

## Triennium Report on the General Synod Archives, 2004-2007

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### 1. Archives Overview

The General Synod Archives of the Anglican Church of Canada is the central repository for the church's national corporate memory and it retains important records of the church's faithful people. In 1927 the church recognized the need to preserve the well-documented activities of the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada and the first Archives Committee was established as one of the fore runners of the Information Resources Committee of today. Mandated by Canon V, the archivist is responsible for acquiring, preserving and providing access to the records held in the archives. The archives ensure the permanent retention of the records created by officers and staff of the national office and they collect records of individuals and organizations of national significance to the Church. The General Synod Archives include an historical library collection of published materials that documents the development of the church throughout Canadian history. The holdings of the General Synod Archives have come to be recognized as one of the premier research collections in the Country.

Permanent staff resources for the archives include the General Synod Archivist and a half time Assistant Archivist, both form part of the General Secretary's Team. Funded by the federal government to assist with the residential school records requests, the archives has also benefited from the services of a Researcher/Database administrator. Under Canon V, the archivist receives direction and reports to the Council of General Synod through the Information Resources Committee.

### 2. Records Management Overview

Records and Information Management (RIM) initiatives constituted about one third of the annual work plan for the archives. Resources for RIM work have been directed toward assisting church house staff in maintaining efficient and effective record keeping systems. During the Church House move in 2004, record appraisals were undertaken and records of a transactional nature and with no long-term value were shredded. Records with a standard statutory seven-year retention period were sent to a secure offsite commercial record storage facility to await scheduled destruction. This ensured that the limited financial and staff resources were devoted to the efficient, accessible; secure storage of the original permanent records within the newly installed archives vault at 80 Hayden Street. Further records management initiatives have included the development of policies to resolve some of the access and privacy concerns as well as consideration of a strategy to respond to electronic records concerns including the proliferation of email communications. The need to ensure long-term access to records in digital form including photographs, especially those that appear on the web site, is also of key concern.

### **3. Archives Facilities**

The move of the General Synod Archives from 600 Jarvis Street to 80 Hayden Street allowed for the creation of a secure and efficient record storage vault outfitted with a substantial mobile shelving unit to accommodate over 4,500 five-inch (12 cm) archival storage boxes. While there are some issues around the environmental stability of the vault, the quality space and efficient on-site access work well for the storage of the records.

Following the discovery of a leak in the overhead a/c pipes located in the archives vault in November of 2005, repairs were undertaken during an extreme unseasonable heat wave in June of 2006. No damage was sustained by the collections but substantial attention was drawn to the vulnerability of the location of the vault installed below the Church House mechanical room. A follow-up inspection by the Church House insurance risk team has led to the some physical plant improvements, most of which have been completed.

### **4. Archival Acquisitions**

During the first year of the triennium, 60 accessions totaling over 250 boxes were transferred to the custody of the archives. These included records of enduring value from most national office departments. As a result of the move, there was an opportunity to review the Financial Management and Administration Department and Pension Office records held in the former vault spaces at 600 Jarvis Street. This led to the discovery of many unique materials that lay dormant in the old part of the Church House building for many years. The further appraisal, arrangement and description work needed for these acquisitions will be added to the backlog of the archival work activity.

During the second and third year of the triennium, the extent of record transfers to the archives has steadily continued given the limited record storage space available in the configured workstation areas for staff.

Acquisition of records from individuals and organizations of national significance has continued throughout the triennium especially from former staff of the Residential Schools. Significant acquisitions are reported bi-annually to the Information Resources Committee and an annual list of acquisitions is maintained in the archives accession registers held in the General Synod Archives.

The General Synod Archives entered into a deposit agreement with the Provincial Archives of Alberta to cover archival services for the records of the Diocese of Mackenzie River held in Alberta.

## **5. Reference and Archival Outreach**

Researcher access to the archival holdings was somewhat limited in 2004 due to the closure of the reading room during the move to 80 Hayden Street. Most visitors to the General Synod Archives have found the new facility a welcoming place to conduct their research especially with the improved vault storage space and access to the adjacent library staff and collections. A workstation to accommodate electronic scanning of images and documents has been setup and has proved useful for both researchers and staff at Church House. The archives staff continues to consider resource and equipment needs for large scale scanning projects. This would resolve a number of storage and preservation concerns and would improve access to portions of the collection.

As part of the communications group at Church House, the archives staff is looking for ways to illustrate to staff and visitors, the value of the archival collections and how to bring to Church House a sense of the role and history of the General Synod to visitors.

## **6. The Anglican Archives Network**

The General Synod Archivist is designated under Canon V to encourage, assist and coordinate with archivists in the Anglican and ecumenical archives networks. The Diocesan Archivists within the Ecclesiastical Provinces have met four times during this triennium to discuss common concerns experienced within various parts of the country. Meetings of the diocesan archivists from the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Ontario and Canada were held in Newfoundland (2004), Quebec City (2005) and Ottawa (2006) and the archivists from the Ecclesiastical Provinces of Rupert's Land and BC and the Yukon met in Regina in 2006. The key agenda items were a) impact of federal and provincial privacy legislation on the church, b) electronic records retention and access issues, c) impact of the Residential School Settlement Agreement, d) descriptive standards implementation strategies, e) parish registers, f) diocesan register of clergy information and g) archives profile on the web.

## **7. Archives and Indian Residential Schools**

The developments associated with the signing of the Residential School Settlement Agreement have meant that significant staff resources have been devoted to responding to enquiries made by the government and former students. Funded by the federal government under Indian Residential Schools Resolutions Canada (IRSRC), the creation of a database to assist with the research has been developed over the past two years. The terms outlined in the agreement require that all residential school records held by the Anglican Church of Canada will be made accessible. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission will be established to encourage former students to tell their stories and to recall their experiences. A committee composed of national archivists for the various church denominations along with representatives from Library and Archives Canada, IRSRC and other agencies has been established to help meet the needs of the former students.

**Nancy J. Hurn, General Synod Archivist**