

# *The Vancouver Island Project: Historical Research and Archival Practice*

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The writing of history and the keeping of records have traditionally been closely related activities. Until recently, archival training usually involved the study of history, while historians usually conducted all their research in archives. The establishment of specific graduate programmes for archivists and changes in the theory and method of historical research have rapidly altered this situation during the past decade. Archives have always had a clientele beyond professional historians and increasingly historians are utilizing data outside traditional archival control.<sup>1</sup> As several recent reviews of relations between historians and archivists suggest, the two groups may be drifting farther apart than at any time in the past.<sup>2</sup>

The connection between historical research and archival practice is a central issue for the Vancouver Island Project [VIP] which is compiling an on-line machine-readable research tool covering local public repositories on Vancouver Island. The resource tool will contain brief histories of the organization and function of the surveyed agencies and will provide descriptive and evaluative lists of holdings at both the record group and series level. The Project is surveying the Island's five cities, eight district municipalities, four towns, twelve villages, thirteen school districts, six regional districts, seventy-five improvement districts, and approximately fifty other repositories including museums, historical societies, and businesses.<sup>3</sup>

The Vancouver Island Project has been assessing and building upon developments in both the United States and Canada. These developments range from changes in historical perspective to redefinitions of archival practice. The significance of the

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1 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Consultative Group on Canadian Archives, *Report*, Ian Wilson, chairman. (Ottawa, 1980), pp. 37-38 (hereafter *The Wilson Report*).

2 Terry Cook, "Clio: The Archivists Muse?," *Archivaria* 5 (1977-78), pp. 198-203; Tom Nesmith, "Le Roy Ladurie's 'Total History' and Archives," *Archivaria* 12 (1981), pp. 127-33; Nesmith, "Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," *Archivaria* 14 (1982), pp. 5-26; Frederic M. Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," *The American Archivist* 44 (1981), pp. 113-24; W. Theodore Durr, "Comments," in T.J. McCrank, ed., *Automating the Archives: Issues and Problems in Computing Applications*, (N.Y., 1981), pp. 228-29.

3 Preliminary funding for the Project was provided by the President of the University of Victoria and from the British Columbia Heritage Trust. Principal funding is provided by the Strategic Grants Programme, "Research Tools -- Canadian Studies," of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada [SSHRCC]. The authors are coprincipal investigators. Alan Artibise, of the University of Winnipeg, was a coprincipal investigator during the Project's first year of operation.

Project extends well beyond its value to either archivists or researchers interested in Vancouver Island and this paper outlines the orientation of the project in terms of general issues of theory and method. The complexity of these issues has generated an extensive literature among archivists, but has attracted little attention from historians. The conclusion is that this development is very unfortunate and, in fact, is ironical given the potential of recent technological developments. The process of revitalizing and perhaps even improving debate between historians and archivists can begin by examining recent trends in historiographical and archival practices and by situating the ambitions of the Vancouver Island Project within these trends.

The disjuncture between research and archival practice can be viewed as a result of the significant theoretical and methodological change which the study of history has undergone in recent years. Traditional historiography focused on the study of "great men" and "great ideas." However, in the twentieth century and especially during the past two decades, professional historians have shifted from studying the activities of kings, presidents, and prime ministers to examining the experiences of the general populace.<sup>4</sup> Following the *Annales* perspective, researchers no longer assume that social and political leaders were the primary causal force in history and that the bulk of the population waited passively to be led, coerced, or persuaded.<sup>5</sup> In the new perspective, decision-making becomes, at least to some extent, an interactive process.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, scholars are less sympathetic to the traditional historian's search for the unique event. The task of historians is to uncover patterns, norms, and typical features of past societies. Comparative studies of classes, groups, and regions become not only possible, but desirable.<sup>7</sup> Thirdly, the study of ideas has been superseded by the study of behaviour.<sup>8</sup> In this context the delineation and definition of the structures within which people interacted has assumed primary importance.

Such considerations have contributed to the unearthing of different kinds of evidence from that found in prime ministerial papers. Routinely generated material such as census data, assessment roles, and vital statistics have become the grist for this new historical mill. In order to study such a large and varied body of material, historians now use quantitative techniques which help uncover patterns and assist in revealing general experience. The proper application of such techniques has

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4 This reorientation of focus is international in scope. The VI<sup>e</sup> section of the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris; the Cambridge Group for the Study of Population and Social Structures in England; Demografiska databasen in Sweden; *Quantum* in Germany; the Philadelphia Social History Project in the United States; the recently completed Canadian Social History Project at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and York University, Toronto; the Montreal Social History Project at the Université du Québec à Montréal; and the Wellington County Project at McMaster University: all testify to the extent and strength of the current historical perspective.

5 For useful reviews of these changes see, *Journal of Modern History* 44 (December 1972); *Journal of Social History* 10 (Winter 1976); *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 12 (1981); *Archivaria* 14 (1982).

6 A good example of this in Canadian historiography is R.D. Gidney and D.A. Lawr, "Bureaucracy vs Community? The Origins of Bureaucratic Procedure in the Upper Canadian School System," *Journal of Social History* 13 (1981), pp. 438-57.

7 For examples, see footnote 5 above.

8 James A. Henretta, "Social History as Lived and Written," *American Historical Review* 84 (1979), pp. 1293-333; André Burgière, "The Fate of the History of Mentalités in the Annales," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24 (1983) pp. 424-37.



*Left half of a two-part view of John Muir's mill, Sooke, Vancouver Island, c. 1866. Photography by Frederick Dally. Courtesy: Public Archives of Canada, C-10336.*

necessitated a more systematic approach to the study of past data. This has led in turn to more interaction between historians and practitioners within other social sciences.

Because of the nature of the evidence involved and the type of questions and methods applied to it, historians are focusing more on local communities and regions and less on large states and nations as their units of analysis.<sup>9</sup> This change in emphasis permits systematic examination of large quantities of data and also contributes towards improved generalizations about the broad-scale characteristics of past societies. Moreover, comparative studies of specific communities highlight regional and local variations in terms of ethnic, racial, political, spatial, and economic patterns.

The sources used in recent studies have been ignored for too long by both historians and archivists. Over the past few years, several historians have written review articles covering their particular subdisciplines for the readers of *Archivaria*. This reflects the desire of archivists to keep open the lines of communication between the two disciplines. Yet these articles rarely confront fundamental principles of

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9 See Nesmith, "Le Roy Ladurie's 'Total History' and Archives."

archival practice.<sup>10</sup> In the American context, historical response to record keeping has been even more dismal. Twelve years ago, Sam Bass Warner, Jr., roundly criticized historians and archivists for permitting the systematic destruction of municipal records.<sup>11</sup> While sympathetic to his overall critique, historians have done almost nothing to alter the process of neglect described by Warner.

Similarly, archival practice has been slow to meet the demands placed upon them by the nature of historiographical change. For example, Kent Haworth suggested that "perhaps the history of Canada has been written largely from the top, at the national level, because that is where most of the archivists and documents have been concentrated."<sup>12</sup> Writing about the United States, Frederic Miller claimed that "both archival materials and the archival profession have become increasingly irrelevant to social science research...."<sup>13</sup> Certainly slim budgets, diminishing space, and staff cuts or freezes have made it difficult for the national and provincial archives to respond effectively to the changing demands of the historical profession. However, it is also true that many archivists have continued to assume the approach of the traditional historiography with the result that the content of their collections are increasingly out of synch with the demands of a major user group.<sup>14</sup>

In this context of mutual neglect, the VIP addresses the problem of local records which is an issue common to both historians and archivists. The Project emerges from and builds on key approaches within history. It points to and comments upon some limitations of widely held archival principles. By so doing, it attempts to bridge a gap between historical thinking and archival practice. Specifically, the Project addresses certain limitations that have not yet received sufficient attention. For example, the emphasis on economic and population data which has characterized current studies has had the positive advantage of allowing a clearer specification of mass behaviour. This is consistent with one of its major ends. At the same time, this approach has downplayed the ideas, motivations, and attitudes which exist at the level of popular experience. In part, this is a residue of the reaction against the study of "great ideas" in history. In part, this lacunae flows logically from the nature of the source material which has dominated current research. The result is that despite the intent of many modern professional historians to write a more "holistic" history than their predecessors, a significant part of that whole has still been missed.

It is with relation to this problem that the Vancouver Island Project seeks to make an important scholarly contribution. It will provide an inventory of a body of locally generated sources that have, for various reasons,<sup>15</sup> remained "an enigma for

10 In this respect, *Archivaria* has set the standard which other major archival journals are only slowly following. For examples of these reviews, the reader can consult almost any past issue of *Archivaria*. For a critical comment on the failure of American journals to do the same, see Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," p. 117.

11 Sam Bass Warner Jr., "The Shame of the Cities: Public Records of the Metropolis," *The Midwestern Archivist* 2 (1977), pp. 27-34. The paper was first presented in 1971.

12 Kent M. Haworth, "Local Archives: Responsibilities and Challenges for Archivists," *Archivaria* 3 (1976-77), p. 32.

13 Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," p. 117; see also Richard Cox, "A Reappraisal of Municipal Records in the United States," *The Public Historian* 3 (1981), p. 59.

14 Cook, "Clio: The Archivists Muse?," pp. 198-99.

15 Since such sources are rarely centrally located, researchers have remained ignorant of their existence.



*Indian houses, Alert Bay, Vancouver Island, 1894. Photograph by H.N. Topley. Courtesy: Public Archives of Canada, C-22368.*

archivists and researchers alike.”<sup>16</sup> By canvassing the records of municipalities which is that level of government closest to the people, and the holdings of various local records and historical societies, museums, churches, and businesses, the Vancouver Island Project will create a research tool composed of those sources that provide the most direct *entrée* into the behaviour and the *mentalité* of Island society. In addition to augmenting population and economic data, the Project will make known sources such as municipal correspondence, bylaws, petitions to city councils, planning reports, district educational records, private papers of local settlers and shopkeepers — all of which will enable historians to present a more sophisticated and “holistic” understanding of society.

These developments within the historical discipline have also contributed to what has been termed the “public history” movement: “the employment ... of the materials and methods of history in the ordinary activities of life.”<sup>17</sup> Public history is relatively

16 R.S. Alcorn, ed., *The Landon Project: Interdisciplinary Studies of the Historical Evolution of Southwestern Ontario, Annual Report 1976-77* (University of Western Ontario), p. 54.

17 David A. Clary, “Trouble is My Business: A Private View of ‘Public’ History,” *The American Archivist* 44 (1981), p. 105. For introductions to and appraisals of this orientation, see Peter N. Stearns, “History and Political Analysis: Toward Maturity,” *The Public Historian* 4 (1982) pp. 5-29; Stearns, “Applied History and Social Science,” *Social Science History* 6 (1982), pp. 219-26; Special Issue on Public History, *The History Teacher* 16, No. 1 (1982), pp. 35-75; James M. Banner Jr., review of *Social History and Social Policy*, eds. by D.J. Rothman and S. Wheeler, in *History and Theory* (1982), pp. 410-16.

well advanced in Europe and the United States. For example, there is an American journal devoted to the field, *The Public Historian*, a National Council on Public History, and numerous university degree granting programmes at the graduate and undergraduate level. In Canada, the University of Waterloo now offers an M.A. in Public History<sup>18</sup> and Simon Fraser University offers an undergraduate programme in this field.

Although still in its "adolescent" stage,<sup>19</sup> the public history movement's general orientation is closely compatible with that of the VIP. Both emerge from a desire to integrate history and social science practice. They respond sympathetically to the broadening focus of social history outlined above. The public history movement takes these developments and attempts to apply them in a pragmatic, goal-directed, policy-oriented manner. The VIP provides access to a historical context from which planners can formulate well-grounded, relevant policies for the region's future.

The Vancouver Island Project is closely tied to several key developments within the discipline of history. In this context, the resultant research tool aims to be directly relevant to the concerns of more than those interested in the study of a portion of British Columbia. Persons interested in examining the evolution of a modern society will find this source study relevant to their particular ends. They can use it to access data on the Island. They can utilize the findings which will emerge from analyses of this data for points of comparison and contrast with studies of other regions, whether in British Columbia or elsewhere. They can use the Project itself as a model and referral point for similar regional source compilations in other settings. Public history advocates and public planners trained in other disciplines such as political science, geography, sociology, urban studies, and public administration can incorporate a longitudinal perspective into their planning activities via this resource tool. The Vancouver Island Project is systematically designed to meet the requirements and to expand the horizons of both a major analytic trend and a growing practical orientation within the historical profession.

At the same time, the VIP is confronting certain limitations inherent in traditional archival activity. Current acquisition policies are a case in point. The collection biases of the national and provincial archives which tend to focus on provincial and federal government records and the associated politicians and bureaucrats, combined with space and budget constraints, have led many Canadian archivists to conclude that the central repositories simply cannot and should not assume responsibility for the maintenance of municipal and other regional materials even given the intrinsic worth of local records.<sup>20</sup> While the arguments supporting this conclusion are in a general sense plausible,<sup>21</sup> the specific problem remains of the continuing neglect of local sources which are more and more central to current historical practice. The VIP has adopted what might be termed a realist perspective concerning this issue. The reality of budgetary and space problems is in part

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18 In May 1983, the Fifth Annual *Public History Conference* was held at the University of Waterloo.

19 Stearns, "History and Political Analysis: Toward Maturity," p. 4.

20 Kent Haworth, "Welfare for Archives and the Will of Archivists," *Archivaria* 13 (1981-82), pp. 124-26; see also William Ormsby's listing of priorities for the Ontario Archives in his "Response to the Wilson Report," *Archivaria* 11 (1980-81), pp. 28-29.

21 See Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," p. 121, however, for a strong critique of this attitude.

recognized by the creation of a sophisticated finding aid, rather than by the centralization of the material itself. Regional resource tools analyze sources where they are located: the catalogue becomes the central focus and the material remains decentralized. This approach respects local sensitivities because documents will not be taken away; rather, the process leads to a heightened appreciation on the part of municipalities and local societies towards the importance of their documentary heritage. As Kent Haworth has pointed out, the more visible local record programmes become, the more local residents become inclined "to deposit their documentary heritage with an agency in which they have confidence through easy and immediate contact."<sup>22</sup>

In addition to responding to traditional acquisition policies, the VIP engages several complex issues in the areas of appraisal and arrangement of documents. Recent debate has focused on the connection between the central principles of archival management and the requirements of modern social history. Frederic Miller suggests that a serious problem lies in archival attachment to the principle of provenance.<sup>23</sup> This principle decrees that the organization of documents must remain faithful to their functional roots so that records, when deposited in an archives, should retain their original order and structure.<sup>24</sup> In defence of this veneration, Terry Cook suggests that original order contains important "evidential value" and, besides, it is the most effective way known to *arrange and describe* "large bodies of material."<sup>25</sup>

This defence of provenance and its corollary, original order, gives rise to several questions: what is the "evidential value" that is inherent in original order and how does this "value" accord with current historical trends? What are the implications for present historical practice of an arrangement and descriptive system which centres on original order? What user groups benefit from organization and description according to the dictates of provenance?

Evidential value, as defined by archivists, has a very discrete meaning: "the value of those records of an agency that are necessary to provide an authentic and adequate documentation of its organization and functioning."<sup>26</sup> With this in mind, Miller has argued that archivists foster institutional history despite the fact that modern social historians are concerned with "the history of people rather than the history of organization."<sup>27</sup> Clearly, arrangement according to functional roots often

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22 Haworth, "Local Archives: Responsibilities and Challenges for Archivists," p. 33; and Haworth, "Welfare for Archives and the Will of Archivists," p. 124, where he recalls the impact his suggestions had on Canadian archivists. R. Scott James, "Administration of Municipal Records: The Toronto Experience," *Government Publications Review* 8A (1981), pp. 321-35.

23 Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," especially pp. 121-24.

24 F.B. Evans, *et al.*, "A Basic Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators and Records Managers," *American Archivist* 37 (1974), p. 427.

25 Terry Cook, "The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on 'Total Archives,'" *Archivaria* 9 (1979-80), p. 141. The debate, as it has evolved in *Archivaria*, over the relationship between provenance and total archives centres on the problem of division by medium rather than on the relationship between provenance and description of print documents. See also A. Birrell, "The Tyranny of Tradition," *Archivaria* 10 (1980), pp. 249-52; E.J. Dick, *et al.*, "Total Archives Come Apart," *Archivaria* 11 (1980-81), pp. 224-27; and Cook, "Media Myopia," *Archivaria* 12 (1981), pp. 147-57.

26 Evans, "A Basic Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators and Records Managers," p. 422.

27 Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," p. 120.

sheds much light on institutional structures and the assumptions underlying them. In this sense Miller is correct. Yet equally clearly his definition of social history is too limited. As Murray G. Murphey has recently pointed out, institutional studies may indeed be an effective way to acquire an understanding of the *mentalité* of the average citizen.<sup>28</sup> This does not mean that the "evidential value" inherent in original order is *sufficient* for the needs of modern social historians. As Miller outlines, this is far from the case.<sup>29</sup> It becomes a matter of great importance to determine the extent to which the principle of provenance informs archival activity in the area of description. Terry Cook implies that a very strong linkage exists, but one must still explore the potential consequences of such a relationship.<sup>30</sup>

Miller is unequivocal in concluding that the traditional, provenance-oriented descriptive system simply fails to yield an acceptable level of information concerning the actual contents of the archival records and manuscripts under review. Richard Berner, in a lucid discussion of the development of arrangement and description, also points out that "the central problem is one of providing subject access to sources."<sup>31</sup> However, his solution to this problem is provenance oriented. Before any information can be provided, "intellectual control" must be established over the material at hand. One establishes this control according to the principle of provenance. Any description which follows must be systematically linked to the organization of the material itself.<sup>32</sup> As Richard Lytle describes it, in the provenance method of archival retrieval "[d]escription relates the documents to the activity that created them, or the purpose they serve."<sup>33</sup> Using this method, other subject areas contained in the documents can be accessed only by inference.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, to use the archives effectively, one has to almost become a trained archivist.<sup>35</sup>

Although both Berner and Cook recognize the need for subject access to archival material, neither directly confronts the constrictive results of adhering too closely to the principle of provenance in the field of information retrieval. Both *seem* to succumb to what might be termed the "tyranny" of provenance: the tendency of an

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28 Murray G. Murphey, "The Place of Beliefs in Modern Culture," in John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, (Baltimore 1979), pp. 151-65. See also Terry Cook's example of the importance of evidential value in Cook, "Media Myopia," p. 148.

29 Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," p. 121 ff. On these points see also Nesmith, "Archives from the Bottom Up: Social History and Archival Scholarship," where he in effect stands Miller's concerns on their head and makes an interesting case for more, not less, provenance orientation and thereby carves out a distinct "scholarly" role for an emerging independent archival discipline.

30 Cook, "The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on 'Total Archives'," p. 141. See also R. H. Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," *The American Archivist* 43 (1980), p. 64, where he states that the Provenance Method "is the traditional method of archival retrieval...."

31 Richard C. Berner, "Arrangement and Description: Some Historical Observations," *The American Archivist* 41 (1978), p. 179.

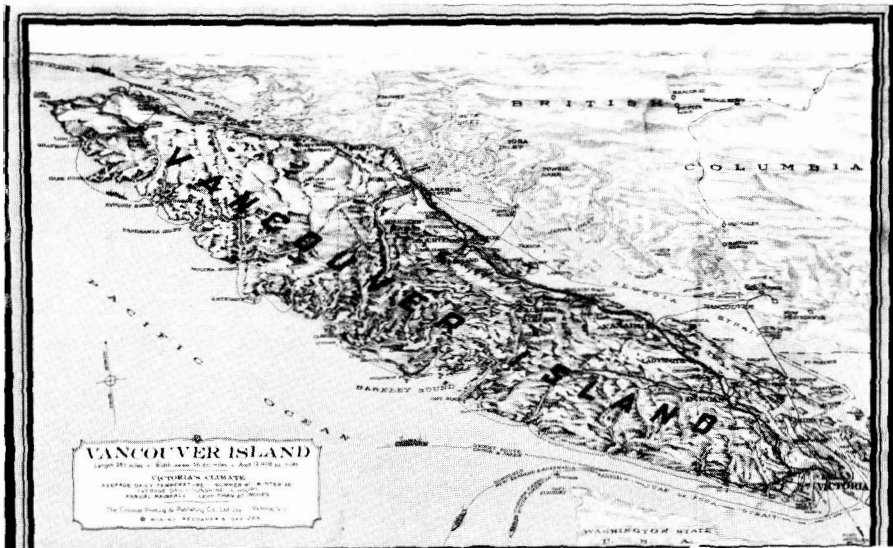
32 *Ibid.*, pp. 176-81.

33 R. Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," p. 71.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72; Berner, *Arrangement & Description: Some Historical Observations*, p. 180.

35 R. Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," p. 72.





*This map of Vancouver Island shows the road and rail network, the principal communities along the lower east coast, and shipping routes connecting the island's coastal communities, many of them still inaccessible by road. The mapmaker's perspective allows one to focus on the island, while the mainland fades into the distance. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the map was issued by a publisher in Victoria, and appeared as the illustration on a 1946 calendar. The Provincial Archives of British Columbia also holds this calendar in its map collection. Courtesy: National Map Collection, Public Archives of Canada, NMC 5934.*

organizational technique to dictate a descriptive system.<sup>36</sup> How then can one begin to break this log-jam? Toward this end the Vancouver Island project is approaching the task of creating a machine-readable annotated inventory of primary sources from the perspective of both archivists and historians. While the Project will use provenance as a basis for administrative control, that structure will not be the sole basis for user access. Consistent with Miller, the VIP agrees that provenance must cease to be seen as the only controlling principle and must instead be viewed as a "technique."<sup>37</sup> When this principle begins to interfere with the needs of archival users, it must be enriched rather than abandoned. In other words, administrative control must be complemented by user access to archival information.

The ambition of simultaneous control and access for archival automation has received a great deal of attention in recent years and has led to both pessimistic and optimistic conclusions. In a 1979 special issue of *The American Archivist*, Alan

36 This may be unfair to Terry Cook and other Canadian archivists. In the apparent absence of any extended discussion of this issue by the Canadian archival community, however, we have arrived at this conclusion from remarks in Cook's articles cited above and from our own at times frustrating experience cracking the descriptive codes found at Canadian archives. *The Wilson Report*, the most recent survey of archival practice in Canada, contains only two pages on the general state of "content access," pp. 98-99.

37 Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," p. 122.

Colmes argued that the need for control had to take precedence over the desirability of access to archival information. Colmes suggested that the compilation of machine-readable descriptions was so complicated by itself that other concerns have to be put aside.<sup>38</sup> This perspective seems quite realistic given the many obstacles which archivists have had to face in pursuing the creation of archival computer files. The demands of cataloguing rules, a standard format, data entry systems, and retrieval are exceedingly complex for archival material. These demands could indeed suggest a pessimistic perspective on the possibility of computerized archival information.

However, in the same journal, David Bearman reported that the two goals of administrative control and user access could both be achieved at least for limited archival projects. By discussing the "Survey of Sources for the History of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology," Bearman demonstrated that archival information retrieval systems could be constructed to permit Boolean searches as well as indexing. While Bearman admitted that the specific computer system designed for the survey would not be applicable in other contexts, he concluded that archival automation could be very beneficial to both archivists and users. Bearman identified the development of appropriate computer systems as the key element in the automation process. He argued that "automation will succeed only to the extent that it takes into account the specific needs and goals of the archives. When systems that meet these needs are successfully adopted they will almost certainly change traditional archival practice."<sup>39</sup>

In recent years, archivists have generally come to agree that archival automation is highly desirable. The example of achievements in library science has undoubtedly encouraged public support for this application. The development of computer systems such as TOBIAS (Terminal Oriented Bibliographic Information Analysis System) at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, suggest the value of computerization in terms of compilation, editing, and retrieval. The TOBIAS programme "uses simple English language and appropriate commands, provides prompting and on-line tutorial instruction, incorporates set theory and boolean logic procedures, displays information on-line and prints information off-line which can be received at various destinations."<sup>40</sup> Similarly, the National Library of Canada has been modifying the DOBIS system developed at the University of Dortmund, West Germany. This software has characteristics such as an integrated system design with multiple functions of cataloguing, catalogue search, and information retrieval as well as powerful search capabilities that permit browsing and flexible search terms.<sup>41</sup>

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38 Alan Colmes, "Practical Realities of Computer-based Finding Aids: The NARS A-1 Experience," *The American Archivist* 42 (April 1979).

39 David Bearman, "Automated Access to Archival Information Assessing Systems," *The American Archivist* 42 (April 1979).

40 Sue A. Dodd, "Building an On-Line Bibliographic/MARC Resource Data Base for Machine-Readable Data Files," *Journal of Library Automation* 12 (March 1979), p. 18.

41 William L. Newman generously supplied the project with information on DOBIS as well as copies of *The Canadian Government Version of DOBIS* (Ottawa: National Library, 1981) and a draft copy of "The Canadian Government Version of DOBIS" published in the *Canadian Library Journal* 36 (August 1979), pp. 181-94.

Bearman and others recognized that fulfilment of the promise of archival automation depended in the first instance on the development of a standard format for the data which are used to identify and describe particular archival holdings. This work was taken up in the United States by the National Information System Task Force of the Society of American Archivists (NISTF). This task force has recently proposed a specific format for the definition of data elements and has produced a series of reports and papers since 1981.<sup>42</sup> Two aspects of the proposed format present somewhat unusual data entry considerations: the need for variable length fields and repeatable fields. These considerations are in theory not a real technical concern since modern computers can store such files and allow for post-editing in a straightforward way. However, the development of software is lagging well behind the computer industry generally and this is certainly the case for archival applications. A standard format should require a standard data logging programme, but no particular software has yet gained dominance among archivists.<sup>43</sup>

The most dramatic developments in Canada have occurred in Quebec where the Archives nationales has constructed a system named SAPHIR (Système, Archives, Publication, Histoire, Inventaire, Recherche). This system does not attempt compatibility with the format developed by NISTF, but rather entails a combination of computerized data and microfilm. In this system, information such as title and volume are encoded as part of a machine-readable record while qualitative descriptive paragraphs are available only on microfilm. The link between these two facilities involves subject-access terms on the computer record. Researchers can search these terms and then decide which sources should be pursued on microfilm. *The specific hierarchical location of a record is immaterial from the point of view of user access.* A single search could lead researchers to either a record group or a specific series-level collection. In this way, the SAPHIR system attempts to enhance both administrative control and intellectual access.<sup>44</sup>

In developing this system, archivists in Quebec have had to face the difficult task of establishing appropriate subject access terms. In abandoning this task for the NAR A-1 project, Alan Colmes explained that "subject indexing was considered impractical because a dictionary of terms would have to be developed and applied systematically to all series descriptions." Colmes estimated that "such a process would triple the series description processing time."<sup>45</sup> David Bearman continues to be more optimistic about the possibilities of user access within archival information,

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42 The reports and papers produced by the National Information Systems Task Force include the following important documents: "A MARC Format for Archives and Manuscript Materials: A Proposal to the Profession" (September 1982); "Data Elements Used in Archives, Manuscript and Records Repository Information Systems: A Dictionary of Standard Terminology" (October 1982); David Bearman, Project Director, "Towards National Information Systems: Strategies and Frameworks," paper presented to Association of Canada Archivists (June 1982); David Bearman, "Toward National Information Systems for Archives and Manuscript Repositories: Alternative Models" (August 1981); David Bearman, "Functional Specifications of an Integrated Information Management System for Administering a Program for Active, Archival, or Manuscript Records" (August 1982); and David Bearman, "Towards National Information Systems for Archives and Manuscripts: Opportunities and Requirements" (September 1982).

43 The complexity of software selection is the focus of Bearman's article, "Automated Access to Archival Information: Assessing Systems."

44 Material describing SAPHIR was kindly sent to us by Michel Roberge, who has also written "SAPHIR: la mémoire des Québécois," for this issue of *Archivaria*.

45 Colmes, "Practical Realities of Computer-based Finding Aids: The NARS A-1 Experience," p. 168.

but he too has been primarily concerned with establishing a standard format to promote administrative control. Bearman has recently emphasized that the National Information System for Archives and Manuscript Repositories has proceeded against an admitted background of "insufficient data on user need."<sup>46</sup> As a result, the principles underlying the standard definitions of descriptive elements are clearly drawn from provenance or "creator-oriented" perspectives.<sup>47</sup>

At the Archives nationales, archivists are attempting both to promote user access and to avoid the "impracticability" of devising *a priori* a lexicon of index terms. The SAPHIR strategy involves the use of subject descriptions which are identical or closely related to the titles of disciplines. For example, the Louis-Joseph Papineau and John Neilson Collection includes entries for manuscripts, audio-visual material, maps and plans, and other documents. The subject terms listed for these sources are: political science, education, history, geography, agriculture and philosophy.<sup>48</sup> This approach, however, assumes traditional disciplinary boundaries which may be no longer relevant to contemporary researchers. Similarly, the survey form used to collect the qualitative descriptions stored on microfilm instruct the computer to compose the annotations "en vue d'orienter les chercheurs avec le plus de précision possible. Il note des principaux événements et les noms des principales personnes, familles ou institutions apparaissant dans les documents."<sup>49</sup> By emphasizing major figures, events, and institutions, these descriptions may reflect research interests which are no longer predominant among historians and tend to continue the archivists' traditional emphasis on provenance-oriented terms. Moreover since the annotations cannot be machine-searched, they do not provide access points to potential users. Therefore, in the end the SAPHIR programme is best viewed as a major step forward in the administrative control of archival holdings throughout Quebec.

The Vancouver Island Project is approaching the twin goals of control and access by building upon developments in both the United States and Canada. In order to create a machine-readable resource tool, the Project is developing a comprehensive survey form which reflects the recent achievements of the NISTF. It is not attempting to use all the fields or subfields provided by the format, but rather is systematically selecting those fields and subfields directly relevant to our particular needs. At the same time, it is developing a longer survey form than is usually employed for data collection. After reviewing relevant literature and carrying out several trial runs at various repositories, the Project concluded that the form should extend to three pages in order to accommodate specific and detailed information on

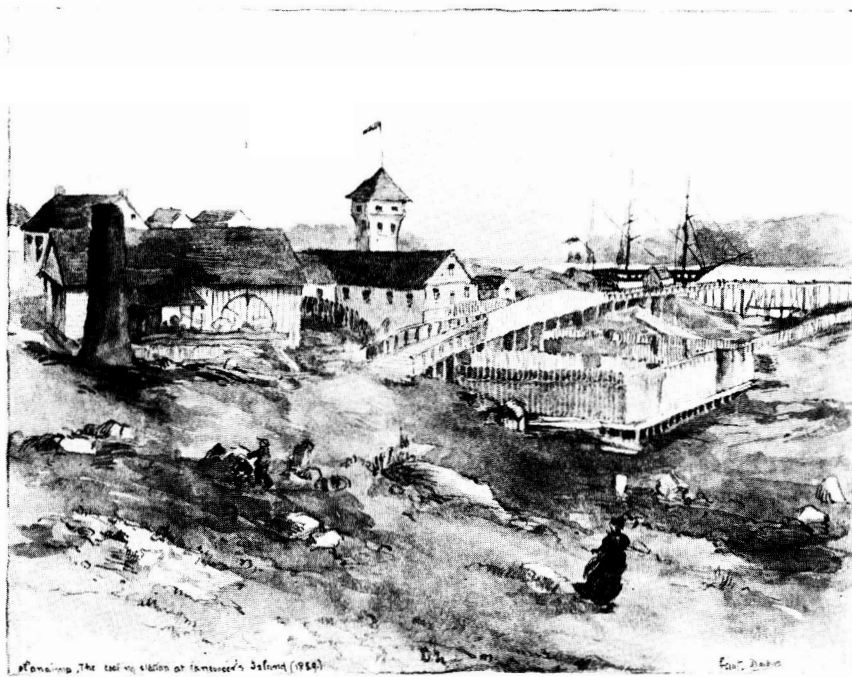
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46 David Bearman, "Toward National Information Systems for Archives and Manuscript Repositories," *The American Archivist* 45 (1982), pp. 53-56. See also D. Bearman and R. Lytle, "Archival Information Exchange in the U.S.," *Archivaria* 13 (1981-82), pp. 127-29.

47 National Information Systems Task Force, "MARC Format for Archives and Manuscript Materials: A Proposal to the Profession," September, 1982. Lytle, "Intellectual Access to Archives: Provenance and Content Indexing Methods of Subject Retrieval," p. 71.

48 Roberge, "SAPHIR: la mémoire des Québécois."

49 Survey form, Inventaire national des Archives du Québec, SAPHIR III, generously sent to us by Michel Roberge.



Edward D. Panter-Downs (act. 1857-1859), "Nanaimo, The Coaling Station at Vancouver Island, 1859." watercolour: 178 x 229 mm. This work is documentary in its purest sense. It is the only known work by Panter-Downes, and was reproduced as a woodcut in the *Illustrated London News* of 1 October 1859. While photography had begun to make inroads into the tradition of documentary art by the mid-nineteenth century, Panter-Downes still demonstrated all the skills of a trained military draughtsman in this watercolour. Courtesy: Picture Division, Public Archives of Canada, C-9561.

the content of the record groups and series surveyed.<sup>50</sup> The VIP form will include substantial space for a scope and content note as well as for an evaluative note section.

The VIP survey form thus reflects a primary goal of the Project's efforts in that it attempts to combine archival description with an extended qualitative assessment. As Frederic Miller has recently noted, standard archival "principles of appraisal ...

50 Form design is an often overlooked and underrated activity. For an introduction to the literature, see John Fleckner, "Records Surveys: A Multi-Purpose Tool for the Archivist," *The American Archivist* 42 (1979), pp. 293-94; J.F. Burns, "Statewide Surveying: Some Lessons Learned," *Ibid.*, pp. 295-300; and G. Mariz, "Multiple Uses of a Survey: Training, Guides, Records Management, and Beyond," *Ibid.*, pp. 301-6. More detailed treatments include *College and University Archives Committee of the Society of American Archivists Forms Manual*, (July 1972); M. Cook, *Archives Administration — A Manual for Intermediate and Smaller Organizations and for Local Government* (Folkestone, Kent, 1977); and F.M. Knox, *The Knox Standard Guide to Design and Control of Business Forms* (New York, 1965).

are ultimately based on the kind of history done in the late nineteenth century.”<sup>51</sup> In devising a survey form, the Project is attempting to supplement existing appraisal standards with criteria more sensitive to current historical trends. To do so required both an enlarged scope and content section and an evaluative note section in which the relevance of particular records to current historical trends can be noted. Archivists have been reluctant to construct finding aids “relevant” to contemporary research trends in part because of the supposed transitory and/or subjective nature of such emphases. However, this point of view begs the question of the relation of provenance-oriented terms to traditional historical pursuits. Even more significantly, it ignores the flexibility inherent in current computer applications. Machine-readable descriptive aids are easily updatable. This flexibility should encourage the development of descriptive aids which are increasingly sensitive to the needs of major user groups.

The Vancouver Island Project’s approach is generally consistent with the current work of the Archives nationales, although the complete entry for each record will be included in the VIP computer file. In this sense users will not have to switch from computer terminals to microfilm readers in order to pursue information about a particular record group or series. The Project is also attempting to create the data in ways consistent with the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, 2nd edition (AACR 2). Since there is at present no established AACR 2 authority in the cataloguing of archival materials, the guidelines used by the VIP have been drawn from several sources and adopted to the particular requirements of our Project.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the Project has decided to risk the “impractical” and to begin devising a lexicon of terms which users will employ to gain fairly discrete subject access to relevant records. It is guided in this task by sensitivity to the needs of the intended user group. Thus the lexicon will reflect both current trends in social history and the requirements of public historians and general policy planners. Obviously this task is formidable, but the Project is convinced that discrete access must be a top priority of archival automation. As part of a standard format, a system of subject access can bring hitherto unconnected and virtually unknown local holdings into an integrated whole. From this perspective, a computerized research tool can be viewed as the first step in the creation of a regional municipal archival network.

Much has been written concerning the desirability of such linkages.<sup>53</sup> Yet, as George Brandak recently pointed out, “there is no visible agreement on the mechanism that will be used to achieve the desired end.”<sup>54</sup> In part, this is because most advocates assume that a significant centralization of local holdings must occur, that leadership must come from a “central” archives, and/or that the appointment of local record manager/archivists must predate such a movement. However, operating within the context of largely unorganized and untapped archival resources

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51 Miller, “Social History and Archival Practices,” p. 119.

52 In particular we have used AACR 2, Chapters 1, 4, 21-24, and “A Working Paper: Compilation of Rules for the Description of Manuscripts and Textual Materials based on Chapter 4 of AACR 2,” Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, (December 1981).

53 *The Wilson Report*, pp. 65-69; “Official Response of the Association of Canadian Archivists,” *Archivaria* 11 (1980-81), pp. 14-16; “Issue on Archival Networks,” *The Midwestern Archivist* 6 (1982); R. Scott James, “Administration of Municipal Records: The Toronto Experience,” p. 334.

54 George Brandak, “Response to the Wilson Report,” *Archivaria* 11 (1980-81), p. 23.

dictates a different strategy. A machine-readable resource tool contributes toward the ultimate creation of archival networks managed by professionals who are faithful to, and reflective of, diverse local needs.

As the work of the Vancouver Island Project continues, one is constantly reminded that the complex relationship between historians and archivists is central to the activities of both groups. Nonetheless, one is forced to agree that there is currently very little substantive dialogue about the theory and method of historical research and archival practice. This isolation is particularly alarming since technological advances have major implications for the nature of history writing and record keeping. The Vancouver Island Project's work suggests that both enterprises will suffer seriously if historians and archivists continue to work in relative vacuums. While the tension between control and access will probably never be completely relaxed, the importance of both concerns necessitate that they be treated as equal priorities in the pursuit of archival automation. Such a treatment requires all the insight and talents of historians and archivists. The time for collaboration is now.