

## WHAT WE HAVE LOST: WHAT WE STAND TO LOSE: THE FUTURE OF ARCHIVES AND ARCHIVISTS IN CANADA

Readers of the *Bulletin* will recall that in March 2012 the federal government announced cancellation of the \$1.7 million National Archival Development Program (NADP) and cuts in staff and services at Library and Archives Canada. These cuts were widely criticized in the heritage and historical research communities as they seemed to threaten the archival system in Canada built up since the 1970s. On January 16, 2013 the Archives Association of Ontario East/Est Chapter sponsored a panel in Ottawa under the title “What We Have Lost: What We Stand to Lose: The Future of Archives and Archivists in Canada.”

One hundred and twenty-five people attended the meeting, well beyond the expectations of the organizers, and the crowd heard excellent presentations from Patti Harper, Department Head, Archives and Research Collections, Carleton University, Jim Burant, Adjunct Professor (Art History), Carleton University and former manager of Art and Photography Archives at Library and Archives Canada, James L. Turk, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers and Laurie Dougherty, Archivist of the Arnprior McNab/Braeside Archives.

James L. Turk laid out the negative effects of recent cuts to Library and Archives Canada. Acquisitions of new records have been severely curtailed; interlibrary loan service has been lost; and the services of specialist archivists to researchers reduced. If announced cuts are carried out, Turk said, the LAC budget by 2014-15, adjusted for inflation, will be just 58% of what it was in 1990-91. He doubted whether LAC could carry out its legislated responsibilities in the face of such cuts. Turk also described the difficulty his organization has had in obtaining any consultation with senior LAC management over the cuts in services to researchers. He referred the audience to CAUT’s website where details of CAUT’s [Save Library and Archives Canada](#) and [Canada’s Past Matters](#) campaigns can be seen.

Patti Harper outlined the types of projects completed by the now cancelled NADP program and pointed out that the program required matched funds by the participating archives creating a multiplier effect. There is more demand for access than ever before, Harper said. There are more potential acquisitions than ever before, and there is less staff than ever before. All these issues are of concern and there is a huge misconception that archives are not trying to keep up with digitization to make these materials available.

Considering the ways archival work in Canada was changing, Jim Burant pointed out that archivists have been trying to deal with three major challenges over the past twenty years - the push to digitize their paper or analogue holdings, the requirement to collect and control new “born-digital” records of archival value, and the demand from online researchers that archival docu-

ments be easy to find. In meeting these challenges Burant sees a need for archivists “to build within the profession regional and national alliances, on a range of issues, if necessary without relying on Library and Archives Canada.” Burant stressed the idea that archivists serve society, and not just the governments that fund their organizations.

Laurie Dougherty spoke of the circumstances faced by smaller local archives with the loss of the National Archival Development Program. An important funding source has been lost and valuable archival projects will simply not get done. Preserving documentary heritage in one’s own community has clearly become more difficult. Dougherty also spoke of the need for mentoring programs for archival staff and the ways a certification program for archivists would foster skills improvement.

It was clear from the turnout and the discussion following the presentations that there is serious concern about the directions being taken in Ottawa with regard to archival funding and the future of Library and Archives Canada. The spirit seen across Canada last spring when the major cuts were announced is still very much alive in Ottawa and, one suspects, elsewhere. Thanks to John Lund, President, AAO East/Est Chapter of the Archives Association of Ontario, whose executive organized the meeting and to Paul Henry, Archivist, City of Ottawa, for hosting the meeting at the City of Ottawa Archives. AAO East/Est will be disseminating as much of the information developed at the meeting as possible through its blog, [aaoeast.blogspot.ca/](http://aaoeast.blogspot.ca/). Some photos from the evening are available on the AAO East/Est Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/AAO-East/20930065827038>.

*John Smart, [jsmart@rogers.com](mailto:jsmart@rogers.com)*

*February 14, 2013 (John Smart is a retired archivist and professor living in Ottawa.)*



Roundtable Panelist John D Lund 2013.  
*From left to right / De gauche à droite,*  
**Laurie Dougherty, Jim Burant, John Smart, James L Turk,**  
**and Patti Harper**