



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

ANDREW CHERNEVYCH, PRESIDENT

Year 2020 is likely to be remembered as the Great Disruption. Like many government-funded organizations, the ASA has been caught between a rock and a hard place - the 2019 austerity cuts have been deepened with cuts introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The combined 38% reduction in funding has forced the ASA Board to review the whole budget and organizational model: we have to re-think resource allocation, service delivery, and staffing. And, obviously, some hard decisions had to be made.

Earlier in 2020, with a heavy heart, we had to discontinue the Access to Holdings grant program that had been helping the member institutions open up their records for the public. In May, the staffing took a hit with Administrative Assistant and Financial Coordinator positions discontinued. A 7-hour per week position of Office Coordinator is yet to be filled, with the bulk of administrative duties shifting to the Executive Director herself. This arrangement leaves precious little time for advising, advocacy work and the ongoing programs.

So, where does it leave the ASA and its mission? Will the organization be able to re-invent itself to deliver value to its members on a half a cost? I suppose we have no choice but to do exactly that. And, once again, it becomes the question of top priorities. What do you, the members, need most from your organization? With your feedback and support the ASA should be able to regroup. The new plan might involve more emphasis on volunteering, partnerships and private sponsorship. Let's think it through and design a plan for a sustainable future together.

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FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/ARCHIVES ADVISOR

RENE GEORGOPALIS

I am writing this article from my backyard with my three-year old playing in his sandbox. This global pandemic has been so difficult for so many of us. Some of us are fortunate enough to still have a job, but perhaps like me, there's the addition of doing the work of daycare on top of the usual work. Some of us may be worried about personal finances or having had a loss of income to the household. Some of us may be worried about losing our jobs and not having a job to come back to. There are some government supports but there is still a lot of stress. The future is so uncertain for all of us.



For information on government support, you can visit the federal government programs: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

or provincial government support: <https://www.alberta.ca/covid-19-supports-for-albertans.aspx>.

ASA's education programs for the Spring have all been postponed until there is a safe time to offer them. Additionally, we have postponed our AGM. We are pausing site visits until it is safe to conduct them. We will let our membership know once we are able to reschedule. We are continuing to offer our advisory services over phone, email and if needed by video. Other ASA business continues such as year-end reporting this spring, eventually physically moving into our new office space, producing newsletters and social media content, adding Alberta On Record descriptions, outreach planning, institution reviews, and preparations for the 2021 conference, etc.

I recently had a teleconference with the other Archives Advisors across the country and we discussed the situation in each province and territory and there are many similarities across the country. The meeting was a reminder that we need to stick to our basic archival principles and best practices at this time. I have had members call me to discuss what work they may be able to do from home. I just want to remind you all that we DO NOT bring archival materials home. It is

FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/ARCHIVES ADVISOR (CONT.)

important to remember the concept of integrity as it is our job to ensure the authenticity, reliability and security of archival records. We cannot compromise those elements during this time. Also, I am worried about sites in which there has been a loss of an archivist resulting in nobody being available to monitor the vaults. Perhaps some member sites with staff working from home are unable to check on their vaults. We need to fight to make arrangements to check-in on our vaults regularly in order to ensure the safety of our archives. If your archives is struggling with environmental monitoring, please contact the ASA and we can walk through possible options to maintain proper monitoring of the vaults.

I would like to thank our institutional members who provided us with feedback on how their archives are faring during this time. I hope the report on the state of archives in Alberta in this issue is useful for you. Let's keep in touch during these tough times and please keep ASA updated on changes to your situation throughout the pandemic. Please let us know if there is any way we can support you.

FINDINGS OF ASA SURVEY OF ARCHIVAL INSTITUTIONS AND COVID-19 - APRIL 2020

Background

ASA conducted a survey of its institutional and associate institutional members from April 7 to 16 to assess the situation with archives in our province during the pandemic.

Demographics of ASA Survey

ASA at present has 171 members. The make-up of these members includes 102 individual members, 13 honorary members, 47 accredited archives members and 9 archives that are not accredited. Accredited archives follow best practices in the archival profession. From the 47 archives who are accredited members, 9 are located in Edmonton, 12 in Calgary and 27 are located in smaller cities and rural communities. The archives members in Alberta range from large government funded bodies to small organizations primarily run by volunteers. Most, if not all of our members are funded to some degree by a government body.

Geographical Break-down of Survey respondents:

Edmonton: 6

Calgary: 7

Smaller cities and rural communities: 21

Budget range of Survey respondents:

Less than \$25,000: 12

\$25,00 - 250,000: 11

\$250,001 - 500,000: 4

Over \$500,000: 3

FINDINGS OF ASA SURVEY OF ARCHIVAL INSTITUTIONS AND COVID-19 - APRIL 2020 (CONT.)

Questions and Summary of Responses

Question 1: Have there been any job losses at your archives due to COVID-19?

Question 2: Have you had cutbacks as a result of the pandemic?

Only one of our members experienced a full cancellation of their archivist due to safety as this archivist works in a long-term care facility. One site is accessing the federal program's Emergency Wage Subsidy to fund the continuation of archival work. In total, 6 sites lost some funding, primarily from gift shop sales, admissions and facility rentals. 5 of those sites report that they have experienced part-time workers that have been temporarily laid off or staff whose hours have been scaled back. Another element of loss of workers at our sites is that of volunteers and interns. 8 sites mentioned that their volunteers can no longer come in and these volunteers cannot do work from home as they work with the collections onsite.

4 members mentioned permanent loss of staff from cutbacks due to the 2020-2021 provincial budget which either affected their parent organization or the Archives Society of Alberta and resulted in a loss of work. The survey did not inquire about that information but rather job loss due to COVID-19.

Question 3: What work has your staff been doing since trying to work from home/social distancing?

Nearly all of ASA's members are serving the public with reference services. Other tasks members discussed included processing their backlog in the archives (ie. the process of making archival records available to the public), working on procedures/policies, digitizing, and improving or adding data online. 4 members mentioned they have increased their social media presence during this time. Sites are also working with their parent bodies or communities on capturing the experience of the pandemic. Many sites are using this time to catch up on projects that they were unable to do when in-person reference would interrupt their work. Here is a break-down of archival work during the pandemic:¹

TASK*	# OF SITES
DIGITIZING	7
POLICIES, PROCEDURES	6
BACKLOG AND PROCESSING MATERIALS	12
IMPROVING OR ADDING DATA ONLINE (TRANSCRIPTIONS, DATA CLEAN-UP, INVENTORY IMPROVEMENT/ADDITION TO DATABASES, FINDING AID CLEAN-UP, ETC.)	17
ADMINISTRATIVE WORK	4
CURRICULUM RESEARCH/DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM RESOURCES	3
TRAINING (PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT VIA WEBINARS)	2
RESEARCH FOR ARTICLES, EXHIBIT DEVELOPMENT, ETC.	6
SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS	8
CAPTURING PANDEMIC INFORMATION	7
REFERENCE SERVICES	31

¹ This survey question was open-ended. We did not ask about the status of statistics for member's social media or provide a possible list of current tasks.

FINDINGS OF ASA SURVEY OF ARCHIVAL INSTITUTIONS AND COVID-19 - APRIL 2020 (CONT.)

Question 4: Have reference requests changed over the past three weeks, if so, in what way?

All of the province's archives have closed in-person reference due to COVID-19; however, the majority of our members still deliver reference services through e-mail and telephone. Only one site is no longer offering reference services as a result of the pandemic. 13 archives mentioned a decrease in the volume of reference requests while 12 sites noted that they have the same volume of reference requests with no sites mentioned an increase in reference. 10 archives stated that reference is more difficult to conduct since some records are only available in analog format those archives do not have access to their vaults at this time. Another difficulty occurs as reference is taking archivists longer as the archivist is tasked with doing more research since users are unable to come in person to look at the archival records themselves. This difficulty is noted by some members who have had a decrease in the volume of reference requests and one site feels they are unable to keep up with the reference demand despite a decrease in reference volume. 2 members mentioned that they will have a backlog of research requests once they are able to work at full capacity again. Many archives note that there is a larger demand for digital access to records as they are currently relying on online descriptions, databases and what has already been digitized to answer reference questions.

Question 5: Are you aware of any benefits your archives is giving your community during the COVID-19 situation?

Currently, many of our members are receiving reference requests related to the current pandemic such as responses to past crises, pandemics, epidemics, economic downturn and disasters. These requests are coming from policy-makers at the organizations for which the archives operates including municipalities, post-secondary institutions and Alberta Health Services, as well as, from external researchers including the media and other community members. The information in Alberta's archival holdings are supporting how organizations such as post-secondary institutions and governments respond to the pandemic. For the media and community members, information on the pandemic is eliciting a memory to provide hope during a difficult time (stated by 4 members) and contextualizing the current situation.

Archives are providing the public, who are now at home, with something to do. For instance, some sites are looking at providing educational resources from the archives to parents and kids who are at home. There is currently a trend in new archival users who are contacting archives and stating that they have always wanted to conduct research on a specific topic but never had the time until now as they are stuck at home (4 sites including Alberta's largest archives have mentioned this trend).

The 7 sites that mentioned they are focusing more on social media posts mentioned an increased number of likes/impressions, etc. and have stated that posts featuring archival holdings give their audiences a break from pandemic-related posts. The social media posts, online resource development for curriculum and the ability for people to conduct research is helpful for mental health during the pandemic. One member referred to her archives' posts as a "helpful diversion from coronavirus news." An online presence from

FINDINGS OF ASA SURVEY OF ARCHIVAL INSTITUTIONS AND COVID-19 - APRIL 2020 (CONT.)

archives can have a positive spin on past pandemics as those who research something like the Spanish flu learn that humans have survived a similar situation in the past. Many members believe that just being open and providing reference was a way in which their archives is helping during the pandemic.

One site stated that they are developing remote work for their volunteers who are stuck at home due to the pandemic: “We are providing meaningful projects and social connections for our volunteers (many of whom are seniors and/or live alone) to complete at home.” Continuing to provide these types of projects to volunteers also has the potential to help those people who may be struggling with mental health.

Question 6: How might your archives contribute to recovery after the pandemic?

Archives are working on ensuring both their institutions and communities’ experiences of the pandemic is captured. There have been projects nationally and locally to ensure that archival holdings have evidence of this crisis. Seven archives mention documentation projects but it is the general practice of archivists to always ensure that activities in a society are well documented which is a critical role of archives and other recordkeepers during this time.

One member is working on an exhibit that looks at mental health and the police and how the collaboration between mental health workers and the police has occurred in the past after a pandemic, during what is called an “echo pandemic” in which mental health becomes more prevalent of an issue in society. Understanding past echo pandemics could be useful for recovery post-pandemic.

The majority of ASA’s members are working on improving digital access to their holdings during the pandemic and this work was something that most sites were lacking the capacity in conducting. Now, with no interruptions from walk-in reference requests, members are able to work on projects which focus on making the province’s holdings available to the public. We anticipate that there will be more archival information online because of the pandemic.

The economic downturn will likely continue post-pandemic. Archives have stories from past crises on how humans have responded to economic crises and how they may be overcome. Archives have the potential of placing positive messaging by providing historical perspectives on overcoming crises. Outreach programs showing this historical perspective such as film nights, exhibits, open houses, etc. provide a place for communities to gather.

ASA’s member sites also mentioned that their archives are places for public gathering through exhibits, events, and other roles. The archives could be one of many venues to assist their communities to “getting back to normal.”

PEOPLE AND PLACES

The ASA is sad to announce that Mary Nutting, former Executive Director of South Peace Regional Archives, passed away this April. Her legacy is highlighted in this article: <https://southpeacearchives.org/2020/04/22/in-memory-mary-nutting/?fbclid=IwAR0gBG7ut24XZVa33D-pXWp0Q-fS4jAq7Gu7ovHTrBGGbKvDoBOOt6FMj4A>.

Doug Cass, ASA honorary member, has retired from the Glenbow this March. He has contributed so greatly to our profession. Congratulations on your retirement Doug!

Josephine Sallis has left the South Peace Regional Archives for other endeavours. Good luck Josephine.

The Archives Society of Alberta News is published quarterly by the Archives Society of Alberta. Submissions, questions and suggestions should be directed to the Newsletter Editor c/o: Archives Society of Alberta Prince of Wales Armouries Heritage Centre 114C-10440 108 Ave NW Edmonton AB T5H 3Z9

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Individuals and institutions are encouraged to submit articles, reviews, reports, photographs or letters to the editor to the Archives Society of Alberta News, Issues #1, 2, and 3. Submissions are preferred in electronic format as Word files for textual submissions, or as JPG files for graphic submissions. Please note:

Issue #4 is reserved for Annual Reports of the Society and its committees.

The views expressed in the Archives Society of Alberta Newsletter are not necessarily those of the Archives Society of Alberta or its Editor.



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ARCHIVES SOCIETY OF ALBERTA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 2020 – 2021

Name (Institution or Individual) _____

Address _____

City _____

Province _____

Postal Code _____

Telephone (_____) _____ - _____

Business Phone (_____) _____ - _____

Fax (_____) _____ - _____

E-mail _____

Voting Delegate (Associate) _____

Institutional Affiliation (Individual Members) _____

TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP

Please Check

- Archives Employee \$60.00
- Students, Volunteers, Seniors \$30.00
- Associate Institutional Member \$90.00
- Institutional Member (Please contact the ASA for further information)
- Yes, I would like to volunteer for an ASA Committee

Credit Card No. _____

Expiry _____ Visa MasterCard

Card holder name (please print) _____

Signature _____

Please make cheque or money order payable to the Archives Society of Alberta and mail to:

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Edmonton AB T5H 3Z9