



Draft

Archives Society of Alberta

Strategic Plan

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May 2006

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A. Introduction

In 2006, the Archives Society of Alberta is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. While this is certainly a time to celebrate, it is also an appropriate time for the society to reflect on where it has been, as well as where it is headed in the future. There have been many wonderful accomplishments over the last twenty-five years. While funding always remains a challenge, archivists throughout the province continue their core work of collecting, arranging, describing, and preserving archival records in a variety of formats, while exploring new and innovative ways of providing access to those records. Several new archives have been created in the last twenty-five years in the province, many of which are in existence because of the guidance provided by the ASA. Alberta's centennial in 2005 helped to raise the profile of archives and many other heritage organizations through the province, but the challenge now is to maintain that profile. The Archives Society has many strengths to build on, and some challenges to face, as it embarks on its next twenty-five years.

B. Acknowledgements

Garth Clarke, Lisa Atkinson, Don Bourdon, Regina Landwehr and Michael Gourlie provided valuable input to this report, and their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

C. Background

The Alberta Society of Archivists was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1981. In 1992, the Alberta Society of Archivists merged with the Alberta Archives Council to form the Archives Society of Alberta (ASA). The ASA represents the province's archival community and those interested in archives. The objectives of the ASA as outlined in the constitution are:

- 1) to provide a forum through which all those engaged or interested in Archives work may meet and discuss common concerns;
- 2) to provide an effective voice for archival interests in Alberta;
- 3) to promote and advance the collection, preservation, and use of archival material, and to encourage and develop archival skills among those involved in archival work by:
 - a) establishing seminars or workshops on archival principals and procedures,
 - b) distributing information relating to archival administration and practice, and
 - c) undertaking other such activities that from time to time may be deemed appropriate;
- 4) to work with and offer support to any other association or institution whose aims are consistent with those of the society.

The ASA is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors that consists of: President; Vice-President; Secretary; Treasurer; Institutional Member-at-Large; and Individual Member-at-Large. In addition, there are several Board committees that provide assistance to the Board in specific areas:

- ANA Committee – provides direction regarding Internet initiatives
- Communications – promotes public awareness of archives
- Education – coordinates educational endeavours
- Grants – adjudicates applications for funding to assist archives
- Membership – promotes membership and recruits new members.

To manage the various programs and activities, the ASA has a full-time Executive Director/Archives Advisor, and three paid contractors: Administrative Coordinator; Financial Coordinator; and System Administrator. Shared office space is maintained with the Alberta Museums Association in Edmonton.

There are four categories of membership offered by the ASA: institutional; associate; individual; and honorary. While the membership has been relatively stable, there has been some decline in recent years. As of May 2006, there are 36 institutional members, 11 associate members, 82 individual members, and 6 honorary members.

Over the last twenty-five years there have been several reviews and studies pertaining to different aspects of the ASA. While there are too many reports to mention them all, there are certain reports that are particularly relevant for the strategic planning progress.¹ In 1988, a comprehensive Needs Assessment and Planning Study Report was completed by the Alberta Archives Council. This was followed by A Needs Assessment, Program Review and Planning Study prepared by Don Bourdon in 1992. There were several surveys undertaken in subsequent years related to the Canadian Archival Information Network (CAIN) project; i.e. CAIN Implementation Study (1999) and CAIN Survey (2002). A full review of the ASA's education program was undertaken in 1999 by the ASA's Education Program Review Committee. In 2001, the ASA completed a four-year Business Plan to provide direction and guidance leading up to Alberta's Centennial celebrations. The most recent membership survey was completed in November 2005.

The ASA has been successful in obtaining funding from a variety of sources. Core funding has been received since the early 1990s from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, and in 2003, this funding was increased from \$100,000 to \$160,000. This has been supplemented by federal funding from the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA). To date, funding from the CCA

¹ For complete details of these reports, refer to Selected Bibliography.

has only been used for professional development and not for other ASA services like the databases or advisory services. Grants for large digitization projects have been obtained from Canadian Heritage. In 2001, the ASA was successful in its application for funding in the amount of \$1.225 million through the Alberta government's Centennial Legacies Funding Program. In addition to federal funds received under the CAIN program, these funds allowed the Archives Society of Alberta to:

- purchase servers to house and maintain the ASA databases;
- supply newer and faster computers, and in many instances scanners and imaging software, to member institutions;
- hire contract archivists to complete fonds level descriptions for a number of different member institutions throughout the province;
- develop new databases (Alberta InSight and Alberta InWord);
- engage in digitization projects; and
- provide training to member institutions.

The ASA, and the archival community in Alberta, have benefited greatly from the various funds that have been received. A significant portion of the funds have been allocated to institutional members in the form of grants, including Access to Holdings. In many instances, the availability of grants has been a key motivator for institutional membership. Alberta is in a unique position to be able to offer grants for special projects to its member organizations from provincial funding, rather than from federal sources. As noted in the November 2005 survey, many archivists throughout the province have received grants for educational programs. These include grants that have been awarded through the ASA's Education and Travel Grant Program for Student Bursaries and the Tuition Support Program, as well as grants through the Educational Program Travel Assistance (EPTA) and Professional Development Travel Assistance (PDTA) programs. Increased participation in networks, shared databases and innovative digitization projects have led to a much greater awareness of the richness of the archival holdings throughout the province. These projects have also led to greater cooperation among archives and the overall strengthening of the archival community, within Alberta as well as nationally.

D. Strengths

While the archival community in Alberta is not large, it was characterized in an earlier study as friendly and cooperative. This has been, and continues to be, a major strength. While the ASA has been fortunate to hire dedicated and competent staff over its twenty-five year history, many individuals from the archival community have volunteered their time for Board and committee positions, as well as their workplaces for ASA events. The growth in ASA activities over the last five years has been phenomenal, and the ASA owes its

success to some key individuals who have worked extraordinarily hard to forward the interests of the ASA and of archives in Alberta. Another example of cooperation can be seen with regard to the virtual exhibits. The ASA was one of the first provincial associations to coordinate an annual virtual exhibit with contributions from members throughout the province. From the time the first exhibit was launched in 1997, there has been enthusiastic participation from the membership, and it continues to be a popular feature of the web site.

A second major strength is funding. As mentioned above, and primarily as a result of the hard work of staff and very dedicated volunteers, the ASA has been successful in obtaining funding from a variety of sources. Although more funding is required to maintain our position in the future, the ASA is extremely fortunate to receive the funding that it does from the provincial government. The ASA is able to provide financial assistance programs that support the professional development of the province's archival community, and to preserve and make available for research archival records held by institutional members of the ASA. Furthermore, the ASA has proven ability with regard to financial management and has shown that it is capable of managing large grant projects, completing them on time and within budget.

The ASA is considered a leader in the field of archival education. There are typically a number of educational opportunities offered throughout the year, including two advanced-level workshops and the Archives Institute. The Archives Institute is the only offering of its kind in Canada and has worked well in tandem with the Association of Newfoundland and Labrador Archivists' manual. Organizations have sent participants from out of province and there have been some very favorable results from the program over the years. The ASA have offered a variety of workshops on a number of different topics, and they have also been well-attended. In the November 2005 membership survey, education programs offered by the ASA were rated very highly by the majority of respondents in categories such as quality of instruction, right balance of theory and practice, quality of information, improvement in job skills, etc.

The rapid changes in technology and the increasing use of computers and the Internet have had a major impact on the archival profession. The ASA has demonstrated that it is capable of dealing with these changes in technology, and in many instances, leading the way for the rest of the community to follow. Alberta was the second province in Canada to create an automated province-wide database of fonds level descriptions, the Archives Network of Alberta database. This was followed by the introduction of Alberta InSight, the photograph database launched in Archives Week 2002, and Alberta InWord, a database of digitized documents launched in 2004. While most provinces now have provincial databases of fonds level descriptions and some have photograph databases, Alberta is the only province to have a database of

digitized documents (Alberta InWord), which currently contains over 80,000 scanned pages. Alberta is also an active participant and contributor to national databases, including Archives Canada and Images Canada. As of February 2006, Alberta's contributions to Archives Canada comprise 18% of the total records in the national database, which is a significant percentage considering the relatively small number of archives in Alberta compared to provinces such as Ontario or British Columbia. Feedback received from users about the ASA's on-line material has been overwhelmingly positive, and the number of user sessions from the general public to the material in the on-line databases is currently averaging 500 per day.

The ASA has spearheaded several innovative digitization projects in recent years (i.e. Archival Resources in the Classroom, Prairie Populism, and Seeing with New Eyes) involving a number of partners, including the Alberta Online Consortium. These projects are available through the ASA's home page at www.archivesalberta.org. The Archives Tutorial, which is also available on the ASA's home page, was developed in conjunction with these projects. It is considered to be a tremendous tool and, once again, the ASA has taken a leadership role in developing a valuable resource that is being used across Canada. The on-line tutorial takes the user through a virtual tour of an archives, and provides valuable background information in the form of Researcher Essays, Archivist Essays, and a Database Tutorial. A French version of the tutorial is currently being funded through federal sources.

E. Challenges

While the ASA has accomplished a great deal in its twenty-five year history, there are still issues that need to be addressed. A significant number of the ASA's members are suffering volunteer burnout. Many have served at least one term on the board and various committees, and they find they are no longer in a position to actively contribute to the organization. While there have been some new members in recent years and some new archivists arrive in the province, for the most part, this has been a very stable community. Many committee positions (including chairs of committees) have been vacant in recent years, as a result of lack of volunteers.

Funding continues to be a challenge for the ASA. While the ASA has been successful in the past in obtaining funding from a variety of sources, core funding is required to maintain the existing services, as well as plan for the future. Federal funding is uncertain, and with the introduction of the National Archival Development Program (NADP), priorities have changed and the preservation management aspect has been largely submerged. The ASA's databases, as well as the online learning objects, tutorial and web site, have resulted in on-going costs to the ASA for the maintenance and updating of servers, software and support, system administrator costs, and hosting. It is timely for the ASA to review its resources to ensure that existing programs

can be sustained, and new opportunities can be explored. The funding that has been received through the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation has been steady; however, there are no guarantees that this will continue indefinitely.

In addition to on-going funding issues, there were a number of other challenges identified in the November 2005 membership survey, including:

- Electronic/digital records
- Professional development, especially in area of e-records
- Succession planning
- Advocacy
- Lack of comprehension by parent bodies of function and purpose of an archive
- Public awareness and subsequent loss of archival records
- Work overload/burnout

As mentioned above, the ASA is considered to be a leader in archival education, and the workshops and Archives Institute have been well received. In 1999, the ASA Education Program Review Committee completed a comprehensive analysis of the ASA's educational offerings entitled "The Archives Society of Alberta Education Program: A Blueprint for the Future, 1999-2002". It may be timely for the ASA to review its educational component and provide an update to this review to ensure that the needs of its members are being met.

F. Core Objectives

Consistent with the objectives outlined in the ASA's constitution, the ASA's core objectives are to:

- 1) Promote and advance the collection, preservation, and use of archival materials.
- 2) Encourage and develop archival skills for those involved in archival work.
- 3) Provide timely and relevant information to members on issues and trends affecting the archival community, and provide the opportunity for those engaged or interested in archives work to meet and discuss issues of common interest.
- 4) Improve access to archival materials through new technologies.
- 5) Provide an effective voice for archival interests in Alberta.

6) Explore new and innovative ways to make the ASA more timely and relevant to its members and to expand its membership base.

G. Recommendations

- 1) *Promote and advance the collection, preservation, and use of archival materials.*
 - a) Provide Access to Holdings grants from Alberta Historical Resources Foundation (AHRF) funding for processing and describing archival records.
 - b) Adjudicate the Alberta portion of the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA) grants for various funding streams under NADP.
 - c) Provide advisory services to the general public, organizations and established archives throughout Alberta.
 - d) Coordinate an Archives Week theme, exhibit and event annually in October.
 - e) Use the ASA display to promote its programs and activities.
- 2) *Encourage and develop archival skills for those involved in archival work.*
 - a) Offer a minimum of two advanced level workshops per year in preservation and archival practice.
 - b) Offer the six-day Archives Institute for basic archival education.
 - c) Provide Alberta's archivists with grants to assist with educational opportunities under the Education and Travel Grant Program.
 - d) Establish an ASA Education Program Review Committee for the purpose of undertaking a thorough assessment of the current educational offerings, including the Archives Institute. The committee would provide a current environmental scan and update to the comprehensive 1999 report, *The Archives Society of Alberta Education Program: A Blueprint for the Future, 1999-2002*.
- 3) *Provide timely and relevant information to members on issues and trends affecting the archival community, and provide the opportunity for*

those engaged or interested in archives work to meet and discuss issues of common interest.

- a) Publish a quarterly newsletter in hard-copy and electronic formats. Investigate the option of providing electronic copies to members, if they prefer, rather than paper copies.
 - b) Update the ASA's web site on a regular basis. Investigate expanding the web site to include on-line membership renewals and course registrations.
 - c) Continue to use asa-l as a tool for communicating to asa members on a timely basis.
 - d) Coordinate the Institutional Forum on a semi-annual basis, to be held at various locations throughout the province. Consider offering this outside of Calgary and Edmonton on a regular basis.
 - e) Devote an Institutional Forum in 2006 or 2007 to obtaining feedback from members about future cooperative projects, including projects that could be funded through NADP, as well as large digitization projects.
 - f) Schedule an Annual Conference every second year to allow for the opportunity for dialogue with members from across the province.
- 4) *Improve access to archival materials through new technologies.*
- a) Expand participation by institutional members in the on-line databases, including the ANA database, Alberta InSight, and Alberta InWord.
 - b) Provide funds for archival Internet initiatives (i.e. digitization, websites).
 - c) Explore initiatives under NADP, particularly the funding stream regarding increased access to Canada's archival heritage through the national catalogue.
 - d) Offer training in the use of new technologies.
- 5) *Provide an effective voice for archival interests in Alberta.*
- a) Develop strategic partnerships with other heritage organizations.
 - b) Attend conferences and workshops to promote the use of archives.

- c) Promote Archives Week in Alberta.
 - d) Promote the extensive ASA's on-line resources to members and the general public.
 - e) Participate in the CCA's Archives and You Conference, to be held in Calgary in September 2006, possibly by giving a session about Alberta's archives.
 - f) Investigate forming partnerships with the Association of Records Managers (ARMA); i.e. offering joint conferences/workshops, joint agreements for member benefits, etc.
 - g) Investigate reaching out to associations of records creators (i.e. Association of Urban Municipalities, Multicultural Society of Edmonton, etc.) to promote the preservation of records in strategic communities.
- 6) *Explore new and innovative ways to make the ASA more timely and relevant to its members, and to expand its membership base.*
- a) Actively recruit members for committees and board members so that all of the positions are filled, beginning with the Membership Committee.
 - b) Reinstate the ASA's Finance Committee to provide assistance to the ASA Treasurer. Working with the Treasurer, the Finance Committee would be responsible for investigating increased provincial funding sources, as well as researching the costs and benefits of applying for charitable status for the ASA. The Finance Committee would also be responsible for making recommendations to the Board regarding priorities for allocations for funding (i.e. through the NADP program.)
 - c) Introduce yearly work plans, at both the committee and Board level. Work plans should be obtained from committees outlining specific activities and related costs for the coming year, and then this information should be incorporated into an overall yearly work plan for the Board.

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