



Honourable H el ene Scherrer
Minister of Canadian Heritage
House of Commons
Parliament Buildings
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

18 February 2004

Dear Madame Scherrer,

I am writing to you with regards to the concerns of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) over the findings of the Auditor General of Canada in her report of November 2003 on the ways in which the federal government has administered certain programs, in particular those relating to the protection of cultural heritage. The ACA is an association of english-speaking professional archivists whose mission is to provide leadership and awareness of archival activities and to facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the heritage across the country.

Records and archives are the memory of a society. They are also the evidence of accountable and democratic conduct by governments. The quality of record keeping is critical in ensuring proper governance and provision of services to the public. Too frequently archival institutions and government agencies that create records do not receive the support required to ensure efficiency in all phases in the life cycle of records management, including long-term archival preservation. This is particularly true at the federal level where, in spite of the records management requirements contained in the National Archives of Canada Act (1987), there still exists a real lack of awareness at all levels of the federal bureaucracy of the importance of records and the need to value and protect them. Accountable record keeping is fundamental if corruption and mismanagement are to be avoided and the people of Canada are not to be deprived of their non-renewable archival heritage. The Auditor General's findings bear this out all too clearly.

Chapter 6 of the Report outlines a disturbing picture of neglect and inaction. It states that heritage sites, documents of historic value and collections of publications in the custody of the federal government will be lost to future generations unless action to protect them is undertaken soon. More than two-thirds of the historic sites and heritage buildings are in less than good condition. More than 90% of the National Library's collections are stored in sub-standard environmental conditions. A more strategic and comprehensive approach to cultural heritage must be adopted now. Ms Fraser calls for a review of the approach to protecting Canada's cultural heritage by both public and private sector partners (section 6.119). The Association of Canadian Archivists urges Canadian Heritage to complete and make known its work on finding the balance between expected results and available resources for cultural heritage.

The levels of existing resources available to heritage custodians is seen as a contributing factor to the sad state of acquisition and preservation witnessed over the last decade. Of particular concern to archivists in Chapter 6 are the reflections on the difficulties experienced by the National Archives in carrying out its mandate with regard to the records of the federal



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government. The Report is correct in its observations on the lack of attention to information management by federal departments and agencies. The federal government's Program Review, (budget and human resource cuts) of the 1990's fell heavily on administrative units and resulted in a major reduction of records scheduling and disposal activity. This may explain in part the claim that the National Archives is having difficulty collecting documents of historic value. It is unfortunate that the other side of the statement implying that there are no tools in place to acquire archival records seems to ignore the existence of a number of such tools such as formal Records Disposition Authorities approved during the past decade. Perhaps the lack of tools referred to is due to the same shortage of resources available for this task at the National Archives as there is in the case of records management staff in creating departments and agencies.

Audits such as this alert us to danger. This Report is a clear sign that more resources, public awareness and government and private sector support are required if those engaged in heritage protection are to have any chance of success. In addition, finding a better balance between resources and mandate/responsibilities in the area of protection would ensure accountability by government and protection of valuable heritage assets (section 6.116). The archival community thanks the Auditor General for her timely notification of the problems surrounding heritage preservation. The ACA calls upon the Martin government early in its mandate , and in particular, upon the Minister responsible for the protection of Canada's national heritage, to strengthen the resources in federal cultural institutions and to work with other related institutions across the country, to halt the erosion described by the Auditor General.

The Association of Canadian Archivists urge you to ensure that Library and Archives Canada is not only supported by a new act of Parliament but also that this vital national institution is supplied with the resources necessary to fix the problems identified by the Auditor General. The people of Canada expect their national government to guarantee the acquisition and permanent preservation of all of our nationally significant heritage.

Sincerely,

J.W. O'Brien
President, ACA