

Daniel J. Caron

Meeting Challenges of the Future

From Reflection to Action



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Daniel J. Caron

Deputy Head and Librarian and Archivist of Canada and Chair, Heads of Federal Agencies

Daniel J. Caron joined the federal public service in 1982. In 2009, he was appointed Librarian and Archivist of Canada. One year later, he launched the modernization initiative to ensure that Library and Archives Canada could meet the multiple challenges of the digital environment. This initiative is a call for collaboration, epistemologically grounded institutional policies and policy-driven decisions. In addition to his organizational experience, Mr. Caron is a seasoned author and speaker on public administration and issues related to information and memory both in Canada and abroad. Mr. Caron has also taught in several Canadian universities. He holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Economics from the Université Laval, and obtained a doctorate in Applied Human Sciences from the Université de Montréal. Mr. Caron has been Chair of the Forum of National Archivists for the International Council on Archives since 2010.

Our relationship with information has changed considerably over the past 20 years. Documentary heritage is not what it once was. It is no longer created in the same way, no longer preserved as in the past, and no longer used in the same manner. That is why, in late 2009, we undertook the modernization of Library and Archives Canada to adapt to the new environment. While the challenges are enormous, the opportunities are also numerous.

We have accomplished a great deal since 2009. Several projects are pending or are awaiting completion in the coming years to ensure our success and strong leadership. We believe that more deliberative decision making and an increasingly collaborative, open environment enable each one of us to play our role in meeting the challenges of managing Canada's documentary heritage in the early 21st century.

The modernization of Library and Archives Canada has fully prepared the institution to play a leading role in this new environment.

Solid Foundations for the Future: An Assessment

Five major projects were announced in our 2010 directions document. Three of these focused directly on the functions that are central to our mandate, i.e., acquisition, preservation and access. The fourth project concerned the organization, its functions and work processes. Lastly, the fifth project sought to rethink our ties and ways of working with our partners.



First, acquisition has always been central to our activities and must continue to be so even in a much more complex world. From the standpoint of our daily practices, our new organizational context now better equips us to build a collection that is representative of the documentary production of Canadians in the 21st century in its original, authentic form, including digital documents. At the same time, this allows us to continue even more rigorously to refine the collection of

analogue documents by adding missing items to it. While much remains to be done, the gradual implementation of our whole-of-society acquisition framework marks the completion of an important step. We now have complete freedom to undertake the second stage of this enormous task, i.e., identifying documents of historic interest that are on the Web, many of which will never be printed.

The organizational context also enables us to continue to support federal departments and agencies in recordkeeping and ultimately to benefit from all documents with relevant historical value that the Government of Canada produces. For the first time, the Whole-of-Society Approach to acquisition offers a highly valuable tool that defines government documents in relation to others produced in society on the same theme, and not only as simple federal administrative documents.

This contextualization, achieved by drawing closer together the federal government and other societal actors, increases the potential for the retention of relevant documents for future researchers and historians. Moreover, it supports the government's objectives respecting transparency. Lastly, this complements very well legal deposit as an ideal mechanism for the acquisition of published material. Through this more comprehensive approach, we are concentrating more extensively on obtaining all socially relevant content rather than acquiring objects taken out of context.

This change fully reflects the manner in which information is being produced in the 21st century.

Our directions pertaining to acquisitions are now clear and our complementarity with other Canadian institutions is better defined. We are interested in the part of documentary production that is of *national interest* regardless of its form or source, or whether it is public or private. We wish to document the discourse of Canadian society on topics of national interest through the entire range of existing collection means, i.e., recordkeeping, Web-based collection, purchases, tax receipts or legal deposit. Lastly, we have adopted criteria that now better define our focus, thereby allowing us to identify more proactively what is of interest to Library and Archives Canada.

Second, as for preservation, our efforts have led to a sweeping review of the physical condition of the collection. Stemming from modernization, this review now enables us to constantly and systematically evaluate the physical condition of our collection and to adopt the appropriate measures to ensure its preservation.

At the same time, we can examine the relevance of our collections to ensure that space is used to preserve the documents that fall under our mandate. This exercise is closely linked to the development of our long-term infrastructure plan and allows us to rigorously and responsibly anticipate our needs. For the first time, we now have a master list of the collections in our vaults. In 2012, we were thus able to produce an initial report on the physical condition of this portion of the collection.

We also began developing an innovative technological approach for our trusted digital repository. We will now ensure that the approach developed can be adapted to all situations in which we receive documentation in digital format (e.g., government documents, blogs, wikis, e-books, or documentary art produced in digital format). As is the case for analogue formats that require conversion to more stable formats, we must be vigilant and ensure that the material will always be accessible. The challenge will be a constant one, as is true of any method of preservation.

Third is access to the collection. The past three years have been the most remarkable in the history of the institution in terms of providing Canadians with access to the collection. We have digitized information resources and made them available online; displayed exhibitions across the country; and answered the questions of Canadians who have visited Library and Archives Canada. In practical terms, we have pioneered the extensive digitization of documents of national interest, such as the portrait collection. Since only a portion of our collection warrants digitization, this work is being carried out according to relevance criteria, including interest in the records and their frequency of use.

We have also innovated by transforming our analogue reprography service into a digitizing service. Instead of photocopying documents, we digitize them and make them available to everyone. We have established numerous partnerships with other institutions across the country, including libraries, to enable greater numbers of Canadians to access their collections. The *Lest We Forget* project is a fine example.

This is a comprehensive approach to managing the collection: assessing the relevance of content preserved by Library and Archives Canada for Canadians; managing the holdings we safeguard as efficiently as possible to ensure their preservation; and providing maximum access to all content.

As anticipated, we have also rethought our structure to better separate our day-to-day operations from our reflection process and the development of directions, key concepts and principles. The challenges posed by the acquisition and preservation of and access to the collections in the digital realm require that we develop innovative approaches and thoroughly reflect on our specific work processes regularly. This will ensure we are able to serve Canadians now and also in the future. At the same time, our teams must continue to operate in both the analogue and digital realms. They must continue to acquire, preserve and make all of Library and Archives Canada's holdings accessible to Canadians. This is what matters most to Canadians.

Accordingly, our new structure is simpler and essentially centred on such day-to-day operations. Moreover, this has enabled us to consolidate our efforts to develop expertise concentrated mainly on formulating policies and standards. This specialized team can now take full advantage of the most advanced research in the field of information sciences.

Next, by streamlining our management structure, we have also returned decision making to the strategic level, which enables us to act in light of options recommended by experts. All this places the activities that represent our core business in the hands of our best experts, who have more time to devote to them and better serve Canadians overall. These experts are now guided in their work by policies and institutional standards that will continue to develop and enable them to adapt constantly to the documentary production environment.

Through this dynamic institutional framework comprising policies and standards, Library and Archives Canada's day-to-day operations, methods and approaches linked to acquiring, preserving and providing access to its resources are becoming more and more transparent. It will be increasingly easy for Canadians to be aware of what we acquire, how we acquire it and why. In the same way, Canadians will be able to better understand the condition of the collection, how we are preserving it and how they can access it. We are convinced that this will enable us to clarify our practices, legislative mandate and the ways in which we serve Canadians.

Lastly, we have adopted a more open, collaborative work approach with the Canadian documentary heritage sector represented primarily by provincial and territorial archives and libraries, and academia. In the first instance, we have undertaken several projects focusing on ways to better co-operate on questions

related to acquiring and preserving records and providing Canadians with access to them. In the second instance, we have identified opportunities for collaboration with universities to advance research in certain areas of our work to better prepare future personnel and respond to our needs.

Of course, we are also striving to take full advantage of international best practices. The Forum of National Archivists, which I have chaired for two years, has rallied the most influential decision makers on questions of concern to all of us. We have also asked the Public Policy Forum to join with us to inform Canadians of the challenges that we are facing outside of our traditional communities. A number of business people, leaders in academia and senior public servants have participated in round-table forums that we have organized. Deliberations are proceeding and other meetings will take place in Canada between now and the spring of 2013. We will jointly produce a report with the Public Policy Forum in light of the results obtained and hope to disseminate it extensively so that the Canadian public overall is more aware of and better understands the challenges that we are facing. Lastly, we have submitted a proposal to the Council of Canadian Academies to request that it conduct a thorough examination of the challenges within the framework of their mandate. Our proposal has been accepted and deliberations should begin in 2013.

In short, over the past three years, while we have continued to acquire and preserve documents and to serve Canadians, we have also rethought internal governance and collaboration with our external partners. We have developed an institution whose work processes have been renewed to allow for the best possible use of the resources allocated to us. We have clarified our mandate and the manner in which we will fulfill it. We have established the outline of the research that must be carried out to enable us to better function as an institution in the digital environment and initiated discussions on our needs in relation to the skills that will be necessary to support our work in the future.

Our business model has been enriched and enhanced by refocusing on our mandate and reinforcing stewardship. However, we must do even more if we wish to continue to play the unique role that Canadians have entrusted to us.

Implementation and Production: An Avenue for the Future



The 2013–2015 time frame represents for Library and Archives Canada an intense period of implementation and production, in addition to the ongoing work that must be pursued. While our reflection on solutions for the future will continue, it is sufficiently under way that we can

accelerate the implementation of certain solutions and shift into production mode by means of these new methods.

With respect to acquisitions, we will pursue our efforts to rigorously acquire both analogue and digital documents. In the case of analogue documents, it is important to continue to build our inventory and pinpoint what is of interest to us and what is missing. We must make our acquisition intentions known and enable those who possess the content to contact us and work with us. Accordingly, we will advance the Whole-of-Society Approach, ensuring:

1. the implementation of our collaborative acquisition mechanism with a monitoring function with other stakeholders;
2. the issuance of public announcements, both analogue and digital, concerning what we are interested in acquiring, on a continuous basis, including using social media tools;
3. the systemic acquisition of Web-based material of interest;
4. the elimination of all backlogs in acquisition files in the next 12 months and the implementation of measures to avoid the recurrence of such backlogs.

Our efforts devoted to digital preservation will continue until we are confident that we can migrate digital content over time. As for analogue material, we will continue to focus fully on it to ensure that the collection is properly preserved, that is, by putting in place appropriate, timely measures to guarantee

that the physical integrity of the documents in our possession is maintained. Our two priorities are:

1. to pursue our efforts to refine the trusted digital repository;
2. to complete our management cycle for the analogue documentary heritage in our possession and take all necessary measures to ensure its long-term preservation.

Our greatest contribution is to make the contents of our collections available to Canadians. Regardless of the means used, the material at our disposal must be available to Canadians who wish to access it. This means that it must be described rapidly in plain language that requires little or no mediation between the material and the user. We must use appropriate vocabulary to ensure that the material can be located using search tools such as Google. Otherwise, this material will remain unknown. Similarly, it is important to describe as many documents as possible so that Canadians overall know what they can access, as easily and directly as possible. This means that we must work with private- and public-sector partners to promptly make the material available. Our service standards must offer users an array of possibilities ranging from totally free access according to usual standards, to access that may require fees but that offers, in exchange, added value for which the user is willing to pay. The private sector, which can specialize and produce more massively and quickly in certain fields, may also be a very useful partner in this respect.

Library and Archives Canada's offerings must be proactive and also adapted to the needs of different groups of users. Historians, genealogists and writers have specific needs that we must keep in mind to develop applications and describe or implement new tools that will satisfy their needs.

Consequently, we aim to:

1. describe as much material as possible in plain terms by developing new standards and continuing to develop research tools to facilitate the use of our holdings by more specialized clients, including historians and genealogists;

2. describe our collections in such a way that our holdings are accessible and identifiable by means of our online catalogues;
3. digitize documents and comprehensively publish online in an orderly manner, in light of what is of interest to Canadians;
4. develop new partnerships with libraries, archives, museums and other institutions interested in exhibiting material from Library and Archives Canada;
5. continue our preparations to celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017.

Our organization must continue to grow and exercise leadership in the development of the new skills required to manage documentary heritage in the 21st century. Library and Archives Canada must also be a leader in the development of work processes, policies and management frameworks for documentary heritage institutions. To this end, our efforts will focus on three priorities:

1. establishing an action-research laboratory in partnership with interested institutions, universities and the private sector to develop, refine and test new approaches in acquisition, preservation, description and access and introduce promising solutions in operations areas to implement them;
2. automating what can be automated to continue to put our best talents where their added value will make a difference;
3. pinpointing and defining the competency profile of tomorrow for our areas of activity.

Lastly, looking forward, I will personally strive to implement three specific initiatives that will serve as the foundation for our future development.

The first initiative will involve forming *Creativity Circles* with the participation of the institution's employees. The purpose of this initiative will be to expand our ability to innovate with regard to very specific issues linked to our mandate. It will then show us how we can further take advantage of and use differently the vast holdings we preserve to more actively participate in the development of Canadian culture, either on our own or through a partnership.

The second initiative involves creating an external review committee on reflection and orientation that will advise us on items of interest to Library and Archives Canada, in other words, items of national interest.

The third initiative will be a series of seminars, the Wallot-Sylvestre Seminars, to encourage internal dialogue and ensure a shared understanding of the changes that may affect us in the future. These will cover demographics, literacy, writing practices in modern society, and the effects of technology on individuals and society. As a result, we will be better able to develop our policies and practices so that the institution remains an integral part of Canadians' cultural activities.

Conclusion

The future of the institutions responsible for managing the documentary heritage of nations is assured insofar as such institutions are able to respond to new demands of the environment. Whether it is a question of defining how and what to acquire, properly preserving for durability or, very immediately, responding to the demands of new users in the digital world, we must work in the context of a changing society. Skills, work processes and a fresh perspective on the future are the keys to Library and Archives Canada's success.

The next three years will be pivotal ones that must enable us to implement new practices and produce results for Canadians in this new framework.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Daniel J. Caron, Ph.D.
Deputy Head and Librarian
and Archivist of Canada