

NOTES FROM THE ARCHIVES

“IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME:” THE PENTECOSTAL ASSEMBLIES OF CANADA ARCHIVES

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Ray Kinsella’s revelation, “If you build it, they will come,” whispered to him one evening in his Iowa cornfield, from the 1989 American fantasy-drama, “Field of Dreams” starring Kevin Costner may be an unlikely motto for an archivist, but it has proven to be an effective one.

The PAOC Archives was founded by Dr. Ronald A. N. Kydd at the request of the denomination in 1976. It began with just three series. Today, the Archives has seven major record classes, nine special collections, 109 fonds and over 450 series. The collection is housed in a purpose-built certified facility which includes a Repository, Reading Room and Processing/Office space. The 850 sq. ft. Repository, equipped with movable shelving has the capacity for over 844 meters (2,770 linear feet) of material. The addition of a final unit in 2016 will increase the shelf space to almost a kilometer. The heroic early efforts of archivists Margaret Rogers, Douglas Rudd and his assistant, Dorothy Raymer at assembling the initial collection were hampered by a lack of awareness of the importance of preserving archival material. In one case a departing General Superintendent decided to “clean out” his files to assist his incumbent. Unfortunately, material documenting his unique roles as the leader of the fellowship and the one who interacted with other denominations and agencies outside the PAOC ended up in the dumpster, instead of the Archives just a few steps down the hall.

In the late 1990’s the PAOC decided to build a new International Headquarters facility. As part of this process, General Superintendent William Morrow approached me and asked if I was interested in becoming the fellowship’s first full-time Archivist. This would involve taking steps to professionalize the operation including designing the archives area of our new building. It seemed a good fit what with my academic background in history and over 27 years of experience in the fellowship so I gladly agreed.

In January of 2000 we moved into our new facilities and I phased

out of my position in missions communications and concentrated on reorganizing and expanding our Archives. Actually the expanding part was quite easy since we acquired 400 large bins of new material on moving day. This material was pre-selected so that nothing of historical value would be discarded as part of the packing process.

By 2003 my assistant and I had made a good start. I received very helpful training through the Archives Association of Ontario as well as excellent advice and assistance from other archivists. I had adapted the



The First “Gospel Light” Boat, 1962

archival principles I learned to our situation as a corporate archive for a movement that literally spanned the globe. We had processed thousands of documents as well as films, video recordings, audio cassettes and photographs. With a grant

from the government of Canada we created RAD-

compliant descriptions of each fonds that included administrative histories or biographical sketches as well as scope and content notes.¹ These are available at <http://www.archeion.ca/repository/browse>.² Then in December of 2003, I was laid off along with 10 others due to financial cutbacks. Marilyn Stroud was hired half time to serve as archivist focusing mainly on answering client inquiries. I was retained one day a month to provide processing assistance and ongoing training. Sadly, in June of 2013 Marilyn passed away so I was re-hired on a part time basis to run the Archives.

¹ RAD stands for the Rules for Archival Description, a detailed set of instructions for writing consistent archival descriptions suitable for online databases.

² Just type “PAOC” in the search bar. The descriptions and scope and content notes were created in 2002 and will be updated presently.

The mandate of the PAOC Archives is quite simple: “To collect, preserve and provide access to materials and records related to the history and activities of the PAOC for the purpose of administrative support and historical research.”³ This means that essentially we exist to collect, care for and make available the raw material of history. One of the most interesting aspects of working as an archivist is what I call conceptual translation. Researchers who have never consulted an archives before are sometimes under the impression that our shelves are full of documents that will provide precise answers to their research questions. They are looking for the right document that will explain why the PAOC decided to organize in 1919 or the reason the General Conference adopted a Code of Ethics for its credential holders in 1984. Archival resources however are simply collections of the materials created by the activities of our organization. They are often incomplete, sometimes puzzling and always carry the unique intentions and biases of their creators. They seldom focus directly on the types of questions researchers bring to them. This is where my role as a conceptual translator enters the picture. As I discuss with the researcher what they are hoping to investigate, I begin to list potential sources that may contain information that will assist them. The translation comes in the conversion of questions into sources that may address the issues under investigation. This involves not only knowledge of the records themselves but also the processes applied by our organization to arrive at decisions and to formalize their acceptance.



The State-of-the-Art Repository

³ PAOC Archives Mission Statement approved by the Executive Officers November 20, 1998.

The flip side of this process takes place as I work with the collection constantly processing new records or those from our backlog and placing them physically into the collection. In this case I am able to observe and identify materials that might serve as resources for various historical projects. In working with researchers I strive to translate questions into the potential sources that are available. In working with the collection, I translate groups of records into potential research projects that have the distinct advantage of significant and suitable archival material already at hand. Nothing is more frustrating for a researcher than to spend weeks crafting a fascinating research proposal only to find that adequate historical documentation is not available. Given that ours is the only Pentecostal archives in Canada, as well as (so I am told by researchers) the largest Evangelical archives in the country, we are in a unique position to assist historians and students who are interested in studying Canadian religious movements using primary sources.

In the second part of this article I would like suggest some possible areas of research based upon interesting groups of records in our collection that could support various academic projects. I have framed these as hypothetical thesis or monograph titles:

***The Amalgamation of the French Conference into the PAOC:
A Study in English/French Relations within a Conservative
Canadian Religious Movement***

The PAOC, with the largest Evangelical work in Quebec, has a fascinating history as to how our work in this province evolved through a series of structural changes over a period of almost a century. The current situation with a full-fledged District of Quebec as of 2000 with jurisdiction over both the French and English churches in the province only evolved after two decades of challenging negotiations with the National Office and the District of Eastern Ontario and Quebec. The Archives has the records of both sides of this conversation as well as the complete minutes of the French Conference. This transition needs to be investigated against the backdrop of the changing political, religious and social evolution of Quebec at the end of the 20th century.

Canadian Pentecostal Preaching

I have left this topic open ended in light of a significant acquisition in 2011 of over 1700 service/sermon audio cassettes/CD/digital files from Portico Community Church (formerly Mississauga Gospel Temple) in Mississauga ranging from 1976 to the present. Several topics come to mind such as evidence of theological evolution vis-à-vis societal changes; changes in rhetorical style compared to changing audience capacities and expectations shaped by other media; doctrinal analysis of the sermons or the worship songs as some tapes include the worship; the impact of parallel religious phenomena such as the rise of the so-called prosperity gospel or the Toronto Airport Revival which took place in the church's backyard or the ways Pentecostal preaching in this church changed over time compared to the church's stated doctrinal and ethical positions.

PAOC Missions and Colonialism: Changing Relations Between PAOC Missionaries and African National Workers and Churches

The Archives has an abundance of detailed material from our extensive work in Africa that illustrates the changes that took place in the ways Canadian missionaries understood and related to their African counterparts against the backdrop of the momentous upheavals on that continent in the last half of the 20th century and the variety of ways non-African workers and agencies adapted to these changes.

As an individual passionate about the importance of history, its role in society, and about the remarkable story of my own spiritual family, I look forward to seeing more quality historical research on the PAOC published. When I began my journey as an archivist, I soon realized that such research would require easy access to adequate source material. I understood that the only way students and scholars would be willing to put in the hard work of researching and writing our history, was if our archives had the necessary raw material they would need. And indeed I

am grateful for the continued commitment of our fellowship that has made it possible to expand and improve the PAOC Archives. The result has been a growing number of students and scholars making use of our collection including undergraduate students for our own PAOC Bible Colleges and Seminaries as well as those working on MA or PhD projects from other institutions. In one case, I began serving a client who did his first archives project as one of my online History of Pentecostalism students. Then he returned a few years later to do his MA thesis and now I am assisting him with his research on this doctoral project. In recent years we have had researchers come from as far away as Africa to spend up to a month going through our collection. We are also pleased to welcome university professors in person or via email inquiries. It turns out the mysterious voice Ray Kinsella heard was right: indeed, “If you build it, they will come.”

Please send all inquiries to: archives@paoc.org. The PAOC Archives is open by appointment only.