THE CANADIAN ARCHIVES SUMMIT, 17 JANUARY 2014

Canadian archives are the foundation of Canadian studies, and the development of Canadian studies will depend in large measure upon the satisfactory development of Canadian archival resources.
To Know Ourselves: The Report of the Commission on Canadian Studies
Dr T.H.B. Symons, 1975 – Vol. II, page 82

The services that Canadian archives provide for our citizens are under severe pressure. They are fragile and, in some cases, disappearing. The records selected and preserved by generations of archivists are in demand more than ever. History lives – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada addressing residential schools; the formal apologies for past wrongs to Canadians of Japanese, Chinese and Ukrainian origin; Arctic sovereignty; land claims; military commemorations; environmental change; and boundary disputes *all* rely on the integrity of the historical record. The fundamental legal and cultural values of the record, both official and personal, are demonstrated daily.

The digital revolution, transforming record keeping systems across society, adds a new complexity to the archival task. Identifying, securing and maintaining e-records in all their rapidly changing formats, while retaining their essential value as legal evidence is an immense technological challenge. Archivists have been learning new skills, supporting graduate programs in archival studies, and advancing research on standards and solutions. Solutions, however, are expensive and seldom factored into the cost of new systems. The Delete key is ubiquitous. In this digital age, governments, institutions, corporations and families are in danger of losing memory.

To address the varied challenges facing archival services, the Association of Canadian Archivists, the Association des archivistes du Québec and the Canadian Council of Archives organized the Canadian Archives Summit. This was centered at the Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto but held simultaneously at 30 plus locations across the country. Key leaders were asked to prepare background papers to inform the discussion. And 16 colleagues and allies were our 'agents provocateurs' advancing new ideas and perspectives in an informative series of seven minute presentations. In the afternoon, those participating locally and nationally gathered at discussion tables to assess the practicality of innovative solutions.

The intent was clear: To ensure that Canada's documentary heritage continues:

- to grow systematically using all media to document the Canadian experience in all its complexity and diversity;
- to maintain the integrity of the record of Canada as evidence valid in law, as the basis for studies in many disciplines, and as a way "to know ourselves";
- to be available to all who are interested in it now and to those of generations to come.

The Summit's intent was also to advance public recognition of our documentary heritage as a source of enduring knowledge accessible to all, contributing to the cultural, social and economic advancement of Canada as a free and democratic society.

This publication makes available the series of Background Papers together with a few of the quick presentations made at the Summit. We invite all comments on the Summit's continuing web site: archivists.ca/content/canadian-archives-summit.

Canada's foremost archival philosopher, Dr Terry Cook, FRSC, provided a realistic and challenging ambition:

"This is about starting a process, interesting enough people deeply enough to round out these issues; address what has been overlooked and build a community vision that is achievable over a generation… The process will be long and painful, but necessary if a strong enough consensus is to be built to sustain it."

We invite all Canadians to help with this process. Canada's recorded memory deserves nothing less.

Ian E. Wilson