

*Archives of Canada*

The very earliest historians were in fact really sociologists because they were doing what we would call contemporary analysis. They were very leery of using written records, and I think the reasons for this are quite relevant to the function and role of archives. Thucydides, for example, wanted to interview the participants in the Peloponnesian Wars because he did not trust records. He said that the people who took records took little trouble in the search for truth, that they accepted what came first to hand, and that chroniclers composed their tales not to speak the truth but to please the ear. Thus we have the writing of history confined to subjects in which participants could get behind the written records and check out the facts for themselves until we had reliable archives.

It is not until the 16th Century that archives became the most commonly used basis for the writing of history. Scholars like ibn-Khaldoun and Machiavelli did not use written records very much. Thucydides and Tacitus relied on contemporary sources in interviews, with very limited archival sources. However, once we get into the 16th Century, we see historians like Guicciardini collecting their own archives, using extensively these written records, and giving historians from different periods a chance to assess the record for themselves because they had an adequate base from which to do it.

We see the very distinguished scholar, Jean Bodin, from the 16th Century, who accepted both the Greek idea that history could be used to infer from the past into the future and the idea that people would be judged on their record and would therefore attend to it. According to him, the fact of historical records would incite some to virtue and frighten others from vice. The Archives of Canada might be playing that role as well. We do not have quite the same situation with a Government with a majority of 210 Members; perhaps it is not quite the same tyranny as has happened in other countries at other times. However, the same principle holds, and let us hope that we have an archives which can incite Ministers of the Crown to virtue and frighten them from vice.

Much of Bill C-95 is very sensible and very reasonable. It is non-partisan and reflects a good deal of solid work. Certainly it is very acceptable to archivists, scholars, and the general public that has occasion to use the Archives. The very important new functions which the archives perform are set out—conserving private and public records of national significance and facilitating access to them. The Archives are to be a permanent depository of records of government institutions and of ministerial records. They are to facilitate the management of records of government institutions and ministerial records. Also they are to encourage archival activities in the archival community. There is a great desire among scholars to have greater co-operation between the Archives of Canada and provincial archives. Indeed municipal archives are growing in many parts of the country. Co-operation among the different levels and different functions is already developing. We hope that it will develop even more strongly.

As well as their function in the acquisition, conservation, and management of historical records, they also provide assistance to other institutions such as the National Library of Canada by providing conservation services, administrative services, and exhibition services. Of course this is extremely important.

There are a number of heritage programs within the Archives of Canada which I should like to cite very briefly. The first is that of historical papers and records or manuscripts with 60 million documents and 23,000 reels of microfilm. Another is historical and genealogical documentation, with more than 100,000 works on Canada and its history. Another is a national map collection with one million cartographic and architectural items in the collection. As well there is a national photography collection with more than 8.5 million photographs from government and from private sources dating from the mid-19th Century to the present. There is a pictorial documentation section with over 100,000 works, including paintings, drawings, and printed images of people, events, places, and objects. There is also the national film, television, and sound archives with an extensive collection of Canadian private and public sector film and films of cultural or social value, amounting to more than 60,000 hours of recorded and historically important speeches and interviews. There are federal archives with a microfilm unit with more than 36,000 metres of selected records of federal Departments and agencies. Finally there are film records with approximately 1,500 files of selected electronic records produced by the federal Government, as well as those created by private agencies.

There is an enormous diversity of functions, and we see in the Bill recognition of the expansion of the requirements of archives as a result of the different media by which recordings are made. All these measures are certainly sensible and will receive my support.

I should like to refer to a couple of problem areas. I begin by referring to subclause 5(1) of the Bill which reads as follows:

Except as otherwise provided under an Act of Parliament, no record under the control of a government institution and no ministerial record, whether or not it is surplus property of a government institution, shall be destroyed or disposed of without the consent of the Archivist.

This appears to give precisely what we want. The archivist will be the person who decides whether or not material ought to be preserved. Anyone who thinks that records should never be destroyed should be aware of the enormous volume of material. Decisions must be made on which items should be preserved and which ones will be and will not be of importance to our culture. It is the archivist who should be making such decisions.

However, once we get past subclause 5(1), we find some unfortunate loopholes. The preservation function will be interfered with if the Bill as presently drafted goes through.