

Off The Record



au camp Ducharme 1938 Amis de la

AAO

Archives Association of Ontario

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On the Cover

En route to après-ski? A splendid wintry scene titled “Amis de Léoda et Anna Gauthier au Camp Ducharme, 1938” from the fonds Liliane Gauthier Beauchamp, Laurentian University Archives, photo P083. Submitted by Marthe Brown

About Us

The Archives Association of Ontario (AAO) was established in 1993 as a



result of the amalgamation of the Ontario Association of Archivists and the Ontario Council of Archives. It is a network of archives and archivists providing programs, education, advocacy and shared knowledge, consisting of approximately 300 members.

The AAO promotes the development of a co-operative system of archives in Ontario by:

- Advocating on behalf of Ontario’s archival community to the government of Ontario, local government and other provincial institutions in order to advance archival practice and promote the value of archives
- Promoting professional standards, procedures and practices among archival repositories
- Facilitating archival communication and cooperation among institutions, users and sponsors
- Providing leadership through communication and co-operation with individuals, groups and associations interested in the preservation and use of Ontario’s documentary heritage

Additionally, the AAO offers a number of different services to its members. Please visit <http://aao-archivists.ca/Services> to learn more.

Message from the Editor

by Grant Hurley

Due to recent political events, I've been thinking lately about the role of archives in democracy. Oddly, it's not an idea we talk a lot about as a profession, though there's a common understanding among us, I think, that recordkeeping supports democracy through making information available, which may hold governments to account. Public archives, after all, are the original open government. A year ago, I could feel confident that the United States' open government program, as made a shining world example under President Obama, would continue. Now, as the past several weeks' bewildering series of events unfolded, it seems like the American federal open government initiative will be among the fact-based casualties. It has yet to be seen how the relationship between President Trump and the US National Archives and Records Administration will turn out: archives have both the power to preserve your legacy and question it. One way or another, I suspect our American colleagues are in for a fight. And perhaps, as journalist-academic Jay Rosen noted in [a recent post](#), citizens will need to seek additional sources for accountability and transparency beyond government (and which they already have, in many forms). There is no longer easy "accountability in a box."

The sweep of these events feels big, and it is. How are we, as Ontario archivists, involved? The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor [was recently interviewed](#) in the *New Yorker* on a new lecture of his titled "Some Crises of Democracy." Taylor observes that

governments are struggling to maintain legitimacy and faith in the system as traditional voting precipitously declines in Western democracies. Taylor attributes this decline to a spiraling feeling of inefficacy among citizens. Citizens no longer, in many cases, feel a sense of personal participation in the project of democracy. One way to combat this, Taylor argues, is to enliven our sense of citizenship through participation in community-oriented projects at a local level. As the author of the piece summarizes, "Perhaps, instead of questing for political meaning on Facebook and YouTube, we could begin finding it in projects located near to us." I feel that this is where our archival organizations fit, both in our programs and services and activism. We already do so much of this work already, and we know from day-to-day experience that a wide variety of members of our communities connect with us in unique, meaningful ways. The challenge may be more about promoting these connections among our funders and stakeholders, and connecting to the non-engaged members of our community. How do we tell our stories in new ways, and tell them better? How can we connect to members of our community who do not have a relationship with our archives, and what barriers might have prevented this relationship? I recently spoke to an archivist about their annual Doors Open event. She noted that Doors Open gave people permission to come in without a particular purpose, and they often expressed curiosity about the archives but had felt intimidated about coming in the doors. Events such as this may help break down some of these basic barriers. This issue of *Off the Record* is a great example of these questions and activities, including an interview with Anna

St. Onge, who emphasizes the need for activism and outreach. It includes a special edition of "Ask an Archivist" on digital archives, and feature pieces by Jennifer Robinson on her work as a private conservator, by yours truly on Michael Redhill's 2006 novel *Consolation* and its imaginary archival objects, and by Arthur G.W. McClelland on the work of the Ivey Family London Room at the London Public Library.



Message from the President

by Dana Thorne

The start of a new year offers opportunities to grow and a chance to reflect on the previous year's goals and accomplishments. As we enter the next calendar year, we look again to the AAO's 2015-2020 [Strategic Plan](#). Our four strategic priorities are: growing and nurturing a strong, thriving, and engaged membership; securing a high level of efficiency, accountability, and visibility as an organization; serving as a centre of expertise for the Ontario archival community; and continuing to serve as an active, reliable, and responsive member of the Canadian archival community. Many of the goals outlined under those strategic priorities have already been achieved, and we continue to pursue more objectives as we approach the middle of our five year plan.

The AAO team had several volunteers step forward in new capacities in the latter half of 2016. We are pleased to welcome Amanda Tomé as the new Web Administrator! Thanks to Danielle Robichaud for the years

that she spent in that role and the bright voice that she brought to our online communications. We also thank Paul Henry for stepping forward as Chair of the Institutional Development Committee. At the April 28 AGM, we will be electing two Board positions: Vice President/President Elect and Secretary-Treasurer. Perhaps you would consider responding to our Call for Nominations!

Following the Fall 2016 special theme issue of *Off the Record* on archives and Indigenous issues, the page [Toward Truth and Reconciliation](#) is live on the AAO website. It will be supplemented with a second web page that links to Indigenous records in archives and cultural centres across the province (slated to launch at the end of February 2017). These two online resources are part of the AAO's ongoing efforts in key areas including: helping archival institutions respond to the Calls to Action outlined in the report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada; engaging with Indigenous users and contributors to archives; and working with Indigenous groups that are seeking support for existing archives or are interested in beginning their own archives. In March 2017, Archives Advisor Iona McCraith and Archeion Coordinator Lisa Snider will participate in a panel at the Ontario Museum Association's Indigenous Collections Symposium that discusses the AAO's ongoing work in this area.

After the draft strategy was approved by the AAO membership in May 2016, the Provincial Acquisition Strategy (PAS) is in effect. Now that the first calendar year has drawn to a close, the PAS Working Group encourages archives across the province to partici-

pate in this strategy by completing the Ontario Archival Accessions Register. This register captures the most basic and essential details about records acquired by your institution in 2016. By submitting this information to the PAS Working Group, you are contributing to an online register that will allow archival institutions across the province to collaborate more effectively and understand what materials are being collected across Ontario. The deadline for submitting your OAAR spreadsheet is February 24, and it can be downloaded [here](#). The results will be published during Archives Awareness Week 2017.

The 2017 Conference is quickly approaching! “Come Together: Meaningful Collaboration in a Connected World” will encourage discussions about how partnerships between archival institutions and reaching out beyond our own community can enhance our work. The University of Toronto’s Faculty of Information (iSchool) will host the Conference from April 26th to 28th. Early bird registration opens in February. For the third year in a row, the [Shirley Spragge Bursary](#) will be available for students, recent graduates, or archivists in financial need. The bursary provides free conference registration and up to \$650 in reimbursement for travel.

As Archives Awareness Week approaches in the first week of April, take advantage of the resources available on the AAO website. If you are a member, login to the Members Only section for material for help planning your events, including press release templates, information on how to conduct a successful tour, media relations tips, and more! You can also register your events and have them posted on the AAO website by

contacting our Archives Advisor, [Iona McCraith](#).

I thank all of our volunteers who worked tirelessly in 2016 on both exciting new endeavours and the everyday tasks that make our association tick. As we look forward to our 25th anniversary in 2018, the AAO anticipates a busy and successful 2017!



Member Spotlight: An Interview with Anna St. Onge

When and why did you first join the AAO?

I’m pretty sure I joined up with a student membership during my second year of library school, but I really got involved when I started working part-time at York University and Suzanne Dubeau recruited me to join the Archeion Committee, which was around 2007.

What is your fondest memory from your involvement with the AAO?

I think my fondest memory is finishing up a big thank you post as chair of the Archeion Committee to acknowledge all the archivists, volunteers and funding bodies that helped us migrate our legacy database to AtoM. It is one of the few times in my career where I was able to see a project from start to completion and saw a direct impact within the community.

Reflecting on your career so far, what are you the most proud of accomplishing?

Recognizing the symptoms of burnout. Finding satisfaction in, and celebrating, every small, incremental victory. Learning to fail in public. Staying in my lane when it comes to advocacy work.

How have you seen the AAO make a difference for archivists practicing in Ontario?

I think the AAO is critical in connecting small institutions managed by lone arrangers and volunteers. Organizations like the AAO do a lot of the unglamorous work that supports professional renewal and provides emotional support to archivists working in isolation. The AAO can also be a strong united voice to advocate on behalf of individuals working in difficult situations. You would be surprised how powerful a press release or a site visit report from the Archives Advisor can be on the ground.

What is the most rewarding part of your work?

In no particular order:

- Suggesting a resource that leads to a researcher's epiphany.
- Teaching undergraduate students about archival practice and theory.
- Reintroducing records back into home communities.
- Reading an acknowledgment of archival labour in academic publications.
- Correcting and cleaning up metadata.
- Solving mysteries, chasing ghosts, and recognizing patterns in documents that reveal the record creator's intention.
- Tweeting about weird stuff in our holdings.

What do you see for the future of our profession?

Okay, I'll bite. Again, in no particular order:

- Active and consistent recruitment of First Nations, Inuit and Métis, people of colour and LGBT2SQ folk into the profession, and establishing equal space for multiple worldviews of how records are created, preserved and made accessible.
- Acknowledgment of the role played by archives in reinforcing colonial paradigms followed by thoughtful and deliberate action to transform our practices.
- Developing stronger advocacy skills as a core requirement for all archivists.
- Acquiring the technical skills necessary to document and preserve records as they're being created.
- Covert infiltration of adjacent professions with the express purpose of implementing institutional accountability, documenting decision-making, and raising awareness about the critical importance of provenance.
- Preparing our institutions for the inevitable societal changes that will be caused by climate change and divestment from fossil fuels.
- Fighting fascism.



taag Update

by James Roussain

taag President

The Toronto Area Archivists' Group has been busily working away behind the

scenes planning the upcoming AAO Conference to be held April 26-28, 2017 at the Faculty of Information (iSchool), University of Toronto. Here's what else we've been up to over the last few months:

Member Recognition Night

On Monday, November 7, TAAG held a pub night at the Harbord House to celebrate our fellow archivists, Jean Dryden and Loryl MacDonald, 2016 recipients of the AAO Alexander Fraser Award. The Alexander Fraser Award is given to individuals who have contributed in a significant way to the advancement of the archival community in Ontario. Both Jean and Loryl were unable to attend the

AAO Conference in Thunder Bay to receive their awards - given their numerous contributions to the Canadian archival community, it was only fitting that we celebrate this great achievement. Big thanks go to Ellen Scheinberg for all her help in ensuring the evening's success.

Omeka.net Workshop

On Friday, November 11, TAAG hosted an introductory workshop on Omeka.net, a free, web-hosted content management platform. Led by Leslie Barnes, Digital Scholar-

ship Librarian at the University of Toronto Libraries, participants learned how to display collections, build exhibitions, gather stories, and map photographs online. With over 18 participants, the event was a smash success and was well-received by all those who attended.

Many thanks to the E.J. Pratt Library at Victoria College, University of Toronto for allowing us the use of their computer lab and for hosting the event.

Winter Warmer

Our Winter Warmer get-together was held on Thursday, January 19th at Harvest Kitchen on Harbord Street. A splendid time was had with friends old and new!



Jean Dryden and Loryl MacDonald, 2016 recipients of the AAO Alexander Fraser Award, pictured at the TAAG reception with Ralph Coram and Ellen Scheinberg.

Stay tuned for news on upcoming tours and workshop in the coming months, details TBA.

Keep current with upcoming events and TAAG affairs by following us on [Facebook](#) or visiting our [page on the AAO website](#)

If you need to reach us, please be in touch! Email us at taag.chapter@gmail.com.



Provincial Acquisition Strategy

If your institution would like to participate in the AAO's new Provincial Acquisition Strategy, now is the time to complete the Ontario Archival Accessions Register. Once the results from archival institutions across Ontario have been tabulated by our team, we will be in a unique position to share information about the material that was acquired by archives across Ontario in 2016.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	ONTARIO ACCESSIONS SURVEY 2016					
2						
3	Name of Archival Institution:	EXAMPLE Barchester County Archives				
4	Archeion Identifier:	EXAMPLE ON00967				

You can participate by downloading the [OAAR Template](#) and returning the completed form to the Provincial Acquisition Strategy Working Group at chairs@aao-archivists.ca. The deadline for completing the OAAR is February 28th, 2017. For more information, visit the [OAAR FAQ](#).

Thank you for participating in this exciting new initiative!

Apply to the Shirley Spragge Bursary!

Up to \$650 in funding and free registration is available to the 2017 AAO Conference in Toronto!

To qualify you must:

- Be an AAO member.
- Be an Ontario resident

And be either:

- A student enrolled in a recognized archival program (must submit proof of enrollment).
- A recent (1-3 years) graduate of a recognized archival program (must submit proof of enrollment).
- A practicing (or volunteer) archivist in financial need (must submit proof of employment or volunteering).

The Shirley Spragge Bursary is adjudicated by the AAO Fundraising Committee. Applications will open for 2017 on February 6 and close on February 20. The successful applicant will be announced at the end of February.

Interested applicants are required to fill in the bursary application accessible on the AAO website and demonstrate a financial need, an interest in archives education and/or professional development, and confirmed intent to participate in the annual AAO conference. Further, applicants will also need to submit one letter of reference from an AAO member that describes the referee's support of the applicant's attendance at the conference. For more information and to submit your application, visit the [Shirley Spragge Bursary page](#) on the AAO website.

Shirley Spragge was an enthusiastic, dedicated archivist, well known in the archival community in Ontario and across the country. While she was most closely associated with Queen's University, she was involved in many other endeavours, including archival associations, historical groups, church archives, and university faculty work. In 1995, Shirley died from complications associated



The Student Pages: Ask an Archivist

Ask an Archivist Special Edition: Professional Panel on Digital Archives

[This edition of “Ask an Archivist” features a special excerpt from the professional panel on digital archives hosted by the ACA Student Chapter at the University of Toronto iSchool on January 24th 2017. The panel featured: Kathryn Lee (Media Asset Management & Taxonomy Coordinator, CBC Library and Archives); Emily Sommers (Digital Records Archivist, University of Toronto Archives); Grant Hurley (Digital Preservation Librarian, Scholars Portal, Ontario Council of University Libraries); and Anna St. Onge (Archivist, Digital Projects & Outreach, Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections, York University). Many thanks to Julia and Curtis of the ACA Student Chapter for hosting us, to the students who asked some excellent questions, and to my splendid fellow panelists for the opportunity to publish an excerpt in these pages! – Ed.]

What are the kinds of challenges that you experience on a daily basis in your different

workplaces?

Emily: I find just managing expectations, whether a researcher's expectations about the service level you're able to provide, or whether those of your fellow staff members about certain systems we are implementing and what these systems are able to do. My position is a new one within the archives, so it's been an interesting challenge to see how I insert myself in terms of managing our digital assets into the existing workflows and structures of the other archivists who are on staff. Some of it is taking away the duties that they've been doing in an ad hoc way over the years and formalizing them, and really trying to implement new workflows and new procedures and policies, and that takes time to do.

Anna: I wrote: breaking the cycle of reactive decision-making. So often when we do work in an archive, we're resource-strapped. You have different pressure points and often you have to make the practices to make decisions not in the moment, but in a 15-minute window, which is sometimes useful, but often is not useful for the long term. So part of what I'm finding challenging in my current position is making policy and docu-

mentation centre-focused, which sounds super boring, and often is, but is so important and so satisfying to actually articulate what you are doing in your everyday, and to make documentation a living organism in your daily work, as opposed to this idea where you're saying "I'll get to that, I'll write out what I did, I'll fix the bug and at the end of the day, I'll write down I fixed it." The end of the day never comes. Or the end of the day arrives and you want to go home and watch Star Trek: Deep Space Nine.

Grant: I find that digital preservation is a hot field right now and there's lots going on. You could spend your whole day reading press releases and project reports on digital preservation - there's a lot of stuff. It's hard to keep on top of everything. I try and be specific about what I'm looking at. I go through the [Documentary Heritage News](#) e-mail that comes through the Arcan-I listserv every Friday. It's pretty great and allows me to keep on top of stuff without getting overwhelmed. The other thing, too, because it's a new field and there's still lots developing, is that there isn't a perfect 'right' way to do everything. That's not entirely true either in the paper world, but it feels like there are analog best practices that are more available to us. So doubting yourself is common, I find, in developing workflows for digital preservation. Is this thing really going to be safe forever? But that's not really the goal - it's more like keeping it safe for the next few years - short term for long term. It takes a lot of research and talking with people ultimately to make that work. And if you're working alone, it's a bit challenging.

Kathryn: One of the challenges I thought of was the shifting of priorities as directors

change. I've been there for nine years and have seen five directors come and go. So each one has their own vision for the library and archives and what they should focus on, so that's constantly changing. The other big thing for me is what we call "fluid timelines" at the CBC. Deadlines constantly shift. A lot of the times they are completely out of your control.

What is the level of expertise, technically speaking, for what your job entails? Where are the areas for students to focus on?

Emily: I would say metadata. Metadata is super important especially because you will be dealing with digital assets and objects. Having a firm understanding of the standards out there is really key. It depends on how you'd define 'advanced knowledge.' I don't think knowing Photoshop or how to use a scanner is really hard to learn, so I don't think that's advanced, and I wouldn't say that you'd need to be comfortable coding or using the command line too much. You'll generally have IT support - it depends though. There are definitely small codes that you can run if you want to teach yourself. The main thing I would say is that it is really important to understand the systems that you are using - how they work. We use AtoM a lot and I know it's run on a SQL database. I don't know how to fix stuff in the command line, but I can talk to my IT systems administrator and ask her to reset the gearman because it's broken, and she can quickly do that. It helps you better communicate your needs. It's also about fostering relationships with your IT staff.

Anna: I think you can learn on the job. I agree that you need to be able to communi-

cate and understand how to articulate what the problem is. And there's certainly skills I wish I had developed when I was in the i-school and the stakes were lower and the timelines were more generous. I wish I had learned the command line. I wish I had kept the computer skills I had in the '90s, like logging into a bbs. And now I'm trying to re-train my brain.

Emily: I can do some of it, but it takes me three times as long.

Anna: If you're able to solve the problem and it takes you longer, at least you can solve the problem under your own steam. I think sometimes there's this weird pressure to become very proficient where in a working environment, not everyone needs to be an expert. You need to be an expert in some area - you need to decide where your talents and skills lie and cultivate certain skills. But not everyone needs to be a wizard.

Grant: I feel like at every one of these kinds of talks, someone asks "do you have to know coding to be a digital archivist?" The answer is no, but if you're interested in pursuing it, then yes, do that, because if you're interested it can only help you. In other ways, being curious about computers and files and how they are created within computer systems is a necessary precursor. And being interested in the big and small questions of digital preservation and digital archives more generally. What do we keep? A perennial one. How do you keep this over the long term? Who gets to access these systems and technologies? Be curious and be interested, and if advanced computer technologies call your name, and it does for

some people, then heed the call.

Kathryn: I think you don't need a computer science background. Our database admin sits in the IT department. I think what is useful is if you have some experience with video and audio editing tools, that can give you a foot in the door at the CBC.

Any other advice you would give to students to help prepare them to enter the field?

Kathryn: I think it's always useful to do information interviews with people in a role you might be interested in doing, so that they can give you the inside scoop on what their job day-to-day looks like and what skills they need.

Grant: It's an interesting question to ask what students should do. In my experience, careers in digital archives and digital preservation aren't clearly laid out at this point. There isn't a clear pathway towards a specialty in this field other than the way you construct it through your own interests. The workshops available tend to be pretty expensive. Emily and I went to this amazing workshop called the Digital Preservation Management Workshop, which is offered pretty often. Tuition is high and you should have your future employer pay for that. My sense is that employers are looking for people who come with good research and problem solving skills, they're good at communicating, and learning and engaged. I do see some job descriptions asking for experience with Archivematica. But it's more about your capacity to learn and solve problems than it is to come in as an expert at this point.

Anna: I went really practical. I said learn

markdown and git. Learn how to use git because it is a way of learning how to communicate with people in outside professions and on project managing and versioning your documentation. It's a good way to ease into that sphere. Learn OpenRefine for manipulating metadata. I only started learning OpenRefine six months ago and it's a revelation. It would have solved so many problems (in the past). You can put in ugly metadata and fix it, and learn how to problem solve in that environment. There was a metadata [workshop on OpenRefine](#) and it was geared towards libraries and archives, so it's useful to practice, and it runs you through very basic steps.

And choose an open source community and get involved in it. Archivematica, AtoM, Islandora - find a community that you are interested in being a part of that community. Start fixing typos or helping out with documentation and working your way up. It helps mitigate the imposter syndrome that happens when you wonder "How did fancy unicorn person become the wondrous being that they are?" They started by correcting typos and worked their way in. And it's appreciated, that kind of work.

Emily: Touching on what Anna said, there are tons of resources online, such as listservs - I find the [digital curation listerv](#) or [code4lib](#), which is a bit library-skewed but applies to our work. Code4Lib also has a journal with good case studies, and there's a newer journal called [Practical Technology for Archives](#) which is a bit more case study-oriented. A couple of really good blogs I follow: the electronic records section of the SAA (it's called [bloggERS](#)) have a great blog with guest people creating blog posts.

There's a really cool archivist in England from the University of York named Jenny Mitcham who's a digital archivist and [blogs](#) about what she does. Her blog is really useful because she's using AtoM. When possible, depending on the student jobs or practicum, take the initiative and mention you have an interest in doing this kind of work to your supervisors and they might be able to find projects for you to work on. That was how I was initiated into doing projects with AtoM and Islandora.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Kathryn: I really like the change management aspect of it. We're building a new system, it's going to change a lot of how we do our work and make things a lot easier, hopefully. I like the aspect of very thoughtfully considering how we are going to change our workflows and how we are going to introduce that to our employees and making sure that they feel comfortable and empowered using the system.

Grant: It's an exciting field - there are lots of opportunities to make your mark and contribute to the community. If you're at an institution that encourages you to do research, which is the case if you're in an academic context, I really enjoy that. And in the work I do, it's about supporting people with resources that they wouldn't otherwise have access to. To me, that's the most extreme validation. Resources are tight and working in a collaborative situation is really wonderful.

Anna: I like mysteries and pattern recognition. I love solving problems, but also figuring out a mystery - why did this records crea-

tor do this, or am I interpreting this intention correctly? And pattern recognition, which I find is a good skill to have because we're dealing with so much data. If you can tolerate spreadsheets and just love the "oh, spelling error" or "there's an extra space," that will reduce the mental health strain of thousands of spreadsheets.

Emily: That's the one thing I didn't realize - how much I'd be working with spreadsheets. Become comfortable using Excel. Otherwise, just the variety of the day-to-day for me personally. No two days are the same. Things are constantly improving in the field, which is exciting. And implementing that change management is important and really interesting. When I think of something and pitch it to colleagues or other people, they will have a different opinion or view, and integrating both sides of things is really neat.

Anna: It's a factor too of this generation. We were the first wave where it was like, "solve my digital problem, you are the digital archivist, fix this!" We've been answering that question for a few years and the next series of jobs that are coming up is solving that problem on a bigger scale. It's beautiful to be working in a community where people want to solve these big problems.

The transcription of the panel presentation has been edited and condensed.

Photo courtesy of the University of Toronto Archives, 2006-2-1MS.



New Lives for Old Artifacts: Conservation in Private Practice

by **Jennifer Robertson**
*Book and Paper Conservation
Services*

As budget cuts have tightened belts in institutions across the country, more and more archives and libraries find themselves without trained conservators on staff. The need for conservation and preservation of artifacts however, only accelerates as collections grow, space contracts and use increases. That is where the conservator working in private practice comes in.

I have been working in the field of book and paper conservation since 2008 and graduated from the Masters in Art Conservation program at Queens University in 2011. I spent several years gaining experience in the conservation labs of collections in the US and UK, including internships and contract work at the British Library, Johns Hopkins University Library and the Smithsonian Libraries. I worked closely with many experienced conservators at these institutions, and their wonderful mentorship was invaluable in developing my knowledge and skills.

In 2013 I moved home to London, Ontario to work at a thriving private art conservation practice, and in 2016 I opened my own company, Book and Paper Conservation Services, in order to focus on the conservation of works of art on paper, archival materials and rare books. Conservation, and

treating archival materials and rare books specifically, is work that I find intensely rewarding. The job is always interesting; every new item is a challenge, and while sometimes working with rare and important items can be intimidating, there is great satisfaction in seeing an object properly restored and preserved.



Jennifer Robertson

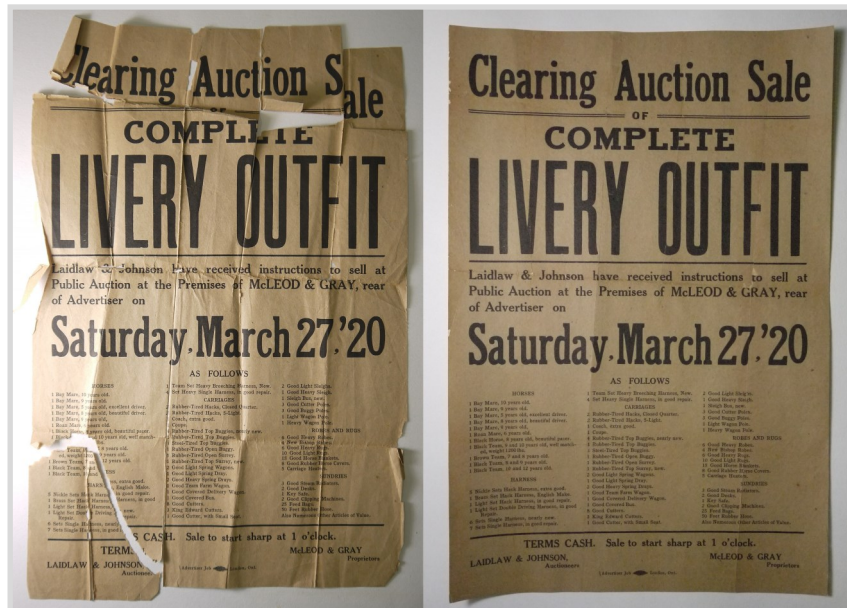
house to perform conservation duties. My job description includes not only physical conservation of damaged and deteriorated items, but also advising on storage and display conditions, performing collections assessments, assembling framing and constructing housings. I often work to deadlines for exhibitions or on new acquisitions,

Working independently of an institution may seem daunting to some, but for someone who has done freelance and contract work for many years, operating a private studio comes naturally. Apart from the benefits of flexibility, the variety of work that comes to a private practice is astonishing. Clients are a mix of private collectors and institutions including libraries, archives, galleries and museums from across Ontario and beyond. While I am not the steward of any one collection identified with an institution, I feel privileged to play a part in the preservation of objects from many backgrounds.

tions, and am always on call for emergencies or disaster remediation. Private conservators tend to see objects in more extreme conditions than an in-house lab would, as it is always the most at-risk artifacts that receive special attention. The treatments are often more complex and the results more dramatic than the routine maintenance a staff conservator might perform, which keeps my practice exciting and challenging.

Smaller institutions in particular rely on the skills of private conservators like myself, as they seldom have staff in-

Funding is always an issue for institutions requiring conservation work from an outside provider. In the best case scenario conservation has been included in the annual budget and is allocated as needed to priority objects each year. Sometimes grants are



Livery advertisement repair before and after

received specifically for undertaking conservation work, or a bequest might have been provided by the donor of an item. The Adopt-a-Book model is a particularly creative one, allowing specific items to be sponsored for conservation by patrons of the library or institution. This model is frequent and successful in collections in the US and UK, and I hope to see more Canadian institutions employing it to fund conservation projects, because it develops strong and tangible relationships between a collection and the community it serves.

Education is an important part of a conservator's job, and that is especially true in private practice. I regularly engage in outreach to organizations and the public, and enjoy giving presentations on specific treatments or conservation in general. The work is visually appealing and the public finds it fascinating to see behind the scenes of the conservation process. I also continue my own professional development by attending conferences and workshops and keeping up with new research, and my practice adheres to the code of ethics and current best practices outlined by the Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property.

The most important part of the job, of course, is the physical process of conserving paper-based artifacts. Archival materials that are commonly treated in my studio include printed and handwritten documents on paper or parchment, photographs, maps, architectural plans, prints and drawings, as well as bound volumes, albums and ledgers. These types of materials are some of the most interesting to work with, and I am always glad to hear from archives and special collections who are seeking conservation for their collections.

Archivists tend to be less concerned with aesthetic improvements; usually what they bring are documents that are too deteriorated to be safely accessed, or that have suffered damage that obstructs the information. Mechanical issues like tears and breaks need to be mended before the item is handled by the public, or else there is risk that it will deteriorate further during use. Items like letters, photographs, land deeds and ledgers commonly experience heavy use over time, causing excessive damage. Oversize items such as wall maps often exhibit extensive damage as well, caused by improper storage and handling.

The treatments are as varied as the artifacts, and usually involve a combination of the following: dry surface cleaning, mechanical repairs to tears or losses, aqueous treatments such as washing, deacidifying and bleaching to reduce stains and discoloration, inpainting, lining, mounting and hinging. Each object is unique and its treatment is tailored to address specific concerns or achieve a specific outcome. Improving the stability and longevity of materials is always the goal, and aesthetic improvements are usually achieved as well. Conservation and preservation allow delicate materials to be accessed safely by researchers for many generations to come.

Thanks to organizations like the AAO, heritage professionals across Ontario are well-connected and there are many opportunities for collaboration. I hope to cross paths with readers of OTR in the future, and look forward to building new relationships in the community. You can see a portfolio of treatments and learn more about conservation processes at my [website](#) and follow

@bookandpaperconservation on Instagram and Facebook to see current projects. Don't hesitate to [get in touch directly](#) at if you have any conservation needs, or simply to say hello.

All photos courtesy of the author.



Archives in Fiction: *Consolation* (2006)

by Grant Hurley

[This article is the first of an occasional series on the representations of archivists and archives in fiction by Ontario authors. As is the case with most archivists, I think, I love reading, and it gives me a thrill to see archives represented in interesting ways in fiction. This series explores these representations. I'll try to avoid spoilers. And please reach out with suggestions on what I should read next, or contribute a piece of your own! - Ed.]

I first came across Michael Redhill's novel 2006 *Consolation* through several references in *The Ward: The Life and Loss of Toronto's First Immigrant Neighbourhood* (2015). *The Ward* is a fantastic read in its varied and engrossing approach to telling the many stories about a complicated place over time. It was also co-edited by Ellen Scheinberg, a 2012 AAO Fraser Award Winner and features the writing of several Toronto archivists. Among the items of interest referenced in the book is a 1856 panorama of Toronto taken from the roof of the Rossin House Hotel. The panorama was the inspira-

tion for the mythical photo collection at the centre of *Consolation*. The [City of Toronto Archives](#) includes the photos among other items as a teaching collection relating to the novel.

Consolation tells two interwoven stories. The first narrative follows scholar David Hollis, a specialist in the field of "forensic geology," which he has pioneered. Hollis's last contribution is the purported discovery of the location of a trove of hundreds of photographs of nineteenth century Toronto. David believes that the photographs are buried in a boat that sank at the lakeshore in a storm on a trip home from London. Dying of ALS, he has published a controversial monograph that uses data and an archival source located at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. However, he refuses to reveal the source, which has been "barely catalogued" (p. 12, apologies to the Fisher!). After his death, David's wife Marianne keeps a vigil, watching over the site of the purported boat being excavated to make way for a new sports arena while her worried relations attempt to tend to her.

The second narrative involves the Toronto of 1856 and the story of a struggling failed apothecary-turned photographer named Jem Hallam. Hallam joins forces with Sam Ennis (a professional photographer) and Ennis' collaborator, the widowed Claudia Rowe. Together they set about creating a photography business in the young city. Among their projects is a set of photographs documenting every corner of Toronto. They hope to sell this collection to the city as the basis for its unrealized archives. The set of photographs is the novel's core: the subject of obsessive creation on the part of Jem,

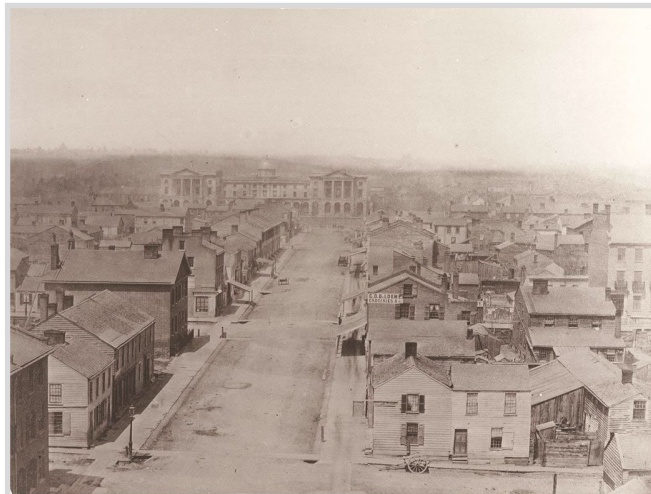
Claudia and Sam; and the subject of obsessive speculation on the part of David and the inheritors of its myth. Redhill spends much time describing the creation of the photographs and its methodology for documenting the city. It starts with a broad sweep: “Claudia broadly photographed the streets and made a record of every road, avenue, lane and byway, riverwalk and horse path, pier and rail” (p. 264). Once completed, the team moves to minute detail conducted by Hallam: “Sometimes he went inside a building and took an image of a hammered ceiling, or a chandelier, if there was enough light and he could cajole it into the right corners; once he even captured the thin uneven stairs that led to an upstairs back room” (p. 264). Taken together, the three hundred-odd photo collection is a simulacrum of the city frozen in time to the point where it stands in for the city itself:

Hallam dreamed that they took their images and went throughout the city gluing them over the original subjects so that the

whole place was formed into a vision of itself. When he told Ennis and Claudia about the dream, they nodded sagely, because that was what they had done, in fact, only their city stood in a pile, ready to be constructed in the mind of a witness (p. 265).

This mythical collection of photographs is a fantasy of total documentation, of a record so rich and deep that it could answer thousands of questions about Toronto’s history and plunge the viewer into a deeper understanding of just what it was like to live in the city at that time. What archivist hasn’t dreamed of such a thing when a question is unanswerable, or a record is missing? The archival record has so many gaps and absences, as we know, and *Consolation’s* dream is of a world in which, at least for a little bit, it is complete.

Of course, once Jem and co. have finished their project, they present it to an indifferent city politician, the mayor’s deputy. He is only interested in seeing his house photo-



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1498, f1498_#0016



City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1498, f1498_#0017

“Toronto from the top of the Rossin House Hotel: looking north” from the City of Toronto Archives, fonds 1498, item 16 and 17. These images form part of a 300 degree view of the city in 1856 and served as an inspiration for Redhill’s novel.

graphed. He dismisses the idea of its archival relevance: “‘There are libraries,’ Hallam offered, ‘here, and in Britain, and there will be archives here as well, one day.’ ‘Why would they need two unholy hundred pictures of a swamp with buildings on it?’” he responds (p. 268). The rest of the narrative traces the tale of this collection’s unfortunate history. Without giving too much away, it will suffice to say that modern Toronto expresses a similar indifference about its own past as the nineteenth century mayor’s deputy.

Consolation is a highly worthy novel for an archivist to read. Not only does it entertain archival photographs as the core of its plot, Redhill also spends time describing the unique qualities of photography as medium and format. On the taking of a portrait, for example: “The light is carrying you now, like a word into an ear, through the lens and on-

to the glass. Thirty seconds is all I need. Be still, still now. ... This little instant of your lives will not go on into the future but will remain here, seeded in time as you grow leaves above it” (p. 80). There are other ruminations on the photographic process itself. And above these things, it considers how archives can contribute to an understanding of the relationship between the lived experience of a place and the historical experiences that have happened before, even if they are thwarted or undocumented. As one character ruminates: “the world may be made up of things you cannot see, people who are gone, knowledge you may not speak of. ... the day-to-day [is] just skipping along the surface of an accord, an agreement about time and place” (p. 192).

Book citation: Redhill, Michael. (2006). *Consolation*. New York: Little, Brown.

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100 Years of History at London Public Library

by **Arthur G.W. McClelland**

*Ivey Family London Room
Librarian*

The Ivey Family London Room is a research facility for genealogy and local history and is located on the third floor of the Central Branch of the London Public Library in London, Ontario. The library's local history collection came into existence after Chief Librarian Fred Landon advocated the collection of local materials in public libraries in his Ontario Library Review article, "The Library and Local Material," published in February 1917. Following his advice, the London Public Library began to collect historical material about London and Londoners. Discards, gifts and purchases were the means whereby this London collection grew.

The concept of a separate room for local materials originated with former Chief Librarian Charles Deane Kent, whose interest in developing an easily accessible local history collection began when plans for an addition to the Central Library were being investigated in 1965. Mr. Kent instructed Miss Elizabeth Spicer, the first London Room librarian, to undertake a detailed survey of local history materials so as "to build the best collection in the world on London, Ontario." In 1967, the concept of a local history room became a reality when the London Room officially opened on Monday July 31st at 1:00 p.m. This room, the library's project to celebrate Canada's Centennial, was furnished by the Rotary Club in honour

of the club's 50 years of existence in London.

The London Room continues to be both a physical and virtual destination for researchers from across Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States who make use of genealogical and local history materials not easily found anywhere else. London historian and documentary filmmaker Chris Doty spent many hours researching in the London Room for his website, [DotyDocs](#). As a result of reading Doty's research about London hangings online, two long-lost sisters were reunited after being separated. Their father, Walter George Rowe, had been the last man to be hanged in London. When history librarian Mark Richardson was commissioned by London Police Services to research and write *On the Beat: 150 Years of Policing in London, Ontario*, he made extensive use of the London Room's vertical files on crime. This collection of newspaper articles proved to be more in-depth than those held by the London police department. Local authors have written acknowledgements to London Room staff for their assistance in helping with research that has resulted in such publications as *Fragments From the Forks* (London's Chronology from 1788 to 2010) by Daniel Brock, *The Grand Old Lady: A History of Hotel London* by Vanessa Brown, *Old South Tales* by Jean Ramer and *100 Fascinating Londoners*, edited by Michael Baker and Hilary Bates Neary.

It was announced on Heritage Day, February 18th, 2002 that Beryl and Richard Ivey had donated \$300,000 to the London Room. This donation was the largest one-time gift in the library's history. A digitization project

was begun in November 2009. London Room staff identified over 500 copyright-free photographs which were then scanned with descriptive data. The records were loaded into Knowledge Ontario's Our Ontario database. Launched in February 2010, the Image Gallery was created with funds from the Friends of the Library. These funds enabled the digital archiving and subsequent uploading of many fragile images held in the London Room using VITA software developed by Knowledge Ontario. The London Public Library Image Gallery of Historic Photographs is now available on the LPL website and the [Our Ontario website](#). London Free Press reporter James Reaney makes extensive use of the photographic resources in the London Room for his "My London" column. Recently, local historian and author, Jennifer Grainger chose photographs from the Image Gallery to round out her research for her book entitled *Early London, 1826-1914: A Photographic History* from the Orr Collection that was launched last month.

Since 2010, London Room staff have continued digitizing historical resources. Fifteen different card indexes comprising 140,000 cards have been scanned and eventually all will be available on the LPL website. Half of these cards are handwritten and 30,000 of them have already been transcribed and uploaded to Our Ontario. At present, three indexes are available on the LPL website – a name index to the London Free Press from July 2, 1861 to May 28, 1880; the library-generated Where to Look Index and an index from October 8, 1921 to August 20, 1949 of the London Free Press' history page entitled Looking over Western Ontario. The London Area Company Index, now

housed in a blue binder, is being transformed into a digital index and will also be available on the LPL website.

As the recent real estate market has been favourable for home buyers in the Old East Village, SoHo and Wortley Village, new homeowners, many of them young couples, have visited the London Room to research the history of their new homes. Often their research has resulted in the erection of a historical plaque on their houses.

As part of the library's celebration of Canada's Sesquicentennial, 13 picture books from the London Room's historical collection published between 1892 and 1923 have been scanned and their images will be available on digital frames to be circulated among the library's 16 branches throughout 2017. The London Room will also be celebrating its 50th anniversary on Monday July 31st, 2017, starting at 1 pm. As part of the gala, there will be a launch of the Gord McDonald Postcard Collection which comprises hundreds of London postcards, including the first pictorial views produced in February 1903. All of Gord's postcards have been scanned and those which are copyright free will be available on the LPL website.

From its humble beginnings to the state-of-the-art, internet-linked facility of today, the London Room continues to be a rich and varied source of information on the people and places that comprise London.



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In general, submit a hard copy if special software is needed to open the file.

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March 24 for Spring issue

June 26 for Summer issue

September 25 for Fall issue

December 29 for Winter issue

Issues are typically released the last week of the month following the submission deadline. For example, the Spring issue deadline is March 25 and it would be released the last week of April.

Please send submissions to:

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