guesses as to some of the information and services that might be offered by the LAC. Respondents most frequently thought they would find information on the history of Canada (i.e. historical documents, family history/genealogy, Canadian cultural and social history, Canadian art and literature, Canadian music and sound recordings, film and video).

Among those who have heard of Library and Archives Canada, one in four (24%) say that they have used their services, while a majority (75%) have not. Some one in ten of those saying they have used the services of the LAC say that they have visited its website "collectionscanada.ca", (a wide majority of Canadians say they have not [89%]).

An important majority of Canadians agree it is important that Library and Archives Canada make as much of its collection and services as possible available over the Web (93%). To be fair, however, this finding does not necessarily provide important leverage for the LAC in securing increased Government support, as it is likely that the population would similarly endorse other institutions making resources more available on the web.

There is somewhat of a paradox in the midst of these less than heartening results. While there is wide support for the digitization of the LAC collection, a majority (52%) of survey respondents agree that "with so many documents, photographs and other media now being produced in digital or electronic format, they worry we will not be able to preserve our documentary heritage."

There is some good news in the poll, in the finding that a substantial share of Canadians are interested in the country's history and culture. By consequence, the Ipsos analyst suggests that there may be a pent-up demand for LAC services, as after being informed about the mandate and availability of its resources many Canadians say they would likely use such services if they were "…looking for information for a school assignment or to help a child with homework, finding information on a Canadian topic via the Web site, researching their family history, or conducting research using the archives, books, newspapers or other collections." (Ipsos, 2005). Again, however, many institutions can use these findings to make the same case in support of their institutional needs.

Five years later in a March 2010 Ekos Research survey commissioned by the Library and Archives, there appeared yet further declines in knowledge about the LAC. Conducted for the National Archive Development Program of Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the survey included questions about awareness of the LAC, answered by 500 persons online and another 500 by telephone.

When asked, without any suggestion, which institution was responsible for collecting, preserving and making accessible publications and records of importance to Canada, some 2% referred to the Library and Archives Canada. Still when unaided another 16% mentioned either the National Library or Archives Canada or National Archives or something similar. In effect, some 82% of Canadians either did not know about the LAC or thought some other organization was responsible for this mandate. When prompted, some 4% of Canadians said they were "very familiar" with LAC. This rises to about 22% when adding the 18% that say they are somewhat familiar. Taking these responses together, the pollster concluded that the "LAC is not widely known among the general population."

In fact the survey doesn't reveal a significant change in the degree of knowledge about the LAC compared with what was yielded by Ipsos five years previously. As revealed below, what the survey does reveal is that lifting the word "National" from Canada's central Library and Archives has not caught on with the population: in general, people continue to evoke the former name when asked about the organization that is responsible for collecting, preserving and making accessible publications and records of importance to Canada. Equally interesting in the 2010 survey is that its split sample (between web and phone respondents) reveals that the web group uses the Library and Archives's previous moniker.

Table 1: What is the name of the organization that is responsible for collecting, preserving and making accessible publications and records of importance to Canada?

		SAMPLE SOURCE	
Q2	TOTAL	ONLINE PROBIT	TRADITIONAL PHONE RDD
Unweighted Total	1033	530	503
Library and Archives Canada	2%	3% ++	1% −−
National Library or Archives Canada or National Archives	16%	23% ++++	9% −−−−
Heritage Canada/ Heritage Minister/ Canadian Heritage	3%	4%	2% −
Statistics Canada	2%	2%	2%
Historical Society of Canada/ Canadian Historical Association	2%	1%	2%
Other variations of Archives (Public Archives, etc.)	5%	4%	5%
Access to Information Act/ Access to Information	1%	1%	0%
Please Specify	0%	0%	0%
Other	3%	2%	4%
Do not know/No answer	66%	59%	73%

Source: Ekos Research Associates, March 2010

FUNDING THE LAC

Although recognition of the Library and Archives is not seen as high, when asked about state funding for the institution a majority of Canadians believe that it should be funded either only or mostly by the government of Canada. As observed below, francophone Canadians are more likely than English Canadians to agree that LAC funds should be provided by Government only.

Table 2: For each of the following institutions, please indicate what should be the ideal level of government involvement in your opinion: Library and Archives Canada

	TOTAL	ENGLISH	FRENCH
Government involvement only	27.3%	24.2%	39.0%
Government involvement in majority	38.4%	39.6%	33.9%
Minimal government involvement	19.4%	20.8%	13.9%
No government involvement	5.9%	6.4%	4.0%
I don't know	9.0%	8.9%	9.2%

Source: Leger Marketing/Association for Canadian Studies, July/August 2013

The percentage that believe that the LAC should get Government only is higher than the share that think that should be the case for the Canadian Museum of Civilization (18.6%) and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (10%).

COLLECTING CANADIANS

Surveys point to a consensus about the importance of preserving our heritage. There is little information in surveys about the degree to which individuals are engaged in the preservation of their records or things they value which can have historic significance. Future surveys that look at opinions about the preservation of our historic records need to consider the role of the citizen in the process of heritage collection. What is the relationship between the things that individual Canadians value and their degree of support for the preservation of our collective heritage? Despite the opportunities to retain key elements of our legacy on line, there are indeed several items that are valued by the population that don't lend themselves to digitization. Undoubtedly photographs are not one of them. As observed below, some 43% of Canadians collect photos either often or sometimes, old coins (32%) are the next most common thing that are collected by the population, old books are collected by some 29% of the population and the least collected are stamps at 13%.

Some three in ten Canadian report that they have a collection of books about the history of Canada. But there is a divide between those under 45 years of age and those above 45 with about in five of the former doing so compared with one of five of the boomer plus generation. One in three English Canadians report that having a collection of Canadian history books compared with one in six francophones. British Columbians (40%) are most likely to possess such a collection with Atlantic Canadians (21%) followed by Quebecers (17%) being the least likely.

Table 3: How often do you do the following? Is this often, sometimes, rarely or never?

COLLECT		TOTAL	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Old coins	Often	9%	17%	6%	11%	8%	9%	5%
	Sometimes	23%	25%	20%	17%	22%	26%	26%
Old stamps	Often	3%	2%	2%	5%	4%	5%	1%
	Sometimes	10%	6%	8%	9%	11%	12%	11%
Old photos	Often	14%	20%	12%	13%	12%	12%	16%
	Sometimes	29%	20%	29%	34%	28%	35%	23%
Old books	Often	7%	9%	7%	6%	8%	7%	7%
	Sometimes	22%	25%	19%	25%	20%	23%	19%

Source: Leger Marketing/Association for Canadian Studies, July/August 2013

SEARCHING FOR CANADIAN HISTORY

Returning to the 2005 IPSOS survey, despite their relatively low awareness of the LAC, it reveals that many Canadians offer a fairly accurate response when asked what information and services are offered by the LAC. Finding information about the history of Canada is the response given most frequently to this question. As noted above, use of the LAC's Collections Canada web site to obtain information is especially low amongst the population with about 2% of the population saying they have used it. A 2013 Leger Marketing survey reveals that when the population seeks information about the history of Canada, they will use Google and then Wikipedia. Approximately one in six Canadians say they will first look to a dedicated Canadian history website (which in effect they might be directed to if they use Google).

Table 4: I consult the following when I search for specific issues in the history of Canada

	TOTAL	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Google	38%	50%	44%	38%	36%	33%	31%
Wikipedia	17%	25%	26%	14%	15%	18%	10%
Dedicated Canadian history web sites	15%	22%	10%	17%	15%	13%	13%

Source: Leger Marketing/Association for Canadian Studies, July/August 2013

LAC CLIENTELE

A third national survey conducted in 2011 by Angus Reid for the LAC looked specifically at the users of LAC services. Of the 860 persons surveyed nearly 40% come to the LAC via the website. The survey found that nearly 60% of LAC clients were culturally-oriented and a similar share had used libraries other than the LAC, 44% used a museum and 36% an archive other than LAC in the past three months (Angus-Reid, 2012).

Over half of the LAC clients are using the services for research (52%). The clients are experienced with library settings (80%) and tend to be familiar with their research subject (53%), which for two thirds surveyed (66%) revolves around genealogy and family history. Some 80% of clients rate themselves as experienced with libraries.

Client satisfaction is high with three quarters very likely to recommend LAC to others. One-third of clients of the LAC learned about it through an online search engine, followed by one in five through a government of Canada website (Angus-Reid, 2012).

In effect the clientele of the LAC consists principally of specialists and further research is needed to determine the level of LAC outreach to the broader public specifically via its website.

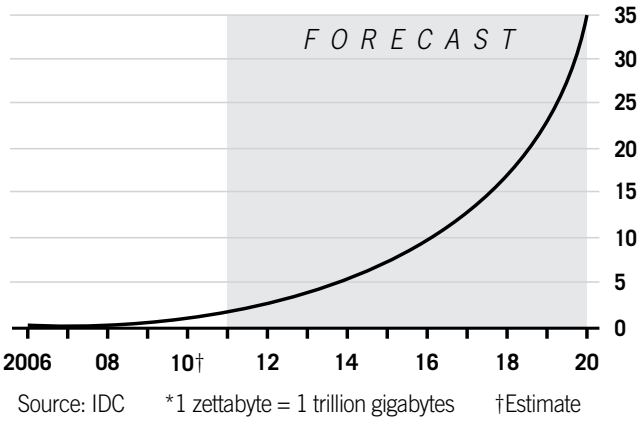
CONCLUSION ARCHIVES AWARENESS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

There is no doubt that efforts to heighten institutional awareness are closely aligned with web presence. Stakeholders increasingly measure outcomes by the numbers of searches on a particular site-dedicated or not. Today when thinking about accessing an organizations output beyond the almost instant reaction of looking at how many people have gone to it is to look at who is doing so. Undoubtedly this reality has a profound on assessing awareness of the LAC and going forward there will be an increasing challenge for the Archives in carving out its

niche. As seen below in Appendix 1, the future will bring yet further increases in the global rate of digitization giving the web in some future incarnations near omnipotence as the repository for documented heritage(s). Clearly under these circumstances more attention will need to be directed at the questions most relevant to determining how best to give Canada's heritage a future and which institutions will be its ideal partners.

Appendix 1: Catch them if you can

Worldwide digital data created and replicated
Zettabytes*



Source: The Economist: "History flushed", April 28, 2012

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