



Archival Donation Guide

Canadian Forest History Preservation Project

The Canadian Forest History Preservation Project's mandate is to protect Canada's forest history by identifying at-risk collections and helping facilitate their placement in archival repositories. While preservation has always been a concern, our current efforts respond to the threat of historic document loss posed by consolidation in the forest industry and an ageing population. As historic papers are often space-consuming and hold little current utility or personal meaning, they may not be welcome at either the office or home. They are, however, invaluable to the archives. We need your assistance to ensure that precious forest history documents don't end up in the landfill or the recycle bin.

This guide will help you to decide whether you have historic records that ought to be preserved in archives or whether it is okay to send them for recycling. If you have things that you think warrant preservation, you will find important details here on the process of archival donation. We will not be covering objects. Objects of historic value belong in a museum rather than archives.

Part 1 Deciding if you should donate.

Why Donate?

By donating to the archives, you will become part of a greater public project to preserve the historical record and to make this knowledge available to future generations.

What is worth keeping? What might an archive want?

Overwhelmingly archives collect *primary sources*, loosely defined as unique, eye-witness records that intentionally or inadvertently document historical events, processes and procedures, and mind-sets of an earlier time. They may be produced by an individual in a diary or as a manuscript, take the form of an

organization's minutes, a company's report or statistics, or even government correspondence. Primary sources are not always written sources. Archives collect photographs, films, maps, artwork, as well as sound and video recordings.

Archives do not typically collect *secondary sources*, often synonymous with published materials such as books or magazines. While a very old copy of a published journal such as *The Forestry Chronicle* might seem valuable, it is unlikely that an archive will want it. Chances are good that many institutions, particularly libraries, already have a copy of something that was once widely distributed. One exception to this rule is if the secondary source has been heavily annotated, especially if the annotations were made by someone of historical interest. Marginalia, underlined passages and readers' notes increase the archival value of old published works.

Physical Condition: What sort of shape are my records in?

Archives do not require records in pristine physical condition. When assessing a donation, however, they will consider possible long-term conservation costs and threats to other holdings. Documents contaminated with mould or bugs will likely be rejected as a danger to the larger collection. Objects in very poor condition will only be considered if they hold great historical value. If you want to donate in the future, it is important to take good care of your records today. You can do this by storing your records in a cool, dry place, away from direct sunlight.

How Should I Prepare My Collection for the Archives?

In a word, *don't!* When preparing to make an archival donation, you may be tempted to sort, cull, weed, clean, and organize your collection. Archivists frown on this practice and for good rea-

son. While your pre-selection and pre-ordering may seem helpful, it may actually devalue and damage the collection. You could unintentionally throw out the most valuable documents. Leave your collection as is and let an archivist make these determinations. Where you see value and where an archivist sees value may lie in different places. Do not throw anything away.

If there is sensitive information, the archives may be able to arrange restricted access until a future date. As for cleaning or damage to your objects, archives employ trained conservationists for this purpose. Don't risk destroying a valuable piece of history. One way you can help is by providing contextual information or provenance about your potential donation. Perhaps identify people in a photograph, know a missing creation date or backstory, which increases knowledge or understanding of the gift. If so, please make notes to accompany the records. Do not write this information on the documents but provide a separate sheet of information. Should the archives agree to accept the donation, an archivist may be able to provide you with assistance.

Finding the Right Match: Where to donate?

Your provincial forest history group will have suggestions on where to best direct your forest history-related collection. The Canadian Forest History Preservation Project also has a national list of archives that wish to expand their forest history holdings. You can find the contact information at the end of this article. When considering where to donate, it is important to understand that all archives are not the same. Archives vary in size, facilities, staff, funding, and mandate. Bigger does not always mean better but larger institutions may offer increased preservation and security for your donation.

All archives have a pre-determined set of criteria to focus the institution's



Banff Hotel from Tunnel Mountain, Alberta, Canada; single frame of a stereograph published by Underwood and Underwood, ca 1900.

SOURCE: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION, WASHINGTON, D.C., LC-DIG-ds-01233.

collection. The most common constraint is jurisdictional, meaning archives will only accept documents relating to their own region and will refer all other documents elsewhere. If your records are of local significance, it is best to approach a municipal archive. If your papers have broader regional or historic significance, they may be better placed at a university, provincial or even national archives. Topic should also influence your repository choice. Some archives have thematic goals, often determined by what is significant to their region, or current trends in research. An archive may have a very specific mandate such as the collection of railway history or simply a pre-existing concentration of holdings such as logging, famous botanists, or cartography.

If you have fragile documents, ask about the use of climate control in storage facilities, and how the facility plans to address long-term conservation issues relating to your gift. You may want to enquire about the institution's

current accession backlog and its impact on your donation. Due to staff and funding shortages, many institutions have a substantial lag between the time that a donation is gifted and when it is accessible to researchers. To overcome this obstacle, some institutions encourage monetary donations, when possible, to accompany physical gifts. These funds permit the archives to hire additional help to begin cataloguing your gift now to become available to researchers sooner.

Significance: How does my collection contribute to the historical record?

While nobody truly knows how the past will be perceived by future generations and what questions they might pose, archives have established criteria to help determine historical value. The most important consideration is a document's capacity to help explain a bigger local, provincial or national historical picture. Typically, if a document has relevance to something greater than itself, such as an interest group, move-

ment, historical event, or field of study, it will hold increased value for the archives.

The More the Merrier.

Unlike museums that acquire rare, individual artifacts, archives collect large groups of thematically-related records called "fonds", which are organized around their creator (significant individual, company, or organization), and retain the creator's original structure when possible. Documents diverse as business papers, personal correspondence, photographs, maps, and diaries, can be grouped in single fonds. What is important is the relationship between the sum parts. Each item derives meaning, not only from itself, but from its relationship to the whole.

Part 2

How to donate. What happens once an archive accepts my donation?

Negotiating the Transfer of Your Records: Access, Copyright, Tax Credits

When the archivist has identified your documents as historically significant, and wishes to acquire them, you can expect some legal paper work.

First, you must be sure that you are ready to part with your donation. Archives will almost never accept material on loan. Limited resources constrain their operations and they don't have the time or money to care for objects beyond their own collection. If parting with your donation is difficult, consider a future bequest in your will. Most archives are very experienced at this and have the proper paperwork to ensure that your wishes can be realized at a later date.

If you are ready to make the donation, the archives will want to know if someone else might hold a competing claim. For instance, just because you are keen to donate your parents' old photos, do your siblings share your enthusiasm?

Another question to consider when making your donation is the right of access. If you have sensitive information, which you want protected for a reasonable period, you must negotiate these details prior to the transfer. This period may be stipulated to end at a predetermined time, or cease upon the death of all parties associated with the material. You may further wish to place

restrictions on who is permitted to access the material, and under what conditions. Enquire about the archives' access policy to learn more.

Transfer of Copyright

During your donation, expect to be asked for the transfer of copyright. The archives will require you to cede your right to control reproductions of the gift, so that they may grant reproduction rights to future researchers. Without this permission, a researcher would be able to consult a document, but be unable to reproduce it in a book, government report, internet blog, or even a student paper. To gain reproduction rights, the researcher would need to seek out your permission, or the permission of whomever holds the copyright.

Current ownership of copyright is also important. While you may physically possess archival material, you may not hold its copyright. Typically, copyright belongs to the person who created the object. So, a photographer would hold copyright of his photographs, a professor would control copyright of her papers, and a business would own copyright of its records. However, this is not always the case. Individual copyright is often ceded in commercial and government settings, copyright can be sold or transferred, and copyright lapses after a proscribed period of time. Talk to the archives about your particular situation.

Appraisals for tax receipts

Archival donations are eligible for tax credits in Canada. Some repositories can appraise your gift for these purposes. At others, this is the responsibility of the donor. Discuss this topic with the facility in advance of your donation.

What Happens Once I've Transferred My Donation?

Once your documents are transferred, they will be described and catalogued as part of the institution's collection, assessed for possible conservation needs, and placed in a storage facility for safe-keeping. These records will be entered into a searchable computer database, card-catalogue, and/or paper-finding aid to help researchers navigate the institution's materials. Your papers

will be kept together as a single collection, which will never be dispersed. What unifies your collection is its creator. It does not matter if it contains information about a variety of places, themes or issues. Your collection will be assembled together.

Unlike a library, archives do not operate as an open stack where a researcher can physically browse the holdings. Instead, the researcher must submit a request to the archivist, citing the appropriate accession number to be retrieved from a closed stack. Frequently, especially with larger facilities, not all records are held on site. In these instances, researchers must return at a later date to view the recalled documents. Documents are always viewed on site, and in the case of fragile, valuable records, under the supervision of an archivist.

How are my records documented?

Your documents will be represented in a standardized, hierarchical format, which explains their contents at a macro and micro level. The highest level of description is called the fonds, which refers to the entire record group. Typical fonds are the collected works of a person or family, government department, or organization. Fonds-level descriptions summarize the thematic and physical content of a record group and are sometimes accompanied by a terse, contextual biography or history. Fonds are subdivided and organized into major themes called series. Series might represent work within a company department, a piece of legislation, a project, or some other significant aspect of the records. Series are further subdivided into similar documents, which share boxes, files and ultimately into the individual objects themselves. Document-level descriptions indicate information such as author, publisher, subject, date, size, material, and scale, varying with the type of documents represented.

While item-level detail is the ideal scenario for record description, it is labour-intensive and not representative of most archival holdings. Individual records are more commonly listed as the contents of fonds, and are located through a finding aid. For instance, a finding aid may note that there are 25

letters of correspondence between the Minister of Forests and a sawmill operator.

Will My Donation Be Digitized?

In the internet age, we've become accustomed to a glut of digitized information. You may have visited Web sites of some of the larger archival repositories, and have been overwhelmed at the extent of information available online. However, even at institutions with large digital libraries, only a small portion of records, typically high-demand, are accessible in this format. While it is possible that your donation may be digitized, it is not the most probable outcome. Digitization is expensive. If you want your material digitized, you will likely need to make a financial donation.

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Forest History Association of British Columbia

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Forest History Society of Ontario

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Société d'histoire forestière du Québec

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www.shfq.ca

NiCHE, The Network in Canadian History and Environment

www.niche-canada.org

International Forest History Society