

**Archives Society of Alberta**

**Archives in  
Interesting  
Times**



**Conference 2021 Program**  
**May 27 – 28, 2021**

## Welcome Message from Honourable Leela Sharon Aheer

### Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women

As the Minister of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, it is my honour to welcome everyone to Archives Society of Alberta's 2021 Biennial Conference!

We are living through times of great change. From the pandemic, movements of social change, and ground-breaking discoveries, we are all part of history being made. It is hard to think of capturing these moments for future generations when we are still processing it ourselves.

Now more than ever, archivists are vital to our society. There is comfort in knowing that Alberta's archivists are documenting how our province survived these challenging times, through documents, photographs, video, and more. Thanks to their work, future generations will be able to study and experience Alberta's story of perseverance and community.

My sincere gratitude to the organizers and volunteers for adapting the society's conference to a virtual experience. It is wonderful to hear so many organizations finding innovative ways to gather and learn safely.

Enjoy the conference!

**Leela Sharon Aheer**

*Minister*

## Welcome Message — ASA President

Welcome to the 2021 Archives Society of Alberta Conference. Funding cuts have pummeled our profession, and a pandemic has caused layoffs and the closure of many archives. We have had to rethink how we engage with the community, develop new partnerships and reimagine projects and standard workflows. 'Archives in Interesting Times', the conference's theme, offers inspirational and creative case studies of how archivists have risen to unprecedented challenges.

I know from personal experience the amount of work involved in organizing a conference. I imagine organizing a conference online has created some unique challenges for the ASA Conference Program Committee and staff. I would like to thank Sara King, Melissa McCarthy, Karly Sawatzky, Bryan Bance and Jennifer Willard, members of the Conference Program Committee, as well as Ericka Chemko, Conference Organizer, for the effort and hard work.

While we will not meet in person this year, I hope you will enjoy the conference!

Sincerely,

**Valla McLean, ASA President**

## Conference Schedule — May 27 and 28, 2021

Thursday, May 27, 2021	Zoom Room 1
9:30am – 11:30am	Alberta On Record Training (Institutional Members Only, free)
11:30 am – 12:30 pm	<b>Lunch</b>
12:30 – 2:00pm	Annual General Meeting

Friday, May 28, 2021	Zoom Room 1	Zoom Room 2
8:30 – 9:00am	Welcome & Opening	
9:00 – 10:00am	<b>Session 1:</b> Keynote Address Shelley Sweeney	
10:00 – 10:15am	<b>Break — 15 mins</b>	
10:15 – 11:45am	<b>Session 2A:</b> 'Pandemics in the Archives' Sara King, Jesse Carson, Kristine Lehew	<b>Session 2B:</b> 'What to do About RG10?' Kenton Storey, Greg Bak, Carmen Miedema, Sarah Hurford
11:45am – 1:00pm	<b>Lunch</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
1:00 – 2:00pm	<b>Session 3A</b> 'Arts and Archives' Kelly Jaclyn Andres, Candace Laycraft	<b>Session 3B</b> 'Internal Systems' Anna Gibson Hollow, Melissa McCarthy
2:00 – 2:15pm	<b>Break — 15 mins</b>	
2:15 – 3:45pm	<b>Session 4A</b> Bottom's Up! Michael Gourlie, Heather Northcott, Sara King	<b>Session 4B</b> 'Archives during the Pandemic' Vino Vipulanantharajah, Jia Jia Yong, Jillian Staniec
3:45 – 4:05pm	<b>Closing</b>	

## Alberta On Record Training

May 27, 9:30 – 11:30 am

**Instructor:** Maryna Chernyavska,  
Database Administrator

**Description:** The AOR Training session is an introduction to contributing content to AOR. The training is intended for those with little to no experience

using AOR or for those who would like a refresher on how to use the database. (Pre-registration required)

## Program Details

### Session 1: Keynote Address, Shelley Sweeney



**Presenter:** Shelley Sweeney is Senior Scholar and Retired Head, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, Winnipeg, where she started in 1998. She was the University Archivist at the University of Regina (1983-1998). She was in the first class of the Master of Archival Studies program

at UBC (1985) and received her Ph.D. in Archival Enterprise from UT Austin (2002). She has taught sessions in the University of Manitoba Masters of Archival Studies program, and sat on a number of thesis defense committees. She was President of the Association of Canadian Archivists, Secretary of the Academy of Certified Archivists, Secretary General of the Bureau of Canadian Archivists, and helped found three archival associations, among other professional work. She spoke about the profession at the ACA conference in Whitehorse in 2012, and has spoken and written widely about the history of the archival profession, archival education, and the possible creation of the information super-professional. Shelley has written journal articles about shortfalls in funding for archives

and academic archivists as agents for change, an encyclopedia article on provenance and a textbook chapter on primary and archival sources, among others. She co-chaired the establishment of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in 2013.

**Title:** Living – and Working – Through Challenging Times

**Abstract:** Archivists are going through particularly challenging times at the moment. How will the gig economy impact the ability of people to find permanent full-time work in the archival field? Will funding cutbacks be temporary or permanent? As archivists, can we look to the past to provide insight on how we as a profession can be resilient? Let us examine what we do best in order to show us the bright promise of an archival future.

### Session 2A: Pandemics in the Archives

**Presenter:** Sara King, Government Records Archivist, Provincial Archives of Alberta

**Title:** Messages in the Margins: Inadvertent stories hidden in the Vital Statistics Records

**Abstract:** For many people, the arrival of COVID-19 has necessitated changes to the way we approach our workplaces and our interactions with the public. While the Provincial Archives of Alberta is once again open and welcoming researchers (by appointment at least), in early 2020, the majority of the Provincial Archives staff found themselves working at home. That meant the hunt was on for projects that could be completed without needing access to the physical worksite. One of these projects happened to be completing a searchable

finding aid for our early Vital Statistics death records. By luck of the draw, I would be working on 1918. And what a year it was.

In this presentation, I'll examine how the review of that year's statistics would reveal more than what a simple government form was meant to capture. They would document the spread of the pandemic from returning soldiers to the general public, how private homes and public buildings were converted into isolation hospitals before the creation of a Government organized public health department, and how officials and ordinary citizens left their own legacy in the official record as they reacted to the disaster unfolding around them. And a few murder mysteries too.

**Presenter:** Jesse Carson, Archives Assistant, Thomas A. Edge Archives & Special Collections at Athabasca University

**Title:** Thomas A. Edge Archives and Special Collections' COVID-19 Memory Archive Project

**Abstract:** In the spring of 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rapid and extensive changes adaptation to it wrought on Athabasca University (AU) and the AU community, the Thomas A. Edge Archives & Special Collections planned and launched our COVID-19 Memory Archive Project. The stated goal of the project was to "create an archive of our individual and shared experiences during the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak."

The project, which was inspired by similar projects launched by other archives across the world, sought to solicit digital submissions of photographs, artwork, recordings, blog and social media posts, poetry and prose, or whatever else people thought would be representative of their experiences in this unprecedented time. We also created a survey asking people about their experiences. We reached out to students, staff, alumni, and residents of the Town and County of Athabasca through social media, email, newsletters, and newspapers to promote the project and invite people to contribute.

I would like to offer a presentation on our experiences planning and executing the project, as well as project outcomes. The project has offered insights into various aspects of archival practice including community engagement, social media outreach, collaboration with other organizations, and archival practice in a post-secondary context. I would also like to share some of the submissions we received, and talk about plans for their short and long-term use as archival resources.

**Presenter:** Kristine Lehew, City of Calgary Archives

**Title:** Archival Pandemics

**Abstract:** This study looks at the records management practices of the City of Calgary during the 1918 Pandemic and how these practices provide important information about the way the city handled the crisis.

A study of the 1918 Pandemic records at the City of Calgary Archives showcases how records management remarks and indicators of original arrangement can be avenues to understanding diverse stories that may otherwise appear silenced in the archives. The ways in which the records were organized and managed by the creating department directly influences the information available. Since archivists can only work with the records that ended up in their collections, these records management decisions should be carefully considered when one studies the 1918 Pandemic. These remarks are particularly important when researchers are looking for diverse stories and perspectives that tell more than just the colonial or settler narratives that archives sometimes provide.

The ways in which records are organized and managed by the department who created the records directly effects the information available. This means that understanding this period is about more than just reading the content of the City's records, but it is also about reading the sometimes overlooked annotations of records professional. Records keeping systems provide insight into the city's operations and the ways organizations valued and disregarded stories of various individuals.

This study also looks at how archivists' can help researchers understand records management along with the historical information they are looking for. This research will lead to discussions of how contemporary records management is shaping covid-19 records.

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## Session 2B: What to Do About RG10? Advancing Archival Decolonization by Addressing Institutional Biases in Governmental Records

**Presenters:** Kenton Story; Greg Bak, University of Manitoba; Carmen Miedema, National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation; Sara Hurford, Library and Archives Canada.

**Abstract:** Everything about RG 10 is problematic; compromised, even. This enormous set of records relating to the Department of Indigenous Affairs bears witness to settler Canada's genocidal attempt to assimilate Indigenous peoples – by violence and coercion, if not by persuasion. In it, one encounters the full range of racist stereotypes in records, both mundane and extraordinary, created through long-term state

sponsored surveillance. Historians and archivists understand how unsettling this content can be.

Nevertheless, RG 10 is core to Indigenous rights activism and research. Archivists at Library and Archives Canada and its predecessors, recognizing this, have long worked to make the records more accessible to Indigenous legal and historical researchers. Selected series of RG 10 were microfilmed and made available at multiple sites across Canada; more recently these microfilmed records and many more have been digitized and made freely available online through

the LAC website and Canadiana.org. Our panel considers the implications of these transformations of RG 10 for the Indigenous people, and their descendants and communities, who are in the records. Our questions include: how should LAC prepare users (conceptually and emotionally) to access RG 10? How might Indigenous communities garner control over records of their communities? What can archivists and historians learn from each other's experiences?

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## Session 3A: Arts and Archives

**Presenter:** Kelly Jaclyn Andres, City of Red Deer

**Title:** The Art of Untold Stories from the City of Red Deer Digital Archives Collection

**Abstract:** In early September 2020, as part of a Development Permit process, an exterior façade improvement in the form of a mural or artwork was required for The City of Red Deer’s new Archives and Record Centre by late October 2020. The initial project theme developed was titled “Women in the Land” featuring twelve photographs (circa 1910-1930) of unnamed women situated in natural environments to be laser engraved on 24” square stainless steel panels. The concept was to introduce the importance of featuring individuals whose stories are often untold, underrepresented or excluded from mainstream settler-colonial portrayals of history. Due to a perceived “political sensitivity” to this theme as not “being inclusive”, the Occupancy Permit was granted with the technical concept of “archive photos on stainless steel panels” but the artistic part of the project was put on hold. The recommendation was to present multiple choices of “themes” while engaging an exterior selection

panel to choose the final content for the artwork. This task created an opportunity for not one but three image-based research and storytelling projects within The City of Red Deer digital archives collection. Additionally, the research for the multiple themes and coinciding images was transformed into an innovative public exhibition-town hall forum (January-February 2021) as well as the public artwork (March 2021). This paper and presentation will share the trajectory of navigating a complex civic environment in terms of curatorial vision, political sensitivity, process, community engagement, and the technical aspects of the project.

**Presenter:** Candace Laycraft

**Title:** Changing Trajectories and Preserving Community Theatre

**Abstract:** At the best of times, community archiving can be challenging. While the need for such work is often great, resources are limited. This reality is compounded by the challenges of preserving born-digital materials. Throw in a global pandemic and community archiving becomes even more difficult.

In the Spring of 2020, that’s exactly the scenario I faced. I was hired by Northern Light Theatre in Edmonton, to create a preservation plan for their digital records, retrieve history that was lost due to a server crash, and eventually deposit these records into an existing collection at the University of Alberta Archives. Designed to celebrate and reflect upon the company’s 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this grant-funded project had already faced one hurdle. The funding received to carry out this work was significantly smaller than was originally hoped for, which had already prompted a drastic project revision.

Change once again became necessary when the pandemic hit and the world shut down the week I was supposed to get started. Suddenly, I was homeschooling and wondering how to move this project forward. What followed was panic, pivoting, adjustments, and eventual success as this work was made possible through technology and community stakeholders. In my presentation, I will be reflecting upon how community archiving changed during these challenging times.

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## Session 3B: Internal Systems

**Presenter:** Anna Gibson Hollow, University of Alberta Archives

**Title:** Welcome to PARIS!

**Abstract:** The University of Alberta Archives is the official repository for the permanently valuable records of the University of Alberta and its affiliated institutions. It has a broad mandate to acquire, preserve and make available university and private records. Like many archival institutions, however, the Archives experiences challenges in fulfilling its mandate including:

- Insufficient resources to properly acquire and preserve institutional memory
- Lack of awareness within the university on mandate and role of archives

- Risk of losing archival records through mismanagement or improper destruction

At the University of Alberta, the Archives is not the only office to be challenged in fulfilling its mandate. The University Records, Information and Privacy, and Information Security offices all struggle to provide services to the university community. With limited resources and a highly decentralized environment, it was clear that changes needed to be made. Enter the world of PARIS.

PARIS, which stands for Privacy, Archives, Records and Information Security, is a collaboration between the offices that provide information management and security services. Launched in 2020 and led by the

University Records Office, PARIS brings together training, product development, and implementation activities under a single harmonized plan. In this presentation, participants will be introduced to the University of Alberta’s PARIS initiative. We will look at the process and reasons leading to its formation, and review some of the challenges faced in this process. We will also look at the benefits that this partnership brings to the offices involved, particularly the University Archives, and to the university as a whole.

**Presenter:** Melissa McCarthy, City of Edmonton Archives

**Title:** A CAAIS Study in Early Adoption

**Abstract:** The City of Edmonton Archives is ahead of the curve in adopting the Canadian Archival Accession Information Standard. Our implementation is well underway — we've switched to a CAAIS-compliant spreadsheet for all new accessions, and we're transitioning legacy data into the new system as well, dating back to the 1960s. Several donation forms, transfer forms, and accession systems have been used over the years, and part of the

impetus for adopting CAAIS has been standardizing these many systems — some of them exclusively paper-based, some a hybrid, none of them entirely RAD-compliant — into one simple, easy-to-use, easy-to-refer-to system.

This change comes for us at a time of many other changes. We're in the process of completing a governance review; we've had some staffing changes in the past few years; the City has largely switched to Google from Microsoft Office — making it easier to work on CAAIS collaboratively and from home; the Archives has switched from Inmagic Presto to AtoM/Archivematica

via ACDPS — one consequence being that our accessions are temporarily not within our archives database; and, like everyone else, we're navigating the choppy waters of COVID and the economic downturn. All of this has led to a rationalization and streamlining of what we do, a move toward more careful adherence to standards, and an openness to new ways of doing things.

The process has been exciting, educational, and full of surprises. This presentation is not a "how-to" but a "how-we," and a look at the joys and challenges of early adoption.

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## Session 4A: Bottoms Up! An experiment in Government Records Description

**Presenters** Michael Gourlie, Sara King, Heather Northcott, Provincial Archives of Alberta

**Abstract:** In 2020 the Provincial Archives of Alberta began a pilot project to shift from our existing TMS database to the AToM platform and this presented an interesting opportunity for the Government Records team to attempt something which hadn't been done for the better part of fifteen years: describe our records. The massive

amounts and regular accruals that typify a Government Records program, combined with recent efforts to clean up past use of Selective Retention, have made trying to figure out what we have on hand in terms of extents, dates, and records creators a baffling ordeal. The top down approach had resulted in a handful of higher-level descriptions with massive extents and little to no series or accession level information attached. Needless to say, this was not particularly helpful for researchers

looking for information (or for the archivists trying to find it). The solution? Flip the problem on its head and start at the bottom.

In this panel, the Government Records Team at the Provincial Archives will discuss the description pilot, focusing on the Department of Agriculture and its successor departments, what we hoped to achieve, how the project went along the way, and probably a little bit about butter sculpting and Dairy Queens.

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## Session 4B: Archives During the Pandemic

**Presenter:** Vino Vipulanantharajah and Jia Jia Yong, Musée Heritage Museum

**Title:** Re-Opening Musée Heritage Museum's Archives

**Abstract:** The Musée Héritage Museum Archives proposes to share the experience of working during the pandemic lockdown and changes since reopening, namely the resiliency of the archives department, increased and different forms of community engagement, and adapting to new ways to showcase work done previously. Our museum closed to the public in March 2020, cutting archival staff hours, and did not come back to normal staff levels until Sept 2020. During this

time, we as an archives department have been resilient in what we have been able to accomplish. As an example, we recognized that reference requests were not going to stop and needed to meet patrons' demands. We also utilized our small but biggest asset, our staff, to tackle different projects. Thus, we would like to share some ways our archives department managed to contribute to our organization much better than other departments that were worse affected. It goes to show the potential for archives to have a more everlasting footprint with people in uncertain times. Our museum also recognized the need for increased community engagement. As a result of lockdowns, we realized this engagement has to mainly come through online methods. This is something we planned to do before, but it was given more priority when we were closed.

This also includes contributions to our museum gallery exhibits and online programming that has continued since reopening. Lastly, the museum recognized that we may not be able to produce new work for the public to view on a consistent basis. However, we had already produced work that needs to be shared more, so we figured out ways to revisit older materials. Specifically, we produced an exhibition about world pandemics in 2019, which we reformatted to an online based exhibit in 2020 and then asked for community involvement to add to our own archival collection. Thus, we were able to find another way for people to continue to contribute to our archives.

**Presenter:** Jillian Staniec, City of Red Deer Archives

**Title:** Unprecedented Times: Moving Your Archives During a Pandemic

**Abstract:** There are few challenges in the archival field more daunting than moving your archives into a new facility, in part because it is done so rarely. Carrying out this move during a pandemic added to the challenge for

the City of Red Deer Archives. The circumstances included merging two storage locations into one, combining our location with the City of Red Deer Records Management section, designing more effective office and researcher spaces, and staff layoffs and reorganization throughout the City. Did we forget to mention following all social distancing protocols? Opportunities and hurdles were discovered including

maintaining reference services, dealing with “found” and water-logged records (who knew we had five cabinets of Engineering drawings, because we sure did not), and ensuring our needs were met as best we could despite not being invited to the design table. We believe that other archives can learn from these experiences because even if you are not moving anytime soon, you never know when unprecedented times will hit.

## Our Sponsors

ASA would like to thank the following sponsors of our conference for making this conference possible:



## Conference Organizers

ASA's Conference Program Committee volunteers include Sara King, Melissa McCarthy, Karly Sawatzky, Bryan Bance and Jennifer Willard. Thank you for all the work you did in preparing the conference program. The ASA Secretariat was also responsible for organizing this conference — Rene Georgopolis, Executive Director and Ericka Chemko, Conference Organizer.

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