

April 26, 2004

The Honorable Premier Williams  
The Office of the Premier  
Confederation Building, East Block  
PO Box 8700  
St. John's, NL  
A1B 4J6

Dear Mr. Premier,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Association of Canadian Archivists ( ACA ) to express serious concern regarding the recent cuts to the operational budget of the Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador and the delay of the opening of the Rooms. The ACA, with headquarters in Ottawa, is a national association representing English-speaking archivists in Canada whose mission is to provide leadership and awareness of archival activities and to facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the archival heritage across the country.

The scope of the cuts by your administration amounts to serious setbacks to the provincial government's archival program. The ACA urges you to reconsider these decisions so as to prevent damage to the cultural life of the province and compromise the non-renewable heritage resources now available to the province's archives and museums.

Records and archives are the memories of communities, and when that community is an entire province with a the longest recorded history in the country, the proper preservation of its memory is of importance not only to the citizens of your province but also to the people of Canada. The provincial government's records are evidence of accountable and democratic conduct, they preserve citizens' legal rights and document vital information resources. When the community's archives do not receive the support required to ensure long-term management and preservation of the people's records the collective memory of the province is placed in serious danger. The recent findings of the Auditor General of Canada with regards to the diminished level of protection of the cultural heritage of the federal government demonstrates all too clearly the results of inadequate support to archival and other heritage programs. It is to be fervently hoped that similar neglect is not repeated in your jurisdiction.

The reductions in the ranks of trained and experienced vital archival employees will impair that arm of your administration's ability to carry out its responsibilities. The current budget will only make matters worse and jeopardize the day-to-day operations of the Provincial Archives and delay the move to the Rooms. We trust that the delay in the Rooms opening will not extend beyond the announced 12 months. The Association also hopes that the positions lost through the reductions in this year's budget will be restored at the earliest opportunity so the Archives can re-establish and maintain full effective operations in its new quarters.

The ACA is not unaware of the fiscal quandary the province finds itself in, but surely a creative way can be found to resolve this dilemma without imposing drastic measures on archival and related cultural functions. We urge you not to endanger the collective memory of Newfoundland and Labrador because the citizens of your province are entitled to a guarantee that their precious cultural and archival heritage is enriched and preserved for them and for future generations.

Sincerely,

J.W. O'Brien  
President