

ARCHIVAL EXHIBITIONS: PURPOSES AND PRINCIPLES

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ABSTRACT

Most information on exhibitions found in the museum and library literature is of little use to the archivist faced with preparing an exhibition of archival material. A body of literature exists dealing with the allotment of institutional resources to the exhibition function and with the physical care of archival material on exhibition. However, little has been written about the principles governing an archival exhibition's inspiration and development, principles that need to be identified before addressing the methods and practice of mounting an exhibition. This thesis is a response to that need. Exploratory, rather than descriptive or explanatory, its purpose is to identify the principles governing the creation of archival exhibitions, not the practicalities or mechanics of mounting them. Primary sources for this study are exhibition catalogues and brochures solicited from various Canadian archival institutions as well as the letters from members of the Canadian archival community that accompanied the catalogues and brochures.

The thesis first establishes that the creation of archival exhibitions is subject to fundamental archival theory. Then, it addresses the ideal motivations or purposes behind thematic, celebratory, institutional, and functional exhibitions and demonstrates that they are linked to the mandate of the archival

institution and the nature of the targeted audience. The thesis concludes that archival exhibitions have a responsibility to promote the archival institution and its holdings and to educate people regarding archival functions and services, and that institutional and functional exhibitions are, by definition, best designed to accomplish these objectives.

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INTRODUCTION

Archival exhibitions are very rarely discussed in archival literature. However, they are regularly mounted by practically every type of archival institution. The literature concerning the physical care of archival material on exhibition is relatively abundant, but very little has been written on the principles behind an exhibition's inspiration and development. The basic text in the archival literature is Gail Farr Casterline's Archives and Manuscripts: Exhibits. Written in 1980 as part of the Society of American Archivists' basic manuals series, the work addresses all the major components of the activity of preparing an exhibition in an archival environment: planning and development, conservation, design and technique, program coordination, and administration. However, some parts of this manual need to be re-examined from a theoretical point of view. Planning and development in particular needs to be expanded and clarified in order to assist archivists in the creation of exhibitions.

Other writings exploring the issue of archival exhibitions take the form of short articles or case studies, and tend to focus on conservation issues involving acceptable methods of hanging or mounting material, temperature and relative humidity control, light levels, handling techniques, and specifications for display

cases. They include the very brief 1950 report by a British Records Association subcommittee on exhibitions (which however provides some theoretical principles) and "Exhibition of Manuscripts at the Minnesota Historical Society," published in 1952 by Lucile M. Kane. More recent general articles include "Using Archival Materials Effectively in Museum Exhibitions" (1987) by Nancy Allyn, Shawn Aubitz and Gail F. Stein. The article "Why Exhibit? The Risks Versus the Benefits" (1978) by Sandra Powers is representative of a body of literature which discusses the exhibition of the holdings of a 'manuscript repository', such as the Folger Shakespeare Library or the Library of Congress Manuscript Division. Its focus on single rare manuscripts collections, rather than the holdings of actual archival repositories, is characteristic of the literature on archival exhibitions.

Much more information on exhibitions can be found in the museum and the library literature. Unfortunately, these sources have the disadvantage of focusing on the display of discrete items -- artifacts or books -- and, as such, are of limited use to the archivist, who must be concerned with the relationships that individual items have among themselves and with their context of creation and use, regardless of whether those items are being processed or exhibited. The writers on museum and library exhibitions approach the subject from a perspective unique to their chosen professions. Even when they are dealing with the exhibition of manuscripts, they do not approach its preparation with an archival mind-set.

The museum and library literature on exhibitions has moved beyond the point where it is necessary to discuss philosophy and theory. The archival literature has not. It still needs to produce a work that examines the subject at a fundamental level and gives some theoretical framework to the methodology and practice of exhibiting archival material. In other words, it still needs to qualify and articulate the archivist's objectives and responsibilities in mounting archival exhibitions.

The purpose of this thesis is to provide the parameters for building that framework, by organizing the existing knowledge on the subject of exhibitions and presenting the basic assumptions guiding the undertaking of an exhibition program. Archivists need to explore the reasons why they create exhibitions and think about whether or not they are maintaining the integrity of the records when mounting them. There is a need, if not to establish the principles that should inspire the creation of archival exhibitions, because they consist of the body of theory that should guide every archival endeavour, at least to view any exhibition-related activities in their context. This thesis therefore will examine theoretical concerns in relation to the purposes of exhibitions, not the mechanics of them. It does not attempt to develop innovative ideas to entice people into an exhibition or hold their interest, nor is it interested in methods for enhancing exhibition effectiveness. It deals with the "why" of exhibiting rather than the principles of design or the practicalities of installation. Of an exploratory, rather than descriptive or explanatory, nature, its purpose is to identify

those archival principles that need to be most remembered when creating exhibitions.

As is the case in any endeavour, it is easier to do something effectively if people understand why they are doing it before they decide how to do it. John Veach Noble, commenting on the situation in the museum world, argues that "[a]ll too often, director, curator, and exhibit designer start with the implementation, or methodology, without clearly understanding the objective."¹ In other words, exhibition creators have to examine their reasons for mounting exhibitions before they concern themselves with how to mount them. Leigh Hayford Coen and A. Gilbert Wright state that exhibiting is a complex endeavour and note that

[g]ood exhibits are thoughtfully designed environments that maximize the communicative effectiveness of the objects displayed. They involve more than just objects, principles, labels, and artwork. They are a special communication medium that demands a comprehensive approach, integrating the philosophy and techniques of diverse fields.²

Exhibiting in an archival environment is equally complex, and if the theoretical foundation is weak, so is the practical result.

Approaching the issue from a theoretical perspective is even more important when one considers the fact that exhibiting is not a core function of archives. An archives may have the most

¹ John Veach Noble, "Museum Thinking," Curator 27 (September 1984): 194.

² Leigh Hayford Coen and A. Gilbert Wright, "The Interpretive Function in Museum Work," Curator 18 (December 1975): 282.

impressive exhibition program, but if such program exists at the expense of solid appraisal and acquisition policies and effective arrangement, description and public service functions, it is meaningless.³

In articulating the archival principles that bear directly on exhibition activities, this thesis addresses a number of issues related to their application, such as the preservation of the relationships between documents when archival material is placed on exhibition. It also discusses the motivations or purposes behind each type of exhibition and relates them to the mandate of the archival institution and the nature of the audience targeted for the exhibition. Furthermore, it identifies those interests that the various types of exhibitions should be promoting, and how they should be approached.

The thesis is comprised of five chapters, the first of which articulates the basic principles guiding the creation of exhibitions. This first chapter begins with a clarification of terminology, noting the differences between the terms display, exhibit, and exhibition, as they are used in the library, museum and archival environments. It then examines the role of exhibitions and the motivations behind mounting them in libraries and museums to determine whether they are being used for promotional or educational purposes; the archivist's motivations for mounting exhibitions, exploring the way in which the approach to exhibition is shaped by the mandate of the archival institution

³ Anthony L. Rees, letter to this author, 12 December 1990, 2-3.

and the nature of the targeted audience; the effects that the nature of library, museum and archival material has on the way in which such material is exhibited; and the limitations that archival theory places on the exhibition of archival material.

Each subsequent chapter deals with a particular type of exhibition. Examination of numerous exhibition catalogues, brochures, schedules, as well as available literature, revealed the existence of four basic types: thematic, celebratory, institutional and functional. This is in contrast with the conclusions of the most prominent writers on the subject. James Gregory Bradsher and Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, for example, identified two basic types, thematic and institutional.⁴ Casterline, on the other hand, categorized exhibitions as either promotional or educational, the first looking at the archives as a subject, the second interpreting a subject using archival holdings.⁵ However, this writer will demonstrate that there are different functions within each type of exhibition identified by these authors, and that a categorization in four types is more appropriate.

Each chapter defines a particular type of exhibition, examines its function, explores the way in which most writers perceive each particular type of exhibition, and clarifies how this thesis interprets them. While this classification is made largely for

⁴ James Gregory Bradsher and Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, "Archival Exhibits," in Managing Archives and Archival Institutions (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), 230.

⁵ Gail Farr Casterline, Archives and Manuscripts: Exhibits (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1980), 11.

the purpose of discussion, it also serves to focus attention on the purposes behind an exhibition project. Exhibitions naturally serve a number of different objectives, but in mounting an exhibition, the creator needs to identify the primary purpose in undertaking the project, and build the exhibition around that purpose. The resulting product may have elements of more than one type: an institutional exhibition, for example, on a secondary level, may celebrate a particular anniversary. For classification purposes, however, it remains an institutional exhibition.

Conclusions are drawn not only from an analysis of museum, library and archival literature on the subject, but also from an examination of exhibition catalogues and brochures representing various exhibitions that have been solicited from various Canadian archives, including government (at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels), church, university, corporate, and cultural institutions. In addition to providing these catalogues, many archivists took the time to write about their personal feelings on the subject. If they had no catalogues or brochures to offer, they still volunteered their opinions. The exploration of these sources is not conducted in a scientific manner. Instead, these sources are used as a means of providing basic information about the types of exhibitions currently being created in archival institutions. The final chapter summarizes the principles that should guide the preparation of any archival exhibition.

CHAPTER ONE

ARCHIVAL EXHIBITIONS: FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS

Contrary to what some archival exhibitions seem to suggest, archival material does not cease to be archival material when it is to be placed on exhibition. Regardless of whether it is located in a storage box or a display case, its treatment remains subject to the rules dictated by archival theory. In order to respect the nature of archival material, the exhibition itself must be viewed as an undertaking subject to archival theory as well. In order to demonstrate the importance of this relationship between archival principles and archival exhibitions, a number of general issues relating to all types of exhibitions of archival material must be outlined, what the archival community means by exhibition needs to be clarified, and the motivations and objectives behind the creation of such projects are to be examined. Also, these motivations and objectives need to be linked to the process of targeting an audience, and the investigation extended to the role played by context in the selection and use of the material to be exhibited.

In order to develop some perspective on the subject, it is necessary to examine the two institutions closest to archives -- libraries and museums -- which are involved in mounting

exhibitions. The way in which these institutions approach their exhibition subjects and the results they expect to achieve are relevant to their adaptation and application to the exhibition of archival material. Archivists may learn much from both libraries and museums; however, they must remember to respect the nature of the material with which they deal, and recognize that fundamental theoretical differences exist between the material exhibited by libraries and museums and that exhibited by archives.

While archival principles have a hand in governing the creation and development of archival exhibition projects, the common thread running through all definitions of exhibition itself reflects the idea that every exhibition project contains some degree of educational substance. No matter the motivation behind their mounting, all exhibitions strive to inform the viewers of something they previously did not know. In some circumstances, that educational objective may give way to a more commercial desire to increase sales or to the need to serve some political end. The desire simply to entertain may act as another primary motive, as may the need to boast of an exhibitor's accomplishments or the need to achieve some sort of publicity. Regardless of motive, however, any exhibition involves the communication of a message and invites viewers to become aware of something new, be it a product, an event, or an idea.⁶

The archival exhibition may contain a number of motives in combination, but its primary purpose remains an educational one.

⁶ R.S. Miles, et al., The Design of Educational Exhibits (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 12.

In examining these motives, the focus of the archivist's attention becomes the literature associated with the creation of exhibitions not only in archives but in other non-profit or cultural institutions as well. Even a preliminary survey of this literature, however, reveals the lack of agreement among librarians, museum curators and archivists over the use of basic terminology. Further examination reveals that the differences exist not only between the professions, but within each of them as well.

In order to ensure that each term conjures up a particular image, and that the differences between the terms are understood clearly, it is necessary to clarify the differences between three fundamental terms, namely display, exhibit and exhibition. Unfortunately, archivists have had little to contribute in the creation of working definitions of these terms. One archival source claims that documents laid out to be shown to a visiting group and discussed by the archivist constitute a display. A display becomes an exhibition when the arrangement of the documents, unaccompanied by live commentary, tells the intended story. In this case, the archivist is conspicuously absent from the final product.⁷ Little else has been said in the archival literature regarding any distinction between the terms. If we are to look at other cultural institutions for guidance, then, we first must examine the way in which these institutions approach what the archival profession regards as exhibition, and ensure

⁷ British Records Association, "The Place of Exhibitions in the Use of Archives," Archives 10 (April 1972): 107.

that everyone is talking about the same thing.

The library literature occasionally distinguishes a display from an exhibit, but rarely recognizes the more subtle differences between an exhibit and an exhibition. One authority argues that in theory the terms display and exhibit are virtually interchangeable, but acknowledges that in practice the scope of the exhibit proves broader than that of the display. In spite of this difference in scope, though, both terms refer to some arrangement of material which makes particular objects the centre of attention. It is stressed, however, that in both cases the objects are united by the presence of a connective idea, that is, that "there has to be some theme or message behind the organization of materials."⁸ A simple collection of unrelated items fails to constitute either a display or an exhibit. Another source, focusing on a different set of criteria, admits that

some librarians distinguish between a display and an exhibit (although the dictionary does not make much of the difference). These librarians mean by a display those books which are invitingly laid before the reader in some conspicuous way, and which may be borrowed immediately, whereas by an exhibit they mean books carefully arranged for a definite time and not intended to be disturbed. Non-book material is usually included. The exhibit remains intact to tell its story, to fix its message, for two or three weeks.⁹

Thus, the difference between display and exhibit is not a highly intellectual one, demonstrating the lack of real distinction among

⁸ Mona Garvey, Library Displays: Their Purpose, Construction and Use (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1969), 23. Garvey also writes on library public relations.

⁹ Stephanie Borgwardt, Library Display (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1960), 30.

librarians between the two terms. Most sources, however, continue to speak of library display rather than exhibit.

While library literature thus pays little attention to the differences between the terms, museum literature proves more observant of the various subtleties of meaning. According to a basic source on museum management, for example, a display involves "the showing of objects, depending on the interest of the viewer in the objects themselves."¹⁰ The exhibit, on the other hand, refers to a project "of a more serious, important, and professional connotation than 'display.' It is the presentation of ideas with the intent of educating the viewer. . . . As such, it might be an identifiable part of an exhibition." The source defines the term exhibition as

an assemblage of objects of artistic, historical, scientific, or technological nature, through which visitors move from unit to unit in a sequence designed to be meaningful instructionally and/or aesthetically. Accompanying labels and/or graphics (drawings, diagrams, etc.) are planned to interpret, explain, and to direct the viewer's attention. Usually, an exhibition covers a goodly amount of floor space, consists of several separate exhibits or large objects, and deals with a broad, rather than a narrow, subject.¹¹

Another authority considers display to be "[a] general term which can refer to an individual exhibit, groups of exhibits or an entire exhibition." The term exhibition, on the other hand, is said to refer to a "series of displays dealing with a particular theme [and] . . . in North America . . . is the collective term

¹⁰ G. Ellis Burcaw, Introduction to Museum Work (Nashville, Tennessee.: A.A.S.L.H., 1975), 5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

for the totality of items displayed in a particular institution." An exhibit is "[a] single unit within an exhibition [such as] a display case or an audio-visual", but in North America the term tends to be used interchangeably with exhibition.¹² Additionally, it has been argued that

[t]o describe something as an exhibition is to raise the expectation that it will in some way move or touch us, emotionally. If we fail to find ourselves moved or touched by something that has been described to us as an exhibition, there is a corresponding tendency for us to feel 'let down'.¹³

Thus, in a museum context, exhibition carries with it more substance than the term display. It suggests the existence of a theme, of the development of an idea. Unlike a display, it gives the viewer the sense that an entire story has been told. Given that exhibition is the most easily recognized function of museums and is merely a secondary function in libraries, the museum professional's attention to the distinction between the terms may be expected. Because they are less concerned with the activity of exhibiting, library professionals simply are less concerned with precision in their related vocabulary.

The essential point, then, lies not in the difference between exhibit and exhibition, but in the difference between exhibition and display. Librarians, particularly in smaller institutions, tend to speak of displays (even though they may refer to exhibitions), while museum curators speak of exhibits or

¹² Miles et al., 186.

¹³ Ibid., 2.

exhibitions. This thesis recognizes the distinction identified in the museum literature between display and exhibition. In keeping with its North American perspective, however, it also recognizes the fact that exhibit has much the same connotation as exhibition. For reasons of consistency, then, the term exhibition is used instead of exhibit, except in those direct quotations which contain the latter term. It now is necessary to examine the differences and similarities in the way in which the three professions justify mounting such projects and the way in which they approach them.

In libraries, the creation of exhibitions -- or more appropriately, in the case of most, displays -- serves a variety of purposes. Indeed, librarians cite numerous reasons for undertaking the process of creation of an exhibition, and place few boundaries on the way in which their objectives are achieved. Library displays or exhibitions serve to publicize the library's collection and services, encourage maximum circulation of each book, and promote either particular material or reading in general. They also direct scholars and students to further readings, elevate reading standards, and illustrate relationships between multi-themed books separated by call number. They can be used to demonstrate that books relate to all aspects of life, to encourage public goodwill, or to publicize the library's interest in community activities. Additionally, they may express abstract ideas or simply provide colour and variety in the library. They also play a more direct educational role, in the sense that they impart information on any number of topics ranging from local

history to the use of the library itself.¹⁴

The primary motivation behind the use of display or exhibition, however, stems from the desire to increase the circulation of library material. This need for increased circulation is related directly to the primary function of libraries. Such institutions exist to make library material available to the public. The library pays for the books.¹⁵ If the books fail to circulate, the library essentially loses the money and time spent on acquiring and processing them.¹⁶ By exhibiting them, the library informs the public of what it has to offer.¹⁷ Considered in this light, display is very much a marketing tool. It is, like exhibition in its most commercial sense, a visual show of merchandise which allows the people to know what the exhibitor, in this case the library, has on hand.¹⁸

From this perspective, the library exhibition or display is part of library promotion, along with advertising, publicity and personal selling.¹⁹ It is, however, only one of the forms of visual promotion used by libraries. Other forms serve different

¹⁴ Borgwardt, 10-19.

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶ Kate Coplan, Effective Library Exhibits: How to Prepare and Promote Good Displays, 2d ed. (Dobbs Ferry, New York: Oceana Publications, Inc., 1974), 1.

¹⁷ Nancy Everhart, et al., Library Displays (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1989), vii.

¹⁸ Rita Kohn, Experiencing Displays (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1982), 161. Kohn also writes on library publicity.

¹⁹ Ibid.

functions: signs advertise, direct or warn; posters, like signs, offer brief information about a subject, but do so through a pictorial design; and bulletin boards, in the classic sense, carry notices and announcements, except when used as a support medium for a display.²⁰ All these forms of promotion work together to create a complete and functional publicity package which promotes the holdings and "advertise[s] the richness and diversity of the library's resources."²¹

Among museum professionals, the attitude towards exhibition bears some similarity to that found among librarians, but also involves some very important differences. These differences stem from the dissimilarity in the basic functions of the two institutions. In 1895 George Brown Goode defined the museum as "an institution for the preservation of those objects which best illustrate the phenomena of nature, the works of man, and the utilization of these for the increase of knowledge and for the culture and enlightenment of the people."²² Exhibition of the museum's objects serves as the fundamental way in which this enlightenment is brought about. Museum exhibitions "have several purposes: they entertain, satisfy curiosity, inspire and stimulate interest, sensitize and improve perception, educate, and socialize."²³ Furthermore, exhibitions "can introduce a subject,

²⁰ Garvey, 17-19.

²¹ Borgwardt, 27.

²² George MacBeath and S. James Gooding, eds., Basic Museum Management (Ottawa: Canadian Museums Association, 1969), 10.

²³ Coen and Wright, 282.

simplify a complex subject, give a detailed description of a subject, or provide a tool for museum and/or outside instructors to use in teaching."²⁴ They also aim at presenting an accurate story while keeping in mind aesthetic appeal and the audience served.²⁵

While museum exhibitions also may be mounted for less noble reasons, including filling space or pleasing individual donors, their most worthwhile justification is to educate the visitor.²⁶ Indeed, the ultimate aim of museum exhibition has been said to be "to stimulate such an interest in the subject that the viewer wishes to learn more about it in his spare time."²⁷ In accomplishing such a goal, the museum seeks "not to impart just facts, but also broad overviews, concepts, stimulation of interests and values, new ways of thinking about the world. Museums are vast educational resources with the potential to serve as significant alternative environments for self-education."²⁸ The exhibition proves to be an ideal means through which museums may fulfil their educational potential. Because it is a visual means, it is able to convey

²⁴ Eugene Bergman, "Exhibits: A Proposal for Guidelines," Curator 19 (June 1976): 152.

²⁵ MacBeath and Gooding, 63.

²⁶ Burcaw, 119.

²⁷ Arminta Neal, Help! for the Small Museum: A Handbook of Exhibit Ideas and Methods (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Press, 1969), 11.

²⁸ C.G. Screven, "Exhibit Evaluation - A Goal-Referenced Approach," Curator 19 (December 1976): 271.

to the majority of adults and children a greater number of facts in less time than if these were expressed by words, written or spoken. The visual and tactile qualities of specimens, their 'reality', make an emotional appeal to people which seems to increase their sensitivity and capacity to assimilate information of considerable complexity and subtlety.²⁹

To further stimulate interest, museums have begun to focus on visitor participation, based on the idea that, by taking an active part in the exhibition, the viewer will learn more from it.³⁰ The approach is noticeably different from that used in library display, where the primary goal is a sales-oriented one, involving the increase of circulation and the encouragement of people to use the library 'product' -- the book -- or the services it provides.

While exhibition plays a major role in the operation of museums, it serves as only one of the basic functions of the institution, coexisting with the roles of collection, preservation, and research. Some sources combine these four functions operating in the modern museum into three, others into two. The first, preservation, assumes that collection has been accomplished; the second, interpretation of the preserved objects, is carried out through research and display. Display, in turn, develops out of possession of and research on an object.³¹ Exhibition thus is actually the end result of the functions carried out before it. As Louis Lemieux stated in the early

²⁹ Alma S. Wittlin, The Museum: Its History and its Tasks in Education (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1949), 188.

³⁰ MacBeath and Gooding, 70.

³¹ Edwin H. Colbert, "What is a Museum?" Curator 4 (1961): 139.

1980s,

[o]nce collections have been assembled, and their importance and significance have been highlighted through a well managed research program, museums still have to accomplish their third main function: they have to disseminate the knowledge illustrated and represented in their collections.³²

To this end, the exhibition must be regarded as one part of an entire program of outreach which involves lectures, educational programs and museum publications such as guides, catalogues and brochures.³³ The costs in time and resources associated with outreach is great, "[b]ut for the museum, its exhibit program is critical, for it is the museum's direct link to the public in its educational function."³⁴ The commitment to education through exhibition remains a primary function of museums. Indeed, the Canadian Museums Association has said that exhibition space occupies 30-40% of the available museum building space.³⁵ Archives and libraries allow only a small portion of space for such projects, given that imparting knowledge through exhibition is not one of either institution's fundamental responsibilities.

Like their library and museum counterparts, archival exhibitions serve "to interest, inform, stimulate, entertain, and educate viewers." They have a role to play in making the public aware and appreciative of archival institutions, they encourage

³² Louis Lemieux, "The Functions of Museums," Gazette (Winter - Spring 1981): 7.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Bergman, 156.

³⁵ MacBeath and Gooding, 19.

the use of archives, and popularize holdings. They also educate people regarding archival functions and services, encourage donations, increase acquisitions, and foster research.³⁶ Thus, the motivation for creating archival exhibitions bears similarities to the educational goals of museums and the promotional goals of libraries. The scale on which exhibition programs are undertaken by archives, however, is much closer to that of libraries, where exhibitions play a considerably smaller role in the operation of the institution. In 1949, a subcommittee of the Council of the British Records Association, in ruling on the advisability of exhibiting material, stated that

[i]t has been found by experience that the best means of arousing local interest in the preservation of records, and of demonstrating their educational value, is by holding displays of documents, maps, views, etc., of an essentially local nature. The advantages thus gained make it desirable to relax, to a small degree, the strict security conditions which have to be imposed by National repositories. If documents deposited by private owners are to remain buried in the vaults of a local Repository, they might almost have been left with the owners.³⁷

The argument, often cited in the archival literature,³⁸ is not unlike the "increased sales" argument voiced by librarians. Indeed, there is little point in housing archival material if its potential users are not made aware of its location, or even of its existence. If the material is not used, it is not worth the time

³⁶ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 228.

³⁷ British Records Association, "Exhibition of Documents: Report of a Sub-Committee Appointed by the Council of the British Records Association," Archives 1 (Fall 1950): 42.

³⁸ See, for example, Casterline, 7.

and resources spent on its acquisition and processing. Therefore exhibition, along with other forms of outreach, provides a means of advertising the archives' wares.

Since exhibition is not a primary function of archival institutions, however, archivists may give little serious thought to their motivations for undertaking exhibition projects. In 1971, for example, at the British Records Association's annual conference, an archivist reported that

[m]any exhibitions were mounted for essentially superficial reasons: 'we've had no exhibition for some time', a particular centenary, a meeting of such-and-such a body. There was an underlying feeling of guilt: 'we owe it to the public' or 'we've just bought a lot of documents so must put them on display'.³⁹

Given the amount of time and resources required to mount an exhibition, however, it is necessary to base one's motivations for undertaking the project on more than a feeling of guilt. Casterline believes that

[n]ot only do exhibits of archival material show what a repository collects, preserves, and makes available to users, but they have the potential to educate, communicate, and serve a variety of other functions. They can encourage people to study the past and to save and donate items of historical interest; teach them something about the nature of archival and historical work; inform them of new acquisitions; tell an interesting story; commemorate an important event; and make a major contribution to scholarship. Among the benefits are a greater and more imaginative use of archival materials by a wider clientele and the reinforcement of a favorable public image that reflects the archivist's interest and involvement in the larger community.⁴⁰

³⁹ British Records Association, 1972, 107.

⁴⁰ Casterline, 8.

Albert Leisinger argues that carefully planned exhibitions "can play an important role in making our institutions centers of popular education. They can draw a community closer to us, they can interest scholars in our holdings, and they can also lay the groundwork for needed support of our other programs."⁴¹ He also sees archival exhibitions as a means by which "the word archives does become for [the uninitiated] not just a word buried in Webster's dictionary but a part of their active vocabulary."⁴² Bradsher and Ritzenthaler argue that "[v]iewers should leave an exhibit with a better understanding of the subject treated and with a greater appreciation of archives and the archival institution."⁴³ Andrew Birrell believes that exhibitions satisfy the archivist's "obligation to make available to the public the results of the research [archivists] carry out".⁴⁴ He also notes that exhibitions have the potential to increase funding and acquisitions.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, some exhibitors become caught up in attempts to make exhibitions aesthetically pleasing. While this certainly is an important consideration, an archival exhibition has primarily an instructional and informative purpose: there is

⁴¹ Albert H. Leisinger, Jr., "The Exhibit of Documents," American Archivist 26 (January 1963): 77.

⁴² Ibid., 75.

⁴³ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 240.

⁴⁴ Andrew Birrell, "From Acquisition to Exhibition," in "Private Realms of Light: Canadian Amateur Photography, 1939-1940," Archivaria 17 (Winter 1983-84): 113.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 106-07.

always a point to be made. As recently noted in The American Archivist,

[t]he fundamental mission of any exhibition is to make the institution's holdings accessible and available to the public. Historians, curators, and archivists have an obligation to educate a broad spectrum of constituents, from the scholar to the curious, from school children to adults. One important way of fulfilling this obligation is to help all individuals better understand their cultural heritage through exhibitions, which can provide a visual counterpart to, and relief from, textbooks, scholarly publications, and other writings.⁴⁶

Archival exhibitions, like their museum counterparts, are a form of communication serving an educational purpose. Archivists may learn an important lesson from the world of museum exhibition design, which suggests that the exhibition designer works simultaneously from the gallery downwards and from the message upwards.⁴⁷ The purpose of exhibition merely is not to fill space in the display case, but to present some message to the viewer. That purpose and the message the exhibition creator is trying to convey, properly understood, articulated, and remembered, serves as the basis for the creation of the exhibition.

Exhibitions play a major role in archival outreach programs. Indeed, Bradsher and Ritzenthaler note that "[p]erhaps no other aspect of public programs reaches so many people or touches them in such a manner that graphically illustrates the goals and contributions of archival institutions in preserving historical

⁴⁶ Nancy Allyn, Shawn Aubitz and Gail F. Stein, "Using Archival Materials Effectively in Museum Exhibitions," American Archivist 50 (Summer 1987): 402-3.

⁴⁷ Miles, et al., 8.

records."⁴⁸ Casterline sees them as "the focal point of a variety of programs that stimulate interest in a subject and expand awareness of the institution and its collections."⁴⁹ They are not an end in themselves, but rather one of a number of methods geared towards interesting people in archives and drawing them into the archival institution.

The objectives cited in the library, museum, and archival literature, however, reflect general motives, each of which may serve as the impetus for the creation of an exhibition. Some of these goals are idealistic in nature and promote high purposes, such as education or enlightenment; others are more practical and deal with generating funds or encouraging future acquisitions. Many of them, however, suit particular types of exhibitions, each of which, if the argument is to be brought full circle, serves a particular purpose. Mounted for different reasons, these types of exhibitions naturally possess different functions, and thus must be discussed separately. Some objectives are served by more than one type of exhibition, but to some degree each objective may suit one type of exhibition slightly better than another. Consequently, it can be said that thematic exhibitions serve to document a particular subject; celebratory exhibitions commemorate a particular event or anniversary; institutional exhibitions promote the individual archives and its holdings; and functional exhibitions educate visitors about archival functions and responsibilities.

⁴⁸ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 228.

⁴⁹ Casterline, 47.

Regardless of the roles the various types of exhibitions play, however, there are boundaries that have to be respected. As libraries create exhibitions which promote their own collections, and museums create exhibitions in line with their own collection policies, archival institutions create exhibitions which support their individual mandates. Indeed, Bradsher and Ritzenthaler note that "[a]ll exhibits, no matter their size, should contribute to the stated mission of the archives."⁵⁰ The point is an obvious one, but it embeds a fundamental principle that needs to be articulated and enforced. John Veach Noble, although writing for museums, states that "[c]ountless institutions contain galleries set aside for exhibits and artifacts that have nothing to do with the main purpose of the museum. Their non-verbal messages distract the visitors and greatly weaken the institution."⁵¹ Similarly, archivists must focus on the main purpose of their archives, and, as they acquire material according to that purpose, so must they exhibit.

Once the exhibition project has proceeded as far as the design stage, the amount of thought invested in qualifying the objectives of the exhibition plays an important role. At this stage, design principles such as balance and harmony, design elements such as colour, line, shape, and texture, and such practicalities as the creation of written copy, come into play.⁵² Often the vision of

⁵⁰ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 229.

⁵¹ Noble, 195.

⁵² Many sources, including Kohn and Garvey as well as Alan Heath, Off the Wall: The Art of Book Display (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1987), discuss the

the designer is at odds with that of the creator of the exhibition. One exhibition designer, though, notes that "[m]uch of the conflict [between originator, designer, copy editor; all those personnel involved in creating the exhibition] can be avoided by clearly defining from the start all aspects of the audience, objectives, and content."⁵³ Thus, the importance of defining at the outset the purpose of the exhibition is linked to the identification of a targeted audience. This designer stresses the point, writing that "[t]he objective of any exhibit . . . should be defined in advance, taking the expected audience into consideration."⁵⁴ Another author adds that carefully defining the audience "would cut through much of the ambiguity, and even mystique, that surrounds the exhibit field."⁵⁵ Indeed, identifying the audience often serves to clarify the objectives of the exhibition. According to Bradsher and Ritzenthaler,

[t]he time devoted to determining the profile of the target audience is well spent, for this information can be used to develop exhibit goals and parameters. Such guidelines help to provide a sense of what exhibits can accomplish and the types of presentations that are most suitable.⁵⁶

Each exhibition serves a particular targeted audience, the

elements, principles, and practicalities of design, concepts beyond the boundaries of this thesis.

⁵³ Bergman, 153.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁵ Harris H. Shettel, "Exhibits: Art Form or Educational Medium?" Museum News 52 (September 1973): 35.

⁵⁶ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 229.

character and needs of which continually must be kept in mind.
The library world acknowledges

that the display should be suitable for the audience for whom it is intended. Exhibits intended for school children, for university students, for the general public, will require different methods of treatment, and the subjects will be different. The wording of captions, the choice of material, the place of the exhibit, and the length of duration will all depend on the kind of people who are to see the exhibit.⁵⁷

The type of exhibition mounted as well as its final appearance, indeed everything about it from the original idea to its design details, hinges on the nature of the targeted audience. This holds true for archives as well. The types of exhibitions defined for the purposes of this thesis are distinguished from one another, in part, on the basis of the different audiences they serve.

In defining the archival exhibition's audience it is necessary to identify the types of users the archival institution serves and the types of users it wishes to attract. The community from which this audience comes usually is not homogeneous. It consists of individuals of different sex, religion, intelligence, educational level, social class, temperament, political view, and mental state, all of whom have various interests and expectations which the exhibition has to recognize and meet.⁵⁸ The target audience may be "the parent institution, the local community, scholars,

⁵⁷ Borgwardt, 27.

⁵⁸ Burcaw, 119-20, Screven, 277, and Kenneth M. Wilson, "A Philosophy of Museum Exhibition." Museum News (October 1967): 15.

tourists, genealogists, and[/or] students."⁵⁹ Elsie Freeman Freivogel, writing on archival outreach, reminds us that, as archivists,

we have many publics, ranging from institutionally connected researchers to general users, and across a spectrum that includes, among others, teachers at all levels of the educational system; elementary, secondary school, college and university students; genealogists, avocational historians, government employees, publicists, media professionals, and the merely curious.

Like the type of exhibition mounted, the target audience must be identified according to the mandate of the institution concerned.⁶⁰ It has been noted, for example, that "[a] national or state archives may be required to develop exhibits with broad general appeal, whereas a university archives may identify a much narrower audience of scholars and students."⁶¹ The audience for the exhibition thus reflects the types of users the archives undertakes to serve as its mission.

In presenting an exhibition to its targeted audience, it is necessary to bear in mind the nature of the material that archives exhibit, and, by association, some of the fundamental concepts of archival theory. The items of an archives are interrelated; indeed, their definition as archival material depends on the existence of their relationships with one another. Approaching material at the fonds level, rather than at the level of

⁵⁹ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 229.

⁶⁰ Elsie Freeman Freivogel, "Education Programs: Outreach as an Administrative Function," American Archivist 41 (April 1978): 148.

⁶¹ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 229.

individual item, archivists are interested in, and indeed committed to preserving these relationships between documents. Exhibitions of archival material, therefore, must respect that material's documentary context, its natural arrangement. If archival material is used in an exhibition in a manner that destroys the unique bonds that link archival items to one another, that is, if the original order of the material is disturbed, the context in which the material was created is lost.⁶²

No such limitations affect library material, and thus, librarians as exhibitors are able to arrange the material any way they choose. One approach involves the creation of a thematic display in which all the books used have a common theme. Additional material used in the display would support that theme. Another approach involves the use of non-book material (defined as anything from shopping bags to potted plants) that is brought together in support of an appropriate slogan with books of any given type.⁶³ Some library displays do not make use of the actual books at all, librarians arguing that if they did, the books would not be available for circulation, and, as a result, the whole purpose of the exercise, namely to increase the book's circulation, would be defeated. Other authorities on library exhibition argue "that the time spent on library displays is not

⁶² Original order and respect des fonds, of course, apply when arranging and describing material, not when exhibiting it. What applies here is the fact that archival documents are made up of documents and of their many administrative and documentary interrelationships, and if these are not presented adequately, the items presented are incomplete.

⁶³ Everhart, et al., vii-viii.

justified unless the books themselves are the focus of attention. They must not be overshadowed by objects or artistic effects."⁶⁴ In spite of the approach taken, library displays or exhibitions remain directed at promoting items in isolation. They are arranged around pre-chosen themes such as specific holidays, particular treasures in the library's collection (such as first editions), or a certain genre (such as mystery novels), and are aimed at increasing the circulation of material related to the subject. It does not matter how the exhibition material is arranged, because one item does not bear any organic relationship to any other. The relationships between the materials exist as the result of chance or choice, not of nature.

Museums, on the other hand, "are concerned with typical, common, quantity-produced, and natural objects that are valued not in themselves but as examples of the natural world and of human cultures."⁶⁵ Of course, they may house unique material (in terms of treasures), but even rare objects often were once one of many. The collection and organization of this material into a meaningful story is the focus of the museum.⁶⁶ The collection itself then reflects the field of interest (or purpose) of the museum. Indeed, according to one author,

[w]hile private collectors may indulge their fancies by

⁶⁴ Borgwardt, 16.

⁶⁵ Burcaw, 31. Art museums prove to be the exception to the rule, concerned as they are with the "unique, highly unusual productions of gifted human beings . . . [i]f the creation by the artist results in a durable, material object" (Burcaw, 31).

⁶⁶ Neal, 8.

collecting miscellaneous assemblages of things that appeal to them, the hodgepodge museum went out of style at the end of the nineteenth century. Today's museum must have a clearly stated objective. The museum, gallery, or exhibit that lacks a clear-cut purpose or objective is a formless, rambling assemblage of unrelated artifacts and is a failure.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, it has been noted by museum curators that

[t]he first responsibility of a museum is to collect. Acquisitions are our lifeblood, our raison d'etre. Whether we excavate, purchase at auction, send out expeditions, receive gifts, ferret in attics or are the beneficiaries of bequests, we gather the objects of interest and importance to our particular discipline.⁶⁸

Archivists also actively seek out additions to the archives' holdings, but they do not collect in the sense of the word that suggests the acquisition of discrete items and only those of personal interest. Archival material accumulates naturally; it is not collected. It comes to the archives as a fonds, or as part of a fonds that is already being acquired by the archival institution. Museums remain focused on collection, rather than acquisition. The distinction is an important one. Items that relate to the museum's mandate do not have to be related to one another by virtue of the existence of a common creator. They are collected on the basis of their pertinence to the museum's collection policy, rather than on the basis of their provenance. In 1965, Margaret Schaeffer argued that "[b]asically, the modern museum is built around an idea, or ideas; it has long since ceased

⁶⁷ Noble, 194.

⁶⁸ John Veach Noble, "Museum Manifesto," Museum News 62 (February 1984): 52.

to be a collection of disparate things."⁶⁹ An archives holdings, by definition, cannot be built around an idea, because the impartiality of the material would be lost, neither can an archives collect 'disparate things,' because the interrelatedness of the material would be lost; this cannot be forgotten when the material becomes part of an exhibition.

However, in a museum, the items collected must fit into a rationally defined pattern, and the museum must collect only those items that fall within the boundaries of the collection policy. It must collect the artifacts, not the curiosities. Often museums may acquire some material outside their time, territorial, and subject collecting limits, however, in order to relate regional specimens or local achievements to the larger picture.⁷⁰ In so doing, the curator actually is establishing the material's context.

The practice of collecting within the boundaries of a defined policy, and of relating items to the broader environment in which they were created represents an evolution of thinking that is significant to the way in which museums exhibit material. This makes their approach to the subject of exhibition of interest to archivists. As recently as two centuries ago, museums were merely institutions dedicated to collecting artifacts and curiosities.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Margaret W. M. Schaeffer. "The Display Function of the Small Museum," Curator 8 (1965): 104.

⁷⁰ MacBeath and Gooding, 43-44.

⁷¹ Ibid, 9. The first museum, that at Alexandria of Egypt in the third century B.C., combined the functions of collection and study. The goal of public education was an incidental one. As society developed and gained more interest and more leisure

At this time, it was sufficient to display the specimens. It then became necessary to devise an artistic setting which offered the viewer a source of interest and pleasure. Finally, the exhibition was expected to incorporate details of the life and habits of the specimen, which represented the conditions under which it existed.⁷² Thus, there developed in museums a concern with setting the specimen in context. Indeed, for museums, the idea now is more popular than it used to be. One museum writer recommends that the curator's responsibility is to present specimens to the public in a "condition as close to their original appearance as possible."⁷³ Another notes that "[t]he current trend in natural history museums is to provide more and more context, both natural (as in habitat groups) and scientific (as in didactic exhibits), to fewer and fewer objects in the exhibits."⁷⁴ Doing so allows the museum collections to reflect a more realistic picture of what the past was like. The trend is one archivists readily can understand, given their natural concern with the context of the material in their care.

Maintaining this context serves a vital end. It has been

time, the public education function of museums evolved (Ibid., 9-10). Alexandria, however, was not a museum in the modern sense. It bore a greater resemblance to a university composed of research institutes and library. The museum of today can be traced to the Renaissance and that period's numerous wealthy and inquiring men who collected various kinds of specimens (Colbert, 139).

⁷² Douglas A. Allen, "The Museum and its Functions," in The Organization of Museums: Practical Advice (Paris: UNESCO, 1967), 22-23.

⁷³ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁴ Coen and Wright, 282.

suggested that there is value in presenting an item in context rather than in isolation. It is impossible to educate the public, which has been shown to be the main purpose or function of the modern museum, without carrying out solid research on the collection. It is imperative that curators understand what they are exhibiting before they can exhibit it intelligently. The more they know about an item, the more valuable it becomes, and the more educational value it will have for the public.⁷⁵ According to one source, for example, an exhibition can "be made more educational if it contain[s] appropriate textual material or perhaps an entire visual/textual presentation designed to show how the [subject] was obtained."⁷⁶ If context is presented to the viewer, the viewer learns more from the exhibition. The same is true for archives. Archivists must understand why the material was created, what it was used for, and who created it -- in short, its context and its provenance -- before they can exhibit it in a useful and meaningful manner.

The early museums, and the modern ones following in their path, have been criticized for their lack of attention to the context in which their artifacts were created. As one writer admits, collecting works from all over the world and putting them on view for study or merely for aesthetic reasons "was to transform them into something different from what they had been when they were originally created." This type of museum "removes the picture or the statue from its context and compels us to see

⁷⁵ MacBeath and Gooding, 47.

⁷⁶ Shettel, 34.

it as an abstract thing, a work of art."⁷⁷ If this is done in archives or with archival material, a fundamental principle is violated. The archivist cannot, in any circumstance, consider a document, a photograph, or any piece of archival material as an isolated item. Doing so corrupts the nature of the material and serves to perpetuate misconceptions about what archives are and how they are used.

Unfortunately, the creation of exhibitions is limited by the fact that exhibiting material inevitably subjects it to some damage.⁷⁸ It is this risk of undue stress on the material that inhibits many archivists from considering exhibition programs. Powers argues that the responsibility for determining whether the benefits of exhibiting material outweigh the risks falls on the administrator of the archives. She also notes, however, that the risks involved are similar to the risks incurred in allowing an ordinary researcher to use the material.⁷⁹ The British Records

⁷⁷ Kenneth Hudson, A Social History of Museums: What the Visitors Thought (New York: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1975), 11.

⁷⁸ There are numerous writings on the subject of the care of archival material on exhibition, including Richard H. Archer, "Display and Exhibit Cases," Library Trends 13 (April 1965): 474-80; Canadian Council of Archives, Basic Conservation of Archival Materials: A Guide (Ottawa: Canadian Council of Archives, 1990); Casterline, Archives and Manuscripts: Exhibits; Joan L. O'Connor, "Conservation of Documents in an Exhibit," American Archivist 47 (Spring 1984): 156-63; Mary Lynn Ritzen-thaler, Archives and Manuscripts: Conservation: A Manual on Physical Care and Management (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1983); Nathan Stolow, Conservation and Exhibitions: Packing, Transport, Storage and Environmental Considerations (London: Butterworths, 1977); and various technical bulletins and notes published by the Canadian Conservation Institute.

⁷⁹ Sandra Powers, "Why Exhibit? The Risks Versus the Benefits," American Archivist 41 (July 1978): 299.

Association mentions the risks of theft, rough handling and fire. Its 1949 sub-committee on exhibition notes, though, that "the risk of loss and damage to exhibits is negligible provided proper supervision can be obtained during the hours when the exhibition is open, and proper security measures are taken when the exhibition is closed."⁸⁰ Nevertheless, if exhibitions succeed in increasing the use of archival material, the material then faces the risks associated with increased handling. At least one source suggests that exhibitions do not increase use: the Leicester Museum kept statistics regarding attendance following exhibitions, and found that

the effect had been negligible, and though there had been an increase in the use of the record office in recent years, this was not the result of exhibitions. In fact, if he seriously thought exhibitions might stimulate more demand and increase pressure on the searchroom, the speaker said he would never do another one. Archivists already saw more customers than many commercial travellers, and it was no job for anyone who wanted a quiet life.⁸¹

It has to be remembered, though, that archivists exist to serve their users, and if educating those users about archives and their holdings helps serve users better, archivists had best mount exhibitions.

Not all professional responses to exhibitions are negative, however. Birrell notes that "[i]n many institutions, time and the number of employees are significant and limiting factors, but the

⁸⁰ British Records Association, 1950, 44.

⁸¹ British Records Association, 1972, 107. In regard to this example, it is possible that the quality of the exhibitions themselves did not foster increased use.

extra effort put into publicizing, writing, or exhibition will frequently yield unexpected returns in further acquisitions."⁸² Casterline argues that archives are ideally suited to mount such projects. Given the evidence in the museum field, she notes, that visitors' attention spans are better suited to small museums where they do not have to absorb so much and are not so much in danger of suffering museum fatigue or information overload, lavish exhibitions requiring large amounts of money, space, and staff time may not be effective. What attracts users is subject, design, location, and execution of the exhibition, all elements well within the abilities of most archives. Thus exhibitions need not be avoided on the grounds that they will bankrupt the institution.⁸³

The time and resources demanded by exhibition programs nevertheless limit their popularity. The sentiment has been voiced even in the museum community, where at one point in time, it was said that

[t]he general attitude now apparently encouraged in the rising generation of museum staffs tends to take them even further away from the desire to feel and communicate enthusiasm for the objects in their charge, and also further away from any obligation to share their knowledge with the public. They want to feel that they are among the elite of museum mortals, perpetually engaged in the more rarefied regions of research.⁸⁴

While it is not the purpose of this thesis to debate such an

⁸² Birrell, 106-7.

⁸³ Casterline, 8.

⁸⁴ Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, "The Fault . . . is . . . in Ourselves," Museums Journal 64 (December 1964): 228-29.

argument or trace its evolution, the general message reveals something very important about the reason for exhibition, which can be applied to any institution, be it a library, a museum, or an archives. It suggests that enthusiasm should play a role in the performance of the professional's duties and that this enthusiasm should be expressed outwardly to the users rather than inwardly in order to serve the professional's personal interests. Exhibitions provide librarians, curators or archivists with a means of transmitting their enthusiasm for their respective professions and for the material in their care to the general public, the public that ordinarily may not be interested in taking the time to examine an institutional guide or brochure.

Motivated by any or all the reasons for the creation of exhibitions, and taking the physical risks to the material and the demands on resources into consideration, archivists may choose to exhibit the material in their care. If they do so, they may turn for guidance to the work of those library and museum professionals involved in exhibition. Both professions offer useful perspectives on the purposes behind exhibitions and the nature of the audiences such projects attempt to reach. Many of the ideas and theories used may be adapted and applied to archival exhibitions. It has to be remembered, however, that exhibitions of archival material are fundamentally different from their library and museum counterparts. They deal with material of a different nature, and therefore they are bound to employ a different approach in the way in which they select and use this material. Similarly, because different types of exhibitions have

different functions and roles to play, they cannot be viewed from the same perspective. Each must be approached from a specific rather than a general point of view, and it has to be recognized that, while they have many motivations and objectives in common, some of these motivations and objectives are specific to particular types of projects. To have the desired effect, the purpose behind the exhibition's creation must be kept clearly in mind. If the archivist wishes to accomplish a specific objective, that objective dictates the type of exhibition mounted. Each type of exhibition serves a certain audience (to whom the objective is directed), and both the purpose and the audience depend on the mandate of the archives. The following chapters will apply the fundamental ideas outlined in chapter one to each of the four basic types of exhibition and attempt to clarify what each ideally is meant to communicate.

CHAPTER TWO
THEMATIC EXHIBITIONS

All exhibitions are to some extent thematic. Like any properly constructed creative endeavour, an exhibition will be built around a particular theme or main idea. In its usual incarnation in cultural institutions such as archives and museums, however, the thematic exhibition attempts to inform its audience about a chosen subject from an historical point of view. These exhibitions traditionally "tell an interesting story" while exercising their "potential to educate", in the sense of attempting to teach the audience something about the subject chosen as the exhibition theme. In keeping with their educational function, many are mounted with an eye to "mak[ing] a major contribution to scholarship",⁸⁵ suggesting that the approach in creating thematic exhibitions is similar to that undertaken in any research project. As a result, the thematic possibilities are bounded only by the creator's imagination. Archivists have taken this to heart, mounting exhibitions on subjects as diverse as the development of modern day transportation systems in Canada, the lives of prominent politicians or artists, and the origins of particular corporations.

⁸⁵ Casterline, 8.

Sources differ slightly with regard to the breadth of the term thematic exhibition, but all agree that this kind of exhibition focuses on the exploration of a particular subject. Casterline defines it as one "centering on an important event, the life and work of a historical figure or institution, the local community, or the work of an agency or organization."⁸⁶ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler offer a broader definition of the term, describing thematic exhibitions as "those that are organized around a subject or a type of object, or that commemorate or celebrate an event."⁸⁷ In their discussion of the basic types of exhibitions, they do not distinguish between the exhibition that focuses on a subject and the one that commemorates an event, seeing them both as part of one basic type.

Defined in this manner, the thematic exhibition serves an educational purpose in the tradition of most cultural, noncommercial exhibitions, in that it aims at teaching the audience about a particular subject, usually from an historical perspective. Erika Chadbourne, for example, examining the use of exhibition in law libraries, notes that, in addition to their positive effect on public relations, exhibitions

have many other beneficial effects. Among these the educational aspect is preeminent. An exhibit may concentrate on an early event which has proved to be a milestone on the road to modern law, on an individual who has enriched legal history, on organizations which have achieved improvement of legal institutions, on a landmark case which has profoundly altered preexisting patterns and folkways; but regardless of the particular focus,

⁸⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁷ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 230.

there is built into each such exhibit, whether small or large, the factor of instructional interest.⁸⁸

Each of the exhibition examples Chadbourne mentions is thematic, and each attempts to teach its audience about a chosen topic, be it an important legal figure or the development of modern law. Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, writing about this type of exhibition in archives, note that

[t]hematic or subject exhibits can explain and interpret historical events, activities, and topics, as well as simply introduce visitors to the raw materials of history. They can emphasize the activities and contributions of a specific institution, organization, family, or individual that is important to a local community, region, or nation.⁸⁹

Thus, thematic exhibitions show particular aspects of events that happened in the past or the past accomplishments of individuals or organizations, while at the same time drawing attention to primary source material.

While thematic exhibitions, by definition, focus on a subject, when mounted by an archives, they often may play a secondary role in promoting the holdings of an archival institution, as well as the archival institution itself. Casterline argues that "[t]he idea [behind the thematic exhibition] is to offer some historical background on subjects that are already on people's minds, attracting attention to both the exhibit and the archives." Casterline also suggests that such exhibitions may focus on

⁸⁸ Erika S. Chadbourne, "Part III -- Library Administration of Historical Materials: Exhibits," Law Library Journal 69 (August 1976): 321.

⁸⁹ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 230.

"[s]ubjects of timely interest (China, the World Series, blizzards, college graduation) that present an opportunity to get related items out on view."⁹⁰ Thus, the thematic exhibition serves as an indirect means of increasing people's awareness of an archives' holdings. Bradsher and Ritzenthaler agree, arguing that "[t]hematic exhibits generally exploit the subject strengths of the archives, thereby publicizing its holdings and possibly attracting new accessions."⁹¹ The thematic exhibition certainly reflects all these objectives to some extent, but for the purposes of this thesis, the term "thematic exhibition" refers to one whose main aim is the documentation of a particular subject. When promotion becomes the primary goal of an exhibition, the exhibition is an institutional one.

To many archivists it may seem natural, when selecting documents for exhibition purposes, to take those documents and use them to explain something about the past. Although most are in the business of preserving the noncurrent records of an organization, archives traditionally have been perceived as dealing with the preservation of history. The thematic exhibition, as it often is used in archives, plays on this perception, and uses archival material to document an historical subject, much in the way a typical museum uses its artifacts to explore historical themes. On a superficial level, the practice may appear acceptable. Unfortunately, problems arise when the archivist allows the development of the exhibition theme to take

⁹⁰ Casterline, 12.

⁹¹ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 230.

precedence over the archivist's respect for the principles governing the nature and treatment of archival material.

In the creation of any archival exhibition, the exhibition creator has to understand the nature of the material with which s/he is working. The archivist's main concern is the meaning of the records in their context, rather than as individual items. Most exhibitions, however, are concerned with the significance of the message of the individual item.⁹² In creating exhibitions, archivists cannot forget that archival documents relate to one another. If their original order is disturbed, they cease to be archival material, and if creators of thematic exhibitions remove the material from the documentary context in which it belongs, they violate the most sacrosanct archival principles. Thus, when archivists begin selecting items from a fonds, with the idea of putting those items on exhibition, they find themselves in an ethical dilemma.

As an example, consider an exhibition mounted by the Archives of Ontario in 1988. Entitled Survivors / Les Survivants, the exhibition focused on the contributions and accomplishments of various immigrant groups in Ontario and was put together, according to its creators, as "a tribute to those who were forced to leave their homelands by war, persecution, famine or other disasters and found refuge in Ontario." The exhibition took as its theme the idea that "[t]he survivors are unsung heroes; they neither sought nor received medals of valour, but by their tenacity, hard work and faith in themselves, they overcame

⁹² Allyn, et al., 403.

adversities imposed upon them." In developing this theme, the exhibition's creators argued that

[f]or the past two centuries Ontario has been a haven for many groups of survivors. It is an unfortunate but necessary fact that from time to time people were ejected from their homes and forced to seek a new life in a new land. While no one could wish this misery on any other, it is important that these pages of our common history be preserved, remembered and taught as lessons in the future.

To support the argument, the exhibition used documents "drawn largely from the collections of the Archives of Ontario." In so doing, the exhibition's creators admit that they have been "[n]ecessarily selective," in their use of documents that "illustrate the broad range of origins, cultures, languages and religions that make up the Ontario mosaic." They justify their selections by saying that "[s]urvivors have been cast in many molds and this exhibition therefore includes a variety of peoples for whom the Archives has representative documents." The documents chosen prove to be quite eclectic. For example, military returns from a member of Ontario's farm gentry represented the Loyalists, while a photograph of Prince Arthur visiting the Mohawks in 1869, a grant and sketch of native land sold in Cayuga township in 1836 and a land deed signed and sealed by Mississauga chiefs represented the Six Nations Indians. A 1787 letter of recommendation from George Washington and an 1807 commission as sergeant-at-arms represented English merchant Thomas Ridout, while slaves were represented by a letter outlining slave conditions in the United States in 1850 and by the cover of S.G. Howe's 1854 pamphlet entitled Freedmen's Inquiry Commission

Report. A colour lithograph of an Eaton's store exterior in 1906 and a 1902 Eaton's catalogue represented Timothy Eaton and the potato famine. Ontario Mennonite communities were represented by a photograph of Gordon Eby, a descendant of the founder of what is now Kitchener, Ontario, a photograph of community members going to the Canadian National Exhibition around 1912 and by other photographs belonging to Eby. Finally, UPI photographs of Vietnam war scenes taken by Thai Khac Chuong, a Vietnamese trained as a combat photographer and news cameraman, later a restaurateur and photographer in Ontario, represented Vietnamese immigrants.⁹³ The resulting exhibition is basically a collection of items from various fonds, brought together because of their relevance to the immigrant theme. The relationships between the documents and the respective fonds is not clear, suggesting that the exhibition topic has been selected first, and documents picked and chosen from various immigrant's fonds to support the theme.

As another example, consider an exhibition mounted by a university archives. Dramatis Personae: an Exhibition of Amateur Theatre at the University of Toronto, 1879 - 1939 appeared at the University of Toronto Archives (UTA) between October 1986 and January 1987. The exhibition used 12 display cases, each focusing on an individual theme. These themes explored the early days of university drama, specific amateur productions, female student participation in productions, university theatre during World War I and the inter-war years, and Hart House art director Frederick

⁹³ Archives of Ontario, "Survivors / Les Survivants," Toronto: Government of Ontario, Ministry of Culture and Communications, 1988, 2-23.

Coates. The exhibition used photographs, a military award earned by actors during World War I, programs, drawings, some scripts and playbills, and paintings of some sets. The material came from various University Archives accessions, other archives and such published sources as the student newspaper, Varsity, and the University's yearbook, Torontonensis.

A display case entitled Women Students Take the Initiative, for example, used programs and photographs from various UTA accessions, excerpts from an 1897 and 1900 Varsity, a theatre program from the Dora Mavor Moore Papers held by the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, and another program from St. Michael's College Archives. Another case, entitled The Inter-War Years, Part II included photographs and programs from three different University Archives accessions, the Loretto College Archives, St. Michael's College Archives, University College Archives, and Torontonensis. Similarly, a case entitled Hart House Theatre and Frederick Coates contained programs, photographs, costume designs, and drawings belonging to art director Coates. Four other cases devoted to Coates contained set, character and costume designs created by him. The drawings were from UTA accession B75-0015 and photographs of the productions (used to "demonstrate how closely his ideas were incorporated into the costumes") were from accession A75-0009. A few programs from A75-0009 and paintings of sets from B75-0015 also were used.⁹⁴

Again, the material from all these sources is selected to suit

⁹⁴ University of Toronto Archives, "Dramatis Personae: An Exhibition of Amateur Theatre at the University of Toronto, 1879-1939," December 1986, 17-30.

the particular theme, and the newspapers, yearbooks and artifacts used for the purpose are not even archival material. The exhibition does little to demonstrate the relationships between the documents, and for that matter, the context in which they were created. The idea of a different fonds is not being communicated to the audience and that audience is given no idea of how the documents relate to one another.

By contrast, consider Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal, an exhibition mounted in 1990 by the Canadian Centre for Architecture. According to the brochure for an accompanying exhibition of commissioned photographs of Cormier's architecture by Gabor Szilasi, the Cormier exhibition

places the building within the context of Cormier's oeuvre. It examines the evolution of his thought as the first architect to introduce modernist architecture into Quebec in the twentieth century and demonstrates his concern with synthesizing the richness of spaces and surfaces from the Beaux-Arts tradition with the ideals of rationalist buildings. In the section devoted to the university in Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal, the plans, drawings, models, newspaper and journal articles, and photographs (drawn primarily from the Fonds Cormier) are arranged to document and clarify Cormier's design process from the genesis of the original plan in 1924 to the building's inauguration in 1943. Such an installation, in which the viewer moves through six chronologically sequenced and structured galleries, encourages a linear reading of history.⁹⁵

In this case, the exhibition uses the material from a single fonds, although it may not present that material in a way that reflects its original arrangement.

⁹⁵ Centre Canadien d'Architecture / Canadian Centre for Architecture, "Sighting the Université de Montréal: Photographs by Gabor Szilasi," 1990, 11.

The root of the problem often lies in the exhibition creators' initial approach to the exhibition project. For example, Albert H. Leisinger, Jr. outlines a common approach in his description of the process as undertaken at the United States National Archives in 1961.

After the subject of an exhibit has been approved by the Archivist [he writes], members of the exhibits staff undertake the detailed historical and archival research necessary to develop a tentative subject-matter or story outline. They prepare lists of pertinent, known documents that we want to examine and a "want list" of the kind of documents, maps, photos, and other items we need to cover specific topics.⁹⁶

Leisinger further explains that, once the items are selected, the exhibition is reviewed by the museum director. This review takes into consideration whether or not the exhibition "tell[s] an interesting story and . . . build[s] to a climax" and whether the archivists are "putting too much stress on relatively unimportant occurrences simply because [they] are weighed down with documentation on them". It also analyzes the originality and accuracy of the theme's development as well as more practical matters such as the legibility of the documents and whether or not they are too crowded in the display cases.⁹⁷

Leisinger's procedure, however, clearly attempts to fit the documents to the exhibition theme, rather than allowing the documents to suggest that theme to the exhibition creator. Items are selected on the basis of how they look, how they fit into the

⁹⁶ Leisinger, 78.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 78-79.

overall design of the exhibition, and how they support the theme, rather than on the basis of the items' provenance or on the way in which they relate to each other.

Similarly, Allyn, Aubitz and Stein argue that

[t]he challenge in each case is to choose materials that are exhibitable from a conservation standpoint, and have strong documentary value as well as visual impact. This ideal marriage between form and content is not always easy to achieve. Exhibit items must be selected according to the purpose and type of project undertaken. In evaluating manuscripts, legibility, unusual calligraphy, color, embellishments such as seals, or other visual considerations might be a factor in selection.⁹⁸

Again, items are chosen to fit a predetermined theme, with little, if any, thought given to provenance, original order or respect des fonds. Such theoretical issues need to be addressed before the archivist considers the aesthetic issues involved in exhibition design. Context cannot be sacrificed for the sake of aesthetics or visual impact.

Casterline touches on the crux of the issue when she notes that, in the creation of thematic exhibitions,

[t]he question arises: Do you start with a subject and then locate examples, or do you begin with objects and use them to develop the story. Some of the most original results [she concludes] are achieved by letting the materials suggest their own stories.⁹⁹

She does not acknowledge, however, that this is what is supposed to happen, that archival material is supposed to speak for itself

⁹⁸ Allyn et al., 403.

⁹⁹ Casterline, 10.

and that the material should suggest the theme without any interpretation on the part of the archivist.

To illustrate the potential intellectual dangers to which archival material is subjected when thematic exhibitions are designed, consider Casterline's hypothetical thematic exhibition entitled World of John Doe. In designing the exhibition she suggests that the archivist

might choose to create topical subsections such as childhood, school years, and family life. But if John Doe happened to be a famous scientist, you might condense the personal information and focus on key phrases of his career: early life and education on one panel; famous discoveries, each on a separate panel; and professional recognition (award certificates and the like) on a panel at the end. Or if the subject is a great writer, the exhibit could be divided into two segments: panels featuring a sequential progression of important manuscripts, and topical "islands" exploring aspects of the writer's life. The panels and islands might be distinguished by different color schemes to indicate that different kinds of materials are being presented. An exhibit of the works of a particular photographer could be arranged chronologically if the goal is to show artistic development. But if the photographs are primarily of interest as historical documents, they might be more effectively organized by topic (architecture, recreation, etc.).¹⁰⁰

While this may produce an interesting and informative exhibition, it does not necessarily reflect the way in which the creator actually arranged his records. John Doe the photographer, for example, may have arranged his photographs in chronological sequence. If this is the case, the exhibition creator has no right to rearrange them by subject. Similarly, if John Doe the scientist did not arrange his personal papers according to

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 24.

"biographical data," "education," "discoveries," and "recognition," the exhibition creator cannot arrange them that fashion and expect to maintain the integrity of the fonds and its parts while the material is on exhibition. Imposing subject divisions on the material, if those divisions did not exist originally, removes the documents from the context in which they were created and ultimately encourages misconceptions regarding the organic nature of archival material.

In addition to the exhibition difficulties posed by archival material's inherent nature, creating thematic exhibitions face some fundamental problems regarding the educational role of these exhibitions. Recalling Casterline's definition, the thematic exhibition has the potential to educate, to contribute to scholarship, and to tell a story. To a certain extent, this is a goal of all types of exhibition, but is particularly applicable to thematic exhibitions. While education itself is a noble goal, be it the education of the audience or the contribution to scholarship, archivists cannot forget what they are trying to teach. It is not part of their professional responsibility to provide a history lesson. That responsibility falls on the historian and on the museum exhibition. Indeed, the contemporary professional archivist does not do historical research, but the archival research necessary to carry out the functions of appraisal, arrangement and description, and public service.

The ethical questions raised by the thematic exhibition's tendency to tell a story lead to another dilemma, that of interpretation. Thematic exhibitions interpret events, a primary

function of exhibitions in museums, rather than in archives and libraries. There are a number of opinions on whether or not exhibitions should interpret material, and, if yes, to what degree.

Bradsher and Ritzenthaler assume that exhibitions should interpret. Indeed, they believe that this medium of communication cannot help but present an opinion, and that care should be taken in ensuring that the opinion expressed is as accurate as possible. They argue that,

[b]ecause visitors assume that what they see and learn in an archival exhibit is authentic, accurate, and true, the exhibits must be objective and truthful. . . . Just as 'history' is a personal opinion about the past, so too are exhibits a form of opinion about the past. To provide balance, exhibits should present different versions of an event or indicate differences of opinion about its significance, when appropriate, via eyewitness accounts or other contemporary records.¹⁰¹

While exhibitions cannot be expected to explore a subject as thoroughly as other types of research projects, they do have a responsibility to present the facts of their argument as accurately as possible.

Bradsher and Ritzenthaler go on to suggest that accurate interpretation through exhibition is easier to achieve if the creator refrains from discussing abstract ideas. To this end, they suggest that

[t]he exhibit staff should try to pose questions that evoke concrete rather than theoretical responses, such as 'who', 'when', 'where', 'what', and 'how', in developing exhibits. By doing so they can empirically answer and

¹⁰¹ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 233.

interpret these questions with their documents and captions, and thereby produce exhibits with greater relevance, accuracy and utility.¹⁰²

The idea is that the archivist uses the document to answer a question, as the historian would do, by looking at the document's context: who created it, what it is, how it was created, when it was created, and where it was created. The process involves some degree of interpretation. The issue arises once again, however, as to whether or not archivists should allow the documents to suggest the questions, rather than using the documents to prove a predetermined point.

Allyn, Aubitz, and Stein's approach to the issue is similar to that undertaken by the creators of museum exhibitions, noting that some documents may require more or less interpretation than others. They argue that

[a] document can be evaluated by considering how it, by itself, symbolizes an event or individual or has a certain identity as an icon. Visual appearance, written message, and historical importance all combine with mythology or folklore, or the ideals of an audience, to give the document an importance that rises above its actual physical presence. The most obvious examples are the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. For most Americans, these documents require very little interpretation. They need only to be present and visible to satisfy the viewer.¹⁰³

Similarly, Coen and Wright, in writing about exhibitions in museums, argue that

[w]hile we recognize that different types of objects will

¹⁰² Ibid., 231.

¹⁰³ Allyn, et al., 403.

require different amounts of interpretation, and that interpretation is not something the exhibit should do completely for the viewer, we believe that a modicum of interpretation is required for all museum objects. . . . The necessity to interpret them in an exhibit follows from the fundamental anthropological principle that the meaning of objects is a sociocultural product. Humans impart meanings to objects and can radically change their significance, and therefore exhibits must be designed to communicate the chosen interpretation of the objects displayed.¹⁰⁴

Because of this fundamental belief, however, it is much easier to justify interpretation in the realm of museum exhibition. Indeed, in the museum world, interpretation is a key part of the exhibition process. According to Edwin H. Colbert,

a repository in which objects are stored away for safe keeping is little more than a warehouse. Consequently the modern museum has a correlative primary function -- that of interpreting the objects entrusted to its care, of making them significant to mankind. Interpretation of museum objects is done in two ways, either by research or by display. Research is basic; the object remains a potential rather than a really significant thing until something is known about it. Display grows out of possession of the object and the research done on it. Many museums interpret their objects both through research and display; some, only through the one or the other of these functions. But in the opinion of the present writer, unless an institution has objects in its possession, which it interprets through research or display or both, it is not properly a museum.¹⁰⁵

The thematic exhibition, then, is really no different from any other research project. The exhibition creator selects an idea to be explored, and uses the exhibition to develop an argument and arrive at a conclusion. To this end, Colbert makes a valid point, arguing that "[i]t should be realized that exhibition is always a

¹⁰⁴ Coen and Wright, 282.

¹⁰⁵ Colbert, 139.

secondary mode of interpretation, for it grows out of research."¹⁰⁶ Good museums, in other words, have sound research programs, and then proceed to develop exhibition programs.

The writers who discuss the mounting of thematic exhibitions in an archival environment, however, fail to take into consideration the fact that archival material, unlike museum artifacts, is, by nature, impartial and that the primary function of archives is to maintain the integrity of that impartial evidence, rather than interpreting it. By mounting an exhibition in the first place the material is manipulated, interpreted, and therefore loses some of its objectivity. Once archivists arrange archival material for exhibition, that material automatically assumes a bias, no matter how careful the exhibition creators are to preserve context. In the case of a thematic exhibition, where the focus is on the exploration and development of an historical theme, the exhibition creators, simply by selecting the "most relevant" material, provide some sort of interpretation of the material itself.¹⁰⁷ Since archivists look at relationships when they arrange and describe and they are ethically bound to respect the records in their care, they have a responsibility to allow the documents to speak for themselves.¹⁰⁸ Archivists, whatever their good intentions, do not have the function of imparting meaning to them.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 142.

¹⁰⁷ Anne-Marie Fenger, "Perspectives on Archival Preservation and Access," paper prepared for Anthropology 433B, University of British Columbia, April 1989, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Allyn et al., 403.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that archivists, when planning exhibitions, fail to focus on those exhibitions that would reflect their institution's mandate or policies. Casterline, for one, argues that

[u]sually, successful exhibits are built around the strengths of the collection, emphasizing those subjects that reflect the institution's major interests. If the institution has important holdings in a particular area (local history, black history, women, science), or is trying to build up its collection in that area, exhibitors should explore these topics.¹⁰⁹

Basically, her argument is that exhibition themes are chosen according to the nature of the archives' holdings, but her approach is subject based, rather than provenance based. The other part of the problem concerns the audience for which the exhibition is mounted. In addressing this issue, Casterline notes that

[i]t may be helpful for the exhibitor to identify categories of viewers to see whether a sufficient audience exists, and whether it could be broadened. When properly presented and publicized, historical exhibits appeal to scholars, students, collectors, tourists, and buffs to name a few. Public institutions, in particular, may be obligated to make their exhibits accessible to all of these groups.¹¹⁰

As a result, the temptation for the archivist, in creating thematic exhibitions, is to make the archives' holdings fit the desired theme, rather than make the theme reflect the origins and character of records holdings.

¹⁰⁹ Casterline, 10.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

Another issue is that, too often, archives, both large institutions and relatively small programs, are given responsibilities beyond the preservation of inactive records or the management of records throughout their life cycle. These responsibilities, given to the archives often because the sponsoring institution has no other department willing or able to assume them, sometimes have only the remotest connection with archival functions and purposes.

The City of Toronto Archives provides a case in point. Its exhibition facility, the Market Gallery,

provides a showcase for the City's extensive archival and artistic holdings. Fine art, photographs, maps, documents and artifacts are enhanced by extensive research to present various thematic exhibitions that illustrate and comment on the City's historical, cultural and social development.¹¹¹

The roots of the Gallery lie in the City's 120 year old commitment to collecting and displaying works of art. In 1974, the Records and Archives Division of the Department of the City Clerk was designated the official custodian of the collection and Council adopted a policy guiding the treatment of the collection and future additions to it. That policy dictated that "[p]urchases of paintings, along with other collections in the Archives . . . would be based on their merit to document the historical, cultural, social or physical development of Toronto." Art was considered "a form of documentation" and thus "the fine art

¹¹¹ Department of the City Clerk, The City of Toronto Archives, City of Toronto: Information and Communication Services Division, 1989, 5.

collection became part of the overall Archives' mandate to preserve and exhibit materials of significance to the City."

The Corporate Image, a November 1980 "exhibition of 19th and 20th century portraiture from the City of Toronto's permanent collection" is a typical example of the Gallery's thematic exhibitions. According to the accompanying brochure,

portraits represent about one fifth of the works in the City's collection. Because so few other records of their subjects' time in office exist, their importance as documents cannot be underestimated. The portraits provide valuable insights into the character and image of those men and women who played such important roles in the development of the City in which we live today.¹¹²

Like many of the Market Gallery's exhibitions, Corporate Image is an exhibition of fine art, and has nothing to do with archives. It is, however, a thematic exhibition using non-archival material found in an archives.

Similarly, a single department within a large archives can have its own focus regarding exhibitions. For example, consider Private Realms of Light, a photograph exhibition mounted by the Public Archives of Canada in 1983 that "sets out to make a complex statement about the two-hundred-odd photographic images which comprise the exhibition." In her review of the exhibition, Ann Thomas notes that

[t]he research and mounting of an exhibition such as this accords with the expansion of the National Photography Collection's mandate to include "the documenting of the history of the photographic medium and its impact on Canadian life as a medium of communication and

¹¹² The Market Gallery, "The Corporate Image," City of Toronto Archives, 1980.

expression[,]

as opposed to its former mandate to document "the history and environment of Canada through photographs."¹¹³ Both old and new mandates, however, encourage the treatment of photographs as artifacts which can be brought together to tell a story, rather than as archival documents, and promote the acceptance of the separation of archival material by media. Mounting theme-based historical exhibitions in the tradition of museums then becomes easy to justify as part of the institution's mission.

The situation is different when dealing with the thematic exhibitions created by historical societies. At the time of the Minnesota Historical Society's Centennial, for example, the Society was looking to the future, and, according to Kane, "[i]n the vision and the exploration was a philosophy that encompassed all the resources of the society, human and material; a philosophy based on esthetic and educational objectives inspired by our times." The approach placed the historical concerns of the museum ahead of archival concerns regarding the nature of manuscripts. At the time of Kane's writing, however, the Society's exhibition program was part of the responsibility of its museum and intricately entwined with it. Kane explains the relationship by saying that

[e]xhibitions of manuscripts are so enmeshed with the entire display program of the society that it is impossible to discuss them as a separate unit.

¹¹³ Ann Thomas, "Reflections on an Exhibition," In "Private Realms of Light: Canadian Amateur Photography, 1939-1940," Archivaria 17 (Winter 1983-84): 138.

Suggestions for all exhibits are originated by or submitted to the curator of the museum. The curator of the museum is assisted by the Planning Committee, a group of staff members including the librarian, the editor of Minnesota History, the general editor of publications, the public relations coordinator, and the curator of manuscripts.¹¹⁴

Such consultation culminated in an exhibition Kane uses to illustrate how the Minnesota Society views manuscripts. Entitled Minnesota Fashion Review, the exhibition used

clothing worn by Minnesotans from 1820 to 1940 . . . [and] articles typical of the fashion periods . . . to create a realistic atmosphere. A Victorian mannequin was not only dressed for her time, but on her table lay a grocery bill from a St. Paul store listing common purchases of the day. In such exhibits, the manuscript itself is not featured, but it lends its qualities to the dramatization of other materials.¹¹⁵

In this case, the grocery bill is little more than a prop used to demonstrate what one aspect of life was like in the Victorian era. The context in which the bill was created is of no consequence to the creators of the exhibition, but their use of it is in keeping with the mandate of a typical historical society. Unlike an archives and more like a museum, these societies collect historical artifacts, and Minnesota Fashion Review is a suitable example of the history lessons they attempt to teach.

¹¹⁴ Lucile M. Kane, "The Exhibition of Manuscripts at the Minnesota Historical Society," The American Archivist 15 (January-October 1952): 40.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 41.

CHAPTER THREE
CELEBRATORY EXHIBITIONS

In defining thematic exhibitions, attention was drawn to the way in which the two best known sources on the subject categorize exhibitions of archival material. Bradsher and Ritzenthaler divided exhibitions into two basic types, the first designated thematic and the second, institutional. As mentioned earlier, they define thematic exhibitions as "those that are organized around a subject or a type of object, or that commemorate or celebrate an event." Exhibitions mounted in response to the need to celebrate something, in Bradsher and Ritzenthaler's eyes, do not constitute a separate type of exhibition, but merely a type of thematic exhibition which "can also commemorate anniversaries, celebrate holidays, or focus on a certain year or era that is significant to the target audience."¹¹⁶ Similarly, Casterline views the celebratory exhibition as a type of thematic exhibition, rather than an exhibition in its own right. Indeed, she refers to it almost in passing in her discussion of exhibitions that examine "[s]ubjects that commemorate anniversaries or relate to the interests of conference groups scheduled to visit the

¹¹⁶ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 230.

archives."¹¹⁷ Thus, in addition to focusing on topics of the archivist's choosing, the thematic exhibition, as Bradsher and Ritzenthaler define it, may build that theme around the celebration of a particular event.

A popular example of the celebratory exhibition takes the form of what Casterline refers to as a "Way Back When" show, an exhibition "focusing on big and little events at some particular point in time, say 50 years ago." In this case, the emphasis is more on commemoration than celebration. Bradsher and Ritzenthaler note that "[a]nniversaries of the institution can also provide an opportunity for a celebratory exhibit."¹¹⁸

The exhibition whose goal is celebration or commemoration, however, serves a different function from that which aims at exploring an historical subject. Exhibitions organized around such subjects are mounted in order to educate the chosen audience about the chosen topic. The celebratory exhibition, on the other hand, aims at drawing attention to a person, place, or thing which, for any number of reasons, often simply the passage of time, warrants special recognition. Sometimes, the lines between the two become blurred, as institutions mount exhibitions in honour of an event, but in so doing create an exhibition that explores an historical subject unrelated to the occasion instead of one that celebrates or commemorates the event they are honouring. In this case, the result is a thematic exhibition, and not a celebratory one. However, most of the time, the differences

¹¹⁷ Casterline, 12.

¹¹⁸ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 230.

between the two are significant enough to warrant their discussion as two distinct types of exhibition.

The popularity of celebratory exhibitions is understandable. Judith Cushman, commenting on the situation in the library world, acknowledges their value, arguing that

[e]xhibitions commonly function to celebrate larger events. Plans for University symposia, lecture series, and conferences often include proposals for exhibiting selections from the library's related holdings. Several of the exhibits in our program have complemented various University activities, drawing particularly heavily on our archival collections. . . . Larger events--those of the nation's history, for example--can easily be honored with exhibitions. The celebratory function of exhibits is so popular that it alone can sustain a successful, rich and varied exhibit program.¹¹⁹

Similarly, in an archival setting, as the anniversary of an important or significant historical event nears, an exhibition exploring some aspect of that event can provide some often much needed publicity to the archives. In those cases where the occasion is well known, the archives appears to be doing its part to aid in the celebrations. When the targeted audience largely is unaware of the occasion, the archives can use the celebratory exhibition to generate some awareness and understanding of the event in question. In some situations, such exhibitions supplement an existing exhibition program, but in others they can serve as the principal type of exhibition mounted by an archival institution. When the exhibition program is small, the institution may be more able to justify the creation of an

¹¹⁹ Judith Cushman, "Creating and Managing an Exhibit Program," The Midwestern Archivist 1 (1976): 30.

exhibition to its administration if it can point to an upcoming anniversary as the reason to devote resources to this type of endeavour.

The idea of mounting a celebratory exhibition, however, can be somewhat seductive. Bradsher and Ritzenthaler note that "[f]requently exhibits are mounted in connection with a specific event, such as a speech, a conference, or an anniversary. Thus, the event itself dictates the subject of the exhibit."¹²⁰ Because the motivation for the exhibition's creation is a particular event, archivists may approach that exhibition with the idea that the theme is preselected. If, for example, the anniversary of a significant World War II battle is eminent, an archives may be tempted to mount an exhibition exploring some aspect of that battle. It may choose to outline the events leading up to the fighting, focus on the events of the battle itself, or focus on the participants in the battle, using whatever material it has in its holdings related to the chosen subject.

Approaching the exhibition in this manner, however, results in the creation of a thematic exhibition with all the attendant ethical dilemmas previously discussed. While this may be acceptable to the prominent writers on the subject, who argue that the celebratory exhibition is merely a type of thematic exhibition, the criteria for a celebratory exhibition are more complex than those for a thematic one, and ultimately restrictive in the boundaries they place on the archivist. Properly constructed celebratory exhibitions actually serve to demonstrate

¹²⁰ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 231.

the archives' place in whatever is being celebrated, and it is in this respect that they fundamentally differ from their thematic counterpart.

As an example, consider the occasion of a university's centennial. That university's archives naturally may choose to mount an exhibition celebrating the milestone reached by its sponsoring institution. In doing so, however, it should attempt to use the exhibition primarily to emphasize the archives' own role in the university, and only indirectly to demonstrate the value and importance of the university itself. In this case, the exhibition could outline the historical development of the university, but would do so from the perspective of the role played by the archives in the development of that history or of the archives' connection to and involvement with the university. Similarly, a government archives, on the anniversary of the jurisdiction's creation or of some important event in the government or its people's history, will mount a celebratory exhibition that puts into relief the archives' place within the government, rather than focussing on the government itself. On the other hand, the archives of a corporation exists to support the corporation. Therefore, on the anniversary of the business or of some important event in the corporation's history, the archives might mount a celebratory exhibition that glorifies the corporation but that does so by means of purely archival evidence presented.

To carry the argument a step further, the celebratory exhibition is not mounted for the benefit of other institutions.

As an example, one might consider an archives associated with a museum. The situation is quite common, especially in the case of small and medium sized archival institutions. Often, these institutions are required to assume the responsibility for all functions related to heritage, and thus, administer museum exhibition programs as well. If the museum program remains separate from the archives program, they still may exist in close physical proximity to one another, and the temptation may be, at most, for the museum to expect the archives to mount exhibitions for the museum's benefit or, at least, to expect the archives to loan documents to the museum for exhibition purposes.¹²¹ In creating the exhibition, the archival contribution has to be kept in mind.

In the case of a celebratory exhibition, this concept is of primary importance. Taking, once again, the example of the World War II battle anniversary, a properly constructed celebratory exhibition would attempt to show the archives' connection to that battle. For instance, the archives could mount an exhibition focusing on the private papers of a participant, if it held them. However, if it simply exhibited items selected from various fonds which, taken together, made a statement about the battle, this could not be considered a celebratory exhibition. If no connection between the archives and the battle exists, the archives has no legitimate reason for mounting a true celebratory exhibition in its honour.

Indeed, the exhibition that highlights the archives' place

¹²¹ Rees, 1-2.

within the institution celebrating or commemorating an event in its past is the only legitimate celebratory exhibition that most archival institutions can justify mounting. Such exhibitions, however, are subject to many of the same problems encountered when mounting thematic exhibitions. They run the risk of violating various archival principles including the integrity and impartiality of the records and of their context. They also have to address the question of whether or not they should be interpreting archival material or using that material to tell a story. The necessity of promoting the position of the archives within the event being celebrated presents an additional problem for the archivist preparing a celebratory exhibition.

The Public Archives of New Brunswick, for example, has been creating exhibitions since it opened in 1967. The exhibition chosen "to mark the official opening of the Archives" was one focusing on New Brunswick photographer and artist George Thomas Taylor.¹²² Such an exhibition has the potential to be a useful celebratory one or a misdirected thematic one. If the exhibition is designed to draw attention to a particular portion of the new archives' holdings, thereby making the public aware that the new archives is open, and if it somehow uses the documents to demonstrate the types of records and services the archives offers, then it accomplishes its goals as a celebratory exhibition. If the exhibition only explores Taylor's work without showing the relationship between the documents used in the exhibition and the newly opened archives, it can be considered an example of a common

¹²² Allen Doiron, letter to this author, 5 December 1990, 1.

error in the creation of celebratory exhibitions. Simply because the exhibition is mounted in honour of an occasion, in this case the opening of an archival institution, it does not automatically qualify as a celebratory exhibition.

The City of Calgary Archives' exhibition program often includes exhibitions that celebrate or commemorate events. As an example, consider A City in Transit, an exhibition mounted in the spring of 1990 by the City Archives. According to the exhibition calendar, the exhibition celebrated the tenth anniversary of the City's light rail transit system (LRT) and, in so doing, aimed at providing "a retrospective look at Calgary Transit, since its origins in 1909 as the Calgary Municipal Railway."¹²³ In this case, the exhibition clearly focused on a particular subject from an historical perspective, examining its development over a period of ten years. It did not reveal much about the City Archives' relationship with the LRT's administration and, thus, about the archives' place in the LRT's anniversary celebrations. Another example, this one occurring in the summer of 1990, is an exhibition entitled A Foundation Laid Sure and Well. Subtitled Celebrating City Hall's 80th Birthday, the exhibition examined "the story of our City Hall and its predecessors, and the evolving civic centre concept that led to our present Municipal Complex."¹²⁴ Again, the question arises as to whether the exhibition was celebrating the archives' role within the

¹²³ City of Calgary Archives, "Calendar of Exhibits 1990-91," 1990, 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 1.

institution or simply the sponsoring institution, the City Hall.

Similarly, Above It All, an exhibition mounted by the Market Gallery on behalf of the City of Toronto Archives in the spring of 1986, provides an example of a celebratory exhibition gone wrong. The exhibition coincided with the tenth anniversary of one of Toronto's best known landmarks, the CN Tower. Using "paintings, photographs, maps, memorabilia, [and] newspaper clippings," the exhibition attempted to demonstrate the "wide variety of artistic interpretation that the Tower has enjoyed over the past ten years".¹²⁵ In doing so, the Archives adopted the historical approach common to the average thematic exhibition. The exhibition explored ways of looking at the CN Tower over a period of time, rather than demonstrating how the Archives and the archival material fit into the anniversary, if indeed it did.

On the surface, there seems to be no connection between the City Archives and the Tower. As was mentioned earlier, the primary mandate of the City Archives, officially known as the Records and Archives Division of the Department of the City Clerk, is

to maintain intellectual and physical control of all the records of the Corporation, from their point of creation through their final disposition, and to preserve materials of permanent administrative and historical value.

As is common in small or medium sized archival institutions, however, the total mission is much broader. In the case of the

¹²⁵ The Market Gallery, "Market Gallery Exhibits: Main Gallery," 1989, 12.

City of Toronto Archives, it also is mandated to acquire, through donations or loans, "maps, documents, photographs, architectural plans, fine art and artifacts that pertain to the City's historical experience" as part of its "commitment to preserving the memory of the City."¹²⁶ Consequently, the Archives can justify mounting an exhibition that focuses on a landmark such as the CN Tower. Instead of an exhibition that celebrates the Archives' place in the Tower's anniversary, it provides one that tells a story by means of archival material reflecting the activity of the Archives.

As an example of what is, on the surface, a celebratory exhibition attempting to maintain the context of the records and reflect their order, consider the jubilarian exhibitions mounted annually by St. Joseph Province Archives. The Archives' mandate not only is to acquire and preserve the records of the provincial administration of the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph's sole English speaking province, but also to acquire the personal papers of the sisters of that province. These exhibitions are mounted each summer in honour of the silver, golden and diamond anniversaries of perpetual profession of these individual members of the congregation, and typically use documents such as baptismal certificates, diplomas, correspondence, and photographs, ideally from each sister's private fonds. Mounted as an attempt to examine the lives of the "ordinary people" within the order, the exhibitions' targeted audience is the sisters themselves. As a

¹²⁶ Department of the City Clerk, The City of Toronto Archives, 1989, 3.

result of these exhibitions, the sisters are showing increased interest in archives, and making inquiries into what they should be keeping in their own personal papers.

Unfortunately, these exhibitions often get caught up in the idea of celebration and do not pay enough attention to the need to maintain the context of the material and respect other ideas basic to archival theory. For example, sometimes the records from an individual sister's fonds are supplemented by records from other fonds, by published material and by photocopies of original records. To add to the problem, the archives usually acquires sisters' records posthumously, rather than as regular donations from living sisters. As a result, most of the records exhibited either are copies of documents not in the custody of the Archives, or relate to particular sisters, but are not created or received by them. The focus of the exhibitions then becomes the documentation of individual sisters' lives, a pursuit in the tradition of the thematic exhibition, and not the demonstration of how the Archives figures in the sister's jubilee celebrations.

As another example, consider Aperçu: the Archives looks at . . . One of a Kind, an exhibition of daguerreotypes, ambrotypes and tintypes mounted by the National Archives of Canada in 1989. The creation of a public archives, the exhibition "celebrates the 150th anniversary of photography and demonstrates the use of these processes in Canada, and their progress throughout the nineteenth century." The exhibition used colour reproductions of photographs from the Archives' Documentary Art and Photography Division. Among them was a half-plate daguerreotype of the ruins of Molson's

Brewery in Montreal, probably following the fire of July 1852; a daguerreotype attributed to Thomas Coffin Doane; a half-plate ambrotype by Hollister depicting the American Falls at Niagara Falls circa 1865; sixth plate tintypes whose photographers and subjects are unknown and unidentified; a quarter plate ambrotype of the Wickens sisters of Brantford, Canada West, 1860, taken by an unknown photographer; and a half-plate daguerreotype of Thomas Kirkpatrick and family circa 1855, taken by an unknown photographer probably at Kingston, Canada West.

The exhibition's accompanying brochure states that

[t]hough often unattributed and unidentified, daguerreotypes, ambrotypes and tintypes are prized today for their relative rarity, as well as for their evidentiary value. These unique photographs record changing styles of dress, of family life and of attitudes towards portraiture and its promise of immortality. They are evidence of the enthusiasm with which new technologies were received by a nineteenth-century public fascinated by novelty and keen to document their times.¹²⁷

The exhibition fits into the celebratory category, in that it specifically celebrates an event that is important in relation to the National Archives' holdings. Unfortunately, the exhibition does tend to display the photographs as artifacts, rather than as parts of particular fonds. This lack of examination of relationships, however, is a reflection of the National Archives' tendency to separate media, rather than a deliberate attempt to build a purely thematic exhibition.

¹²⁷ National Archives of Canada, Documentary Art and Photography Division, "Aperçu: the Archives looks at One of a Kind / Aperçu: photographies d'archives - unique en son genre," Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1989.

The difficulty archives have in building proper celebratory exhibitions demonstrates the ease with which archivists construct thematic exhibitions. The creation of an exhibition that explores some aspect of history and develops an argument using material found in the archives seems natural for institutions that, historically, have been charged with the preservation of history. It has been shown, however, that the thematic exhibition and the celebratory exhibition that takes on thematic characteristics, by their nature, violate most of the principles archivists ethically are bound to uphold. Nevertheless, these still are the most commonly mounted types of archival exhibitions. There is a fine line, however, between those exhibitions that promote or serve the archives and those which are detrimental to them. In regard to the latter, there is little point in putting resources into outreach if that outreach sends the wrong messages to the audience. The answer may lie in the creation of institutional and instructional exhibitions.

CHAPTER FOUR
INSTITUTIONAL EXHIBITIONS

Bradsher and Ritzenthaler identify the institutional exhibition as the second of two major types of exhibition, the first being thematic. They define institutional exhibitions as those that "present archival institutions and their holdings in a favorable light by focusing on various archival activities, functions, and services."¹²⁸ As it is the case with their definition of thematic exhibitions, however, which includes the celebratory exhibition, their definition of institutional exhibition actually encompasses two distinct types between which there are fundamental differences, significant enough to warrant a separate discussion of them. The first type, the institutional exhibition, promotes the holdings and the archives. The second type, defined as functional, examines the duties and responsibilities of an archivist.

Casterline argues that, in general, exhibitions "show what a repository collects, preserves, and makes available to users". In her basic definition, however, she recognizes that differences do exist, not only between thematic and institutional exhibitions, but also within the institutional type itself. Like Bradsher and

¹²⁸ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 230.

Ritzenthaler, she believes that institutional exhibitions fall into two categories, but unlike them, she sees the first popularizing what the institution has -- in other words, its holdings -- and the second promoting the institution among various audiences, including the general public and the archival community itself.¹²⁹ As a popular example, Casterline cites the exhibition that examines "'Great Firsts" in the life of the institution, including little-known highlights reflected in unusual memorabilia." The exhibition that focuses on newly arrived accessions or on "[i]tems you wouldn't expect to find in an archives" also is an example of this type of exhibition.¹³⁰

Some writers believe the institutional exhibition has a significant role to play in an archives' exhibition program. Most, however, hold the opposing view regarding the importance of such exhibitions, arguing that their value is minimal. For example, Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, in combining institutional and functional exhibitions, note that although such exhibitions are useful, they are not particularly popular. They write that

[e]xhibits that focus on the institution can explain the nature and value of archives, describe the mission of the archival institution, and depict specific archival operations. While such institutional exhibits are not, as a rule, of great interest to the general public, they do serve a purpose and should be considered on a modest basis. These exhibits can provide an overview of the institution's holdings or highlight an important document or artefact acquired during the previous year. Such exhibits can also reflect the diversity of the archival record by presenting an historical survey of materials and techniques used to generate records and maintain

¹²⁹ Casterline, 8.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 12.

information.

Thus, according to Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, the institutional exhibition plays a small role both in describing what archives and archivists are about and in promoting the holdings of the archival institution. Its value is overshadowed by the thematic exhibition, which they view as far more important. Indeed, at one point in their discussion, they note that "[t]hematic exhibits generally exploit the subject strengths of the archives, thereby publicizing its holdings and possibly attracting new accessions."¹³¹ In this case, the promotion of holdings is seen as a secondary function of the thematic exhibition, rather than as a valuable goal of a separate and distinct type of exhibition.

Despite archivists' acknowledgement of the value, albeit minimal, of institutional exhibitions, achieving this type of exhibition's goals often is considered to be a secondary function in a thematic exhibition. The Archives of Ontario's thematic exhibition entitled Survivors / Les Survivants is a case in point. As was discussed previously, the exhibition examined the immigrant experience in Ontario. On a secondary level, though, the Archives saw the exhibition as "a demonstration of how archival documents and photographs can help us to understand our fellow Ontarians."¹³² It also used Survivors / Les Survivants as a vehicle for soliciting donations of archival records. To this end, the accompanying brochure proclaimed that the exhibition drew

¹³¹ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 230.

¹³² Archives of Ontario, 23.

attention to various groups of immigrants whose experiences were represented by selected portions of the Archives' holdings and that "[t]he Archives would welcome donations of historically important material to enhance our collections."¹³³ In this case, the exhibition was mounted primarily in order to explore a theme, but it also highlighted the usefulness of the Archives' holdings with an eye to acquiring new fonds.

The Provincial Archives of Alberta's exhibition entitled Northern Alberta Railways is another example of a thematic exhibition which also aims, on a secondary level, at promoting the holdings of the Archives. Dubbed a foyer display by the Archives, the exhibition consisted of three 72" x 25" display cases and wall mounted images, and examined the history of rail companies in Northern Alberta. These companies -- the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway; the Alberta and Great Waterways Railway; Central Canada Railway Company; and Pembina Valley Railway Company -- were sold jointly to Canadian Pacific and Canadian National by 1929 and united as the Northern Alberta Railways (NAR). Canadian National assumed complete ownership in 1981. According to the handout describing it, the exhibition

highlights sources of the Provincial Archives of Alberta which pertain to the NAR. Included in these are the records of the NAR itself, which were generously deposited by CN Rail. Other documents are taken from the records of government departments and from private individuals.¹³⁴

¹³³ Ibid., 1.

¹³⁴ Provincial Archives of Alberta, "Northern Alberta Railways," n.d., 1.

The point of the exhibition was to explore an historical subject and, to this end, it used records from various fonds in typical thematic exhibition fashion. It also played a secondary role in drawing attention to the holdings of the institution, in particular the records donated to the Archives by CN Rail.

From a broader perspective, exhibitions can be seen to

provide many opportunities to build good will between archivists and members of the various professional, social, and institutional communities to which they belong. . . . Through the arrangement of loans and cooperative exhibits, an archives can maximize its resources and develop stronger relationships with other institutions. Over time, the increased exposure can yield new sources of funding that strengthen the entire archival program.¹³⁵

If the exhibition promotes the holdings of the archives and the archival institution itself, rather than simply a particular theme, such exposure may lead to wider understanding and accurate interpretation of an individual archives' purposes and objectives. If this educational effect is directed toward the body to which an archives is accountable, these exhibitions may assist in justifying the archives' existence to its parent institution.

The scope of the institutional exhibition can be expanded by launching exhibitions in cooperation with other institutions. Casterline suggests that such exhibitions have numerous potential benefits:

[i]nstitutions located in major cities might consider cooperative exhibits in which each repository contributes materials from its own collections for display at one or all of the lending institutions. These arrangements

¹³⁵ Casterline, 8

maximize the audience, minimize competing events, and increase funding and participation. But they pose logistical problems that make them more difficult to manage over a broad geographical area.¹³⁶

Logistical difficulties aside, these types of exhibitions are useful in promoting the archives position or existence within a parent institution and within the geographical location in which the exhibition is mounted. These exhibitions promote each archival program's function, and at the same time demonstrate the complementarity and distribution of holdings within a given jurisdiction.

To some degree, archival institutions have recognized the value of the institutional exhibition, as well as that of the closely related functional exhibition, as a complement to those defined as thematic and celebratory. To this end, some have written the preparation of such exhibitions into their mandate or mission statements. For example, the City of Calgary Archives Administration Manual states that "the Archives promotes general awareness of its holdings and the study of local history through public programmes such as **exhibits**, lectures, tours and special events."¹³⁷ It goes on to state that the City Archives mounts two types of exhibitions, thematic, defined as those "related to a particular subject or event", and institutional, defined as those "related to specific archival functions."¹³⁸ The latter

¹³⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹³⁷ City of Calgary Archives, "Exhibit Policies and Procedures," 1991, 1.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 5.

actually are functional exhibitions, but the Archives' effort demonstrates an attempt to place non-thematic exhibitions on an equal footing with thematic exhibitions.

As another example, the British Columbia Archives and Records Service's Client Services Section's mission is "[t]o provide records storage, reference and library services to government departments, branch staff and the general public. To publicize the archival holdings and reference services of the branch." To this end, one of its goals is to "[p]repare and mount exhibits which display the holdings of the branch and which publicize the role and uses of archives."¹³⁹

Similarly, the library world recognizes the importance of this type of exhibition. Cushman, writing in a university library setting, argues that

[e]xhibitions are, first, a means of introducing the university community and its visitors to the rich resources of the library. It is surprising how many students--and occasionally faculty members--are ignorant of these resources. Acquainting an audience with a library's holdings can take the form of simply exposing the academic or broader community to a department of special collections or of informing a particular scholar about the acquisition of a certain item. More commonly, an exhibit will make known particular strengths of a library by displaying works or papers either drawn from a special collection or focusing on a given field.¹⁴⁰

Chadbourne, writing in a law library context, also sees value in the institutional exhibition. She argues that

¹³⁹ British Columbia Archives and Records Service, "Client Services Section Mission Statement", draft 6, 4 May 1989, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Cushman, 28-29.

[a]nother beneficial aspect of exhibits is that they lend themselves well to highlighting particular items, collections, accessions or small areas of concentration within the law library of which the general clientele may not be aware. Possible examples of such specialties are the personal-professional papers of the founder of a particular law firm, documents (in a state library) like old land grants and other topographical features, a complete set of the consecutive editions of a legal treatise, or a collection of legal memorabilia of a particular judge including documents such as his law degree, admission to the bar, official appointment to the bench, a bench photo of himself with his fellow judges, and perhaps his judicial robe.¹⁴¹

In her description of this type of exhibition, Chadbourne may be speaking from a librarian's point of view, but her suggestions reveal a grasp of the idea of respect des fonds.

The approach is different from that taken by museums, whose exhibition programs, it has been shown, focus on education and story telling as their raison d'être. One museum source writes that

[o]f the three basic functions of museums (preservation, research, and education), preservation is of interest to museum donors, research is of interest to scholars, and education is of interest to the public at large. Education, then, is the main museum activity to be exploited with publicity in realizing the museum's duty as a public institution.

The argument is preceded, however, by the reminder that "[t]he museum as an educational institution and a distributor of information has been discussed by numerous writers . . . , but relatively few people have discussed the problem of getting the

¹⁴¹ Chadbourne, 321.

public into the museum where it can be educated."¹⁴² Thus, despite their focus on education, the creators of museum exhibitions have to remember that if they fail to provide an exhibition that entices the audience into the museum, they fail to fulfil their educational function. To this end, the author goes on to argue that

[t]he local people may know of the museum but getting them to visit it, except when entertaining visiting relatives, is another matter. An active museum program, with new exhibits, illustrated lectures, planetarium shows, and so on, is necessary to attract local visitors, and this program must receive constant publicity by radio, television, newspaper, and other media. The nature of this publicity is . . . , the key to museum success or failure, assuming that the program is worth publicizing.¹⁴³

In this case, the museum relies on various outreach activities to promote its exhibition program, rather than on a particular exhibition to promote its holdings. The same can be said for archival institutions, albeit perhaps to a lesser degree, since exhibition creation is a smaller part of an archives' mission. If archival exhibitions cannot generate enough interest among their targeted audience to get that audience into the archives, their ability to educate becomes irrelevant.

Allyn, Aubitz and Stein touch on the idea in their article discussing the use of archival material in museum exhibitions:

[a]n exhibition encompassing a wide variety of documents can be an excellent vehicle for demonstrating that

¹⁴² Rex E. Gerald, "A Philosophy on Publicity for Museums," Curator 6 (1963): 125.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 126.

libraries and archival institutions hold interesting records in areas other than predictable ones such as politics, military affairs, and diplomacy.¹⁴⁴

Leaving aside the theoretical issues this example raises by combining archival documents and museum artifacts, mounting an exhibition that focuses on the diversity of archival documents is one method of illustrating the types of records and potential sources individual archives, or archives in general, hold.

Toronto to Scale, for example, a Market Gallery exhibition of more than 50 maps from the City of Toronto Archives representing 200 years of City development, was mounted "to promote greater awareness of the importance of cartographic records in documenting the history of Toronto".¹⁴⁵ While the exhibition does promote the idea of separation of material by media, it at least promotes a lesser known portion of the Archives' holdings and the usefulness of a particular type of record that members of the public may not readily consider as an archival source.

Kane, in writing about the experience of the Minnesota Historical Society, notes that the Society had the opportunity to mount an exhibition focusing on a particular type of record:

[s]uch an exhibit was installed in 1950 when the work of census enumerators stimulated public curiosity about the old census records. After the staff of the manuscripts department had brought out volumes several times upon the request of visitors, it was obvious that there was a public demand for a showing of this record. We assembled information on census taking in Minnesota, condensed the information on a label, and installed a volume of the 1950 census in a case. Although the exhibit was very

¹⁴⁴ Allyn et al. 404.

¹⁴⁵ The Market Gallery, 1989, 7.

simple, it provoked a new curiosity about records keeping. The interest of newspaper reporters in the volume brought out features comparing it to the current census.¹⁴⁶

The exhibition is fundamentally a thematic one, which also increased interest in a specific part of the holdings.

Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, although ranking the institutional exhibition as secondary in importance, make an interesting point about its usefulness. Such exhibitions, they argue,

can be mounted to show the contributions the archival institution has made to the community or the world of scholarship, by showing how records have been used to advantage by its various constituencies. For example, photographs used by historical preservationists to restore a neighborhood or a sampling of published articles and books based on the holdings of the archives might be displayed. Exhibits can be used to generate support or acknowledge contributions of a friends group.¹⁴⁷

Casterline agrees, noting that "[o]ne of the great challenges of exhibiting is to inspire the writers of books to make more extensive use of a wider range of sources."¹⁴⁸ The role of the institutional exhibition is, quite simply, to make potential users aware of these sources. In some cases, the exhibition serves to show wider audiences that records actually exist and how they can be used. In its early years, for example, the Minnesota Historical Society had no exhibition space, and its collections were stored in basements. "But hundreds of unknown treasures --

¹⁴⁶ Kane, 42.

¹⁴⁷ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 230.

¹⁴⁸ Casterline, 10.

notes Kane -- lay hidden in the vaults, known only to scholars who braved dust and confusion to "dig" among them."¹⁴⁹ The institutional exhibition provides the opportunity to draw attention to such items.

The "treasures" exhibition is a popular manifestation of the institutional exhibition. Treasures of the City of Toronto Archives, mounted in the summer of 1983, for example, was an exhibition of "over 100 paintings, artifacts, maps, documents and photographs which highlighted the extensive and significant holdings of the Archives" with the objective of "mak[ing] material available to the public".¹⁵⁰ Similarly, For the Curious, mounted in 1986, "displayed over 200 items from each category of the City's diverse archival collections, with the intention of fostering a greater understanding and appreciation of the archival collection administered by the Department of the City Clerk." The exhibition was comprised of "one of a kind artifacts, rare paintings, historical photographs, early maps, civic records and other important documents . . . [which] were recent acquisitions or donations that had never been shown before".¹⁵¹ Both are typical treasures exhibitions, which aim at highlighting the unusual or particularly significant parts of the Archives' holdings. Unfortunately, in this type of exhibition the temptation is to focus on selected items rather than on whole fonds or on how the items relate to one another.

¹⁴⁹ Kane, 39.

¹⁵⁰ The Market Gallery, 1989, 8.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 12.

A 1990 National Archives of Canada exhibition entitled The Art of Persuasion: Posters of the Empire Marketing Board, 1926-1933 better illustrates the problem. The exhibition featured posters from the Archives' Documentary Art and Photography Division. The Empire Marketing Board (EMB), created "to foster economic cooperation between Great Britain and its far flung Empire", had commissioned various poster artists to design posters that would encourage people within Great Britain to buy the agricultural products produced throughout the British Empire. According to the accompanying brochure,

[i]n the course of its brief existence [1926-1932], the Empire Marketing Board produced approximately 800 poster designs, and although thousands of copies were printed, few have survived. Fortunately, the National Archives of Canada has nearly 300 examples, most belonging to the remarkable poster sets. While the posters are still valued for their aesthetic qualities, they are also historical documents giving strong evidence of the political, social and economic will that offered new hope for prosperity and shaped the future relations of the Commonwealth countries.¹⁵²

Among the posters described in the brochure were two of the five poster sets designed for display in railroad stations. The posters are remarkable works of art and extremely eye-catching, but are published discrete items, and therefore, non-archival material. The exhibition does include EMB correspondence, but it seems almost secondary to the posters themselves, which are considered valuable due to the fact that only a few have survived.

¹⁵² National Archives of Canada, Documentary Art and Photography Division, "The Art of Persuasion: Posters of the Empire Marketing Board, 1926-1933," Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1990, 1-2.

They are not unique, however, only rare. Archivists then need to ask what sort of message this sends to the audience regarding the nature of archival material.

Such fundamental oversights subject institutional exhibitions to the problems of context and interpretation that can plague thematic and celebratory exhibitions. Vision: Isaac Erb Photography, for example, was an exhibition of 26 prints from negatives co-sponsored by the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, Kodak Canada and Wilson Studio, the latter having exclusive rights to the negatives.¹⁵³ The exhibition had potential to promote the acquisition of the work of a particular photographer. The overall impression given by the exhibition, however, is strictly thematic. Each print examined some aspect of life in New Brunswick around 1900, suggesting that the exhibition creator picked and chose the photographs that fit the theme from among the negatives.

Similarly, the Provincial Archives of Alberta's exhibition entitled Lac St. Anne Pilgrimage 1889 - 1989 focused on a new acquisition, but in so doing encountered some of the problems inherent in the thematic exhibition. Lac St. Anne, the first Roman Catholic mission in Alberta, had been founded by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1844. In 1889, a miracle apparently occurred in which natives received an end to a particularly bad drought after praying to St. Anne for rain. Traditional native prayers had not worked. Miraculous cures involving the lake water

¹⁵³ Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, "Vision: Isaac Erb Photography," n.d., 1-2.

were reported at the time as well, and consequently, an annual pilgrimage was established. The Archives mounted the exhibition in honour of its acquisition of the Anthony Lewis Photographic Collection. The collection "contains several hundred documentary shots of the 100th anniversary of the Lac St. Anne Pilgrimage in 1989". According to the exhibition's accompanying handout, "a selection [of these photographs] have been incorporated into this display."¹⁵⁴ Again, an exhibition that starts out highlighting an acquisition becomes one in which items within the accession are selected to support a predetermined theme. In a properly constructed institutional exhibition, the new acquisition should be the exhibition's central feature presented in the context of the acquisition policy, rather than becoming lost in the chosen subject.

Walter Edwin Frost, an exhibition of the City of Vancouver Archives, provides a better example of the institutional exhibition. According to its promotional brochure, "[t]his display is a representative sampling of one of the Archives' most significant recent acquisitions." Offering "a sampling of the entire Frost collection", the exhibition "presents images from the photographer's three main subject interests", namely Vancouver itself, railways and ships. The photographs documented views of the city from the 1920s to the 1970s, locomotives in operation in and near Vancouver, and maritime traffic in Vancouver. The brochure goes on to note that

¹⁵⁴ Provincial Archives of Alberta, "Lac St. Anne Pilgrimage 1889-1989," n.d., 1-2.

[i]n 1985 Walter Frost [a Vancouver amateur photographer] generously donated his entire collection of prints and negatives [approx 10 000 negatives) to the City of Vancouver Archives. Ordinarily, a display would not be mounted until the entire collection had been catalogued and indexed. This small display, however, is presented as a sneak preview to give Vancouverites a glimpse of a rich new collection that will be more fully available in the months ahead. It is only fitting that the city should see this collection in 1986; Walter Frost's donation is a very special birthday present to his city in its 100th year.¹⁵⁵

The exhibition accomplished exactly what an institutional exhibition is supposed to accomplish, to draw attention to some aspect of the holdings, in this case, a new accession. On a secondary level, it was also a celebratory exhibition which focused, as it should have, on the Archives' place in the City's anniversary, rather than on the City itself.

The Market Gallery's 1989 Arthur S. Goss: City Photographer exhibition also drew attention to a particular part of the Archives' holdings. Mounted "to give wider public exposure to a most important collection of historical photographs relating to Toronto", the exhibition consisted of selected images from the City's Department of Public Works' series of photographic negatives, and additional material from the private collections of Goss family members, collections of the Art Gallery of Ontario and the National Archives of Canada.¹⁵⁶ Goss had served as Official City Photographer from 1911 to 1940, working out of the Department of Public Works, and "[f]or nearly three decades, from 1911 to

¹⁵⁵ City of Vancouver Archives, "Walter E. Frost: Terminal City Photographs," 1986, photocopy of brochure, 1.

¹⁵⁶ Department of the City Clerk, "Arthur S. Goss: City Photographer," City of Toronto Archives, 1980, Preface.

1940, [he] systematically recorded municipal activities and projects in Toronto, primarily for the Works Department but also on consignment to other civic departments and agencies."¹⁵⁷

According to the exhibition catalogue

[t]he processes of cleaning, identifying and arranging revealed a collection of enormous value, in effect a visual record of the activities of the Corporation of the City of Toronto from before 1911 to 1950. The majority of the 83 separate series [from which the Goss images were taken] . . . document the daily operation of the Works Department -- the building of bridges, the laying of street railway tracks, the widening of streets. The photography section, however, had also worked on assignment for other departments producing, for example, over 2000 pictures of parks development 1912-1945 and a full record of a home renovation scheme operated by the City during the depression. . . . All of the photos produced by the Photography and Blue Printing Section [created in 1911 and headed by Goss when the City Engineers Office reorganized to become the Public Works Department] were taken for a specific administrative purpose, whether to illustrate a report or to monitor the progress of a construction project. However, some 40 years later these images have taken on a new meaning and usefulness as aesthetically pleasing and highly informative historical documents.¹⁵⁸

While the exhibition brings this particular and very useful part of the City Archives' holdings to the attention of the public, it also shows the activity of a particular city department, whose records it is the responsibility of the Archives to preserve. Even though approached from a somewhat thematic perspective -- the documentation of the Works Department's daily operation -- the exhibition attempts to treat the material in a truly archival fashion, bearing in mind its administrative history and its

¹⁵⁷ The Market Gallery, 1989, 2.

¹⁵⁸ Department of the City Clerk, 1980, 6.

connection to various series. Unfortunately, it selects the photographs from these series, and then chooses to arrange them by subject.¹⁵⁹ Overall, however, the exhibition succeeds in making the public aware of the Goss photographs, and perhaps ultimately increasing their use and generating additional interest in the Archives itself.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 9.

CHAPTER FIVE
FUNCTIONAL EXHIBITIONS

Like the closely related institutional exhibition, the functional exhibition harbours benefits that contradict its unpopularity. Often considered dull and uninteresting, if done well such exhibitions have the potential to educate the uninitiated about what archives are and what archivists do. Consequently, they are able to counteract some of the misconceptions about archives and archivists that are perpetuated by improperly mounted thematic, celebratory and institutional exhibitions. Jean Dryden makes the relevant observation

that exhibitions provide a skewed view of the nature of archival records because most exhibits use individual items that are "pretty". It leaves the viewer with an impression that archives want bits and pieces of material that is often ephemeral in terms of informational value. I have no evidence [Dryden goes on to say] that any archives got more funding or acquired a significant new collection as a result of any exhibition. Exhibitions undoubtedly bring people in the door, which may be a good thing, but I would also like to see proof of more tangible and long-lasting benefits, like a bigger budget.¹⁶⁰

If Dryden's fears are correct, archivists are allocating resources for exhibition programs which, in the final analysis, may or may

¹⁶⁰ Jean Dryden, letter to this author, 23 November 1990, 1.

not be justifying their expense. The immediate reaction may be to accept negative results -- the lack of new acquisitions or increased budgets -- and simply scale down or even eliminate the exhibition program. The less drastic alternative is to reevaluate the archival world's conventional approach to exhibition.

Increasingly, archivists are coming to the conclusion that, in mounting exhibitions, they need to focus on promoting what archives are and what archives do, rather than attempting to mount stylish thematic and celebratory exhibitions in the tradition of their museum counterparts. The aim is not to entertain the general public, or even to educate the audience about historical events, places, names, or objects. Rather, the aim is to educate and encourage that audience to use an archives as it was meant to be used. The archival exhibition should not be used simply as a means to break attendance records, but to help people understand what archives are about and to generate genuine interest in using them. If archivists follow archival principles in designing their exhibitions, and if they use exhibitions to educate the audience about archival theory, methodology, and practice, they can help counteract the many misconceptions the uninitiated often have regarding archives. The most obvious way to do this is considered to be mounting an exhibition that directly addresses the questions of what archives are and what archivists do.

Bradsher and Ritzenthaler include this type of exhibition as part of what they categorize as institutional exhibitions, namely "those that present archival institutions and their holdings in a favorable light by focusing on various archival activities,

functions, and services."¹⁶¹ As in the case of thematic and celebratory exhibitions, they see the two types as one, arguing that, through focusing on what archives do, the audience is made to understand what the term "archival material" means and what archival institutions aim to accomplish. Casterline calls this type of exhibition promotional, defining it, somewhat idealistically, as that which "focus[es] on various archival activities, functions and services in a deliberate attempt to project a favorable public image, expand public consciousness about the benefits of archives, and increase the number of patrons." On a more practical level, she adds that "[s]uch exhibits might be particularly useful at budget time."¹⁶² The functional exhibition's focus on activities, functions and services thus ultimately is linked to the idea of promoting the institution, part of the primary goal of the institutional exhibition.

The functional exhibition has as many thematic possibilities as there are archival functions and responsibilities. Casterline offers numerous examples, ranging from acquisition and arrangement and description to reference service and conservation. Her example of the latter uses "before and after examples of items that have been restored, conservators' equipment, [and] captioned photos of a conservator at work" to demonstrate conservation techniques and even some of the physical threats to archival material that make conservation treatment necessary. Her

¹⁶¹ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 230.

¹⁶² Casterline, 11.

acquisition exhibition "includ[es] correspondence showing how items were solicited by the archives and representative examples." The spirit of arrangement and description is explored by "contrasting a pile of unprocessed material with a processed file, complete with inventory, catalogue cards, and photos of processors at work." An exhibition focusing on reference service can examine the variety of uses of archives. Such an exhibition can "demonstrat[e] how the archives can assist with various kinds of [research] projects: how to trace your family tree, how to date the house you live in, how to gather information when deciding whom to vote for". As a final example, Casterline describes a catch-all exhibition entitled "A Day in the Life of an Archivist". In this case, the archivist exhibits any number of items

includ[ing] a typical day's correspondence (reference requests, carbons of letters soliciting donations, etc.); a completed NUCMC card and the item(s) it describes; a pile of rusty staples, paper clips and a staple remover; and any number of other objects and photos showing the kinds of tasks the archives performs.¹⁶³

Such an exhibition serves to remove some of the mystique that sometimes surrounds the activity behind the reference desk. Bradsher and Ritzenthaler echo Casterline's suggestions, arguing that the functional exhibition .

¹⁶³ Casterline, 11. Interestingly enough, Casterline's example of a reference service exhibition actually would demonstrate research methods with primary sources, and as such would be more properly categorized as an institutional exhibition. An exhibition on reference service would show how the instruments of research are presented to researchers and how the reference archivist uses the interview with the researcher, the archives' finding aids and his or her personal knowledge to help researchers.

can explain such archival activities as preservation and reference services. For example, [they suggest] an exhibit on preservation could explain reasons why archival records deteriorate and then present such institutional responses to this problem as microfilming, conservation treatment, and access and handling regulations. An exhibit on reference could assist researchers in exploiting information contained in archival records, focus on copyright and privacy issues, or explain how research is best accomplished in an archival setting.¹⁶⁴

If archivists use their imaginations, the possibilities for this type of exhibition are almost endless, potentially reaching beyond Casterline's and Bradsher and Ritzenthaler's suggestions into the realm of more advanced esoteric topics such as, for example, appraisal, legal issues and even diplomatics.

In the eyes of most authors on the subject, however, mounting thematic and celebratory exhibitions continues to take precedence over mounting institutional and functional exhibitions. In turn, mounting institutional exhibitions, which aim at promoting the archival institution's holdings as well as the institution itself, take precedence over mounting functional exhibitions, which basically educate audiences about archival theory, methodology, and practice. The popularity of the latter definitely is not of the first order. Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, for example, give it only grudging recognition, admitting that "[s]uch exhibits can be useful to the institution, for they may save staff time that would otherwise be spent in instructing researchers or reminding them of their expected conduct."¹⁶⁵ Like their institutional

¹⁶⁴ Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, 230.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 230-31.

counterpart, however, functional exhibitions have the potential to be a more valuable component of an archives' exhibition program than Bradsher, Ritzenthaler, Casterline, or, for that matter, most sources, consider them. They, along with institutional exhibitions, may provide an answer to the dilemma articulated by Dryden.

The basic purpose of functional exhibitions is to educate viewers about archival science, a subject that encompasses archival theory -- ideas about what archival material is --, methodology -- ideas about how to treat archival material --, and practice -- the application of theory and methodology.¹⁶⁶ According to Bradsher and Ritzenthaler, such exhibitions "can also be an effective means of teaching visitors what museum curators, archivists, and librarians do, how they do it, and why they rely on the public for assistance, donations, and financial support."¹⁶⁷ In so doing, the exhibition clarifies the often misunderstood differences between the professions. When Casterline argues that exhibitions serve to "teach . . . [people] something about the nature of archival and historical work" and discusses the educative function of exhibitions, she can be interpreted as referring to the functional exhibition's ability to educate viewers about archival materials and the archival profession.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ For further discussion of what constitutes archival science, see Terry Eastwood, "Nailing a Little Jelly to the Wall of Archival Studies," Archivaria 35 (Spring 1993): 233.

¹⁶⁷ Allyn et al., 404.

¹⁶⁸ Casterline, 8.

Librarians have seen the value of such a component in an exhibition program for some time. Cushman argues that, in addition to highlighting library acquisitions and holdings, exhibitions draw attention to "the work-in-progress of the library staff. It is important -- she goes on to say -- that the larger academic community be apprised of the library's activity in researching and processing its collections."¹⁶⁹ The type of exhibition that can do this effectively is a functional one. Chadbourne argues that

[i]f a library maintains even a small exhibit area with frequently changing exhibits, it is able to give readers, often harried by their immediate pursuits, the opportunity to refresh themselves with a break, to reflect, or just simply to relax. The user thus senses that his library is, after all, not just a storage house of cold judicial facts but also a human environment manned by library personnel who take cognizance of their patrons' tastes and broader interests, and of their esthetic comfort while using the library.¹⁷⁰

In this case, Chadbourne is not speaking specifically of the functional type of exhibition, but the effect she notes, that of humanizing the institution, is one of the goals of the functional archival exhibition. An exhibition that teaches visitors about the nature of archives and archival work demonstrates that archival institutions are more than storage facilities for old paper.

Arguments in support of functional exhibitions can be found in the museum world as well. The American Museum of Natural

¹⁶⁹ Cushman, 29.

¹⁷⁰ Chadbourne, 321.

History, for example, uses an exhibition of shrimps, lobsters and crabs to attempt "to carry the museum visitor well into the realm of basic research, with the hope that he may gain some understanding of how work on a form as far removed from man as a crab may be rewarding and in the long run extremely practical."¹⁷¹ The exhibition aims at teaching the public about the nature of the work of a natural historian. Similarly, an important goal of archival exhibitions should be to help people gain an understanding of a particular archival function or type of document.

Consider what the functional museum exhibition can accomplish.

If a natural history museum can succeed in interpreting basic research to the layman [argues one writer], and if in addition it can convey an understanding of the need for supporting both "practical" and what superficially appears to be "non-practical" research, it may be able to credit itself with a third accomplishment, that of having furthered the essential cause of adequate financial support for scientific research. A public that recognizes the value of basic scientific research is probably a public that is ready and willing to support it.¹⁷²

From an archival perspective, such an exhibition demonstrates the importance of various archival functions and helps the audience understand the functions. These exhibitions can have the same effect in explaining the practicalities of how to use archival material and the abstractions of various theoretical and methodological issues. This understanding of the profession

¹⁷¹ Dorothy E. Bliss, "A Museum Exhibit Interprets Basic Research. Why?" Curator 2 (1959): 216.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 217.

behind the institution mounting the exhibition has the potential to translate into increased use of archival holdings and even into financial generosity.

Another writer points out that

[s]pecialized museums, such as science and technology centers, frequently construct exhibits to illustrate or explain ideas or processes rather than to display items. The overall goal remains the same -- to increase the visitors' knowledge and understanding of the material exhibited and its relationship to their lives.¹⁷³

Again, the exhibition focusing on ideas and processes, in an archival context, can be used to explain the practicalities of what the archivist's job entails and the theoretical and methodological foundation on which the profession is based.

As an example, consider Tears and Cheers: The Olympic Bid Process, an institutional exhibition mounted by the City of Calgary Archives, the official repository for records relating to the XV Olympic Winter Games. According to the exhibition's accompanying brochure,

[t]he Olympic Collection includes documents from the XV Olympic Winter Games Organizing Committee, OCO'88, plus Olympic records from City, private agencies and individuals. . . . [and] consists of written documents, agreements, correspondence, photographs, blueprints, posters, pamphlets, reports, artifacts, audio tapes and original broadcast video tapes.¹⁷⁴

The exhibition notice for Tears and Cheers states that the

¹⁷³ Herbert D. Thier, "Developing Effective Exhibits for the Expanding Role of Museums," Curator 27 (June 1984): 93.

¹⁷⁴ City of Calgary Archives, "Calgary 88 XV Olympic Winter Games," 1990, 2.

exhibition examines "successful and unsuccessful Olympic bids from the 1950s to the present [and] features Olympic bid books from Calgary, Montreal, Toronto, Sofia, Bulgaria and Lillehammer, Norway."¹⁷⁵ As such, the exhibition draws attention to a particular type of record held by the Archives while, to a lesser degree, exploring an historical theme.

Alternatively, the exhibition could have been developed as a functional one. In this case, the exhibition might have documented Calgary's own bid process or one of the many organizational procedures undertaken by the Organizing Committee -- some aspect of the construction of Canada Olympic Park, for example -- using the correspondence and other material held by the Archives. Such records could be used in an exhibition to introduce the audience to such concepts as original order and levels of arrangement by building the exhibition around a particular transaction carried out by the organizing committee. If the archivists wanted to use the records to demonstrate more practical concepts, they could use the same series to mount an exhibition focussing on how they went about arranging and describing the records, and perhaps, even on initially acquiring them.

As an example of how archivists perpetuate misunderstandings, consider a comment made in Ann Thomas' review of Private Realms of Light: Canadian Amateur Photography, 1939-1940, an exhibition mounted by the then Public Archives of Canada. She writes that,

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., Exhibition Notice: "Tears and Cheers: The Olympic Bid Process," 1990, 1.

[t]raditionally, archival institutions have presented displays rather than exhibitions. More often than not photographic images, . . . rather than photographs, have functioned as purely illustrational adjuncts to the more important manuscript material. Occasionally, the photographs used for such purposes are originals -- cabinet portraits, tintypes, or cartes-de-visites -- scattered unceremoniously like trinkets, in display cases. . . . Photographs thus treated remain largely incoherent. They may function in an indifferent way as illustrations of an historical theme, but as documents with a syntax, a content, and a history of their own they are, in this context, subordinated."¹⁷⁶

An exhibition that treats photographs as documents which are part of a fonds will help audiences understand that archival documents are not artifacts.

Joel Wurl agrees that archivists need to communicate more openly with non-archivists regarding what their work involves, and argues that "[r]ecent discussions on enhancing the profession's image among the public . . . have concluded that archivists can and should encourage an appreciation of the curatorial methods they employ." He goes on to argue that "[t]hese principles and practices [of archival and conservation techniques] should not be considered by the lay person as entirely mysterious, incomprehensible, or even inapplicable."¹⁷⁷

A good example is provided by Arthur S. Goss: City Photographer, the already mentioned exhibition by the City of Toronto Archives mounted in 1989. The exhibition is a lesson in what archivists do, and how they go about their work. The

¹⁷⁶ Thomas, 136.

¹⁷⁷ Joel Wurl, "Methodology as Outreach: A Public Mini-Course on Archival Principles and Techniques," American Archivist 49 (Spring 1986): 184.

exhibition catalogue outlines the collection's custodial history, noting that it was one of a number of collections uncovered by the first City Archivist, A.R.N. Woadden, in the attic of Old City Hall in the early 1960s. Consisting of more than 26 000 glass plate negatives produced by the City's Photography and Blueprinting Section, the majority of the collection was salvaged and stored more securely. Cleaning and arrangement, however, did not begin until the Archives relocated to New City Hall in 1965. According to the catalogue,

[t]he delicate glass plates had been exposed for many years to the extremes of temperature and humidity in the uncontrolled environment of the Old City Hall attic. Stored in acidic envelopes, often three or four to an envelope, many negatives had fused both with each other and with their containers. Moreover, although the envelopes were identified and dated, many were torn, removed or otherwise rendered useless as protection and had exposed their contents to the elements -- dust, water and the local pigeon population had taken their toll. Following a procedure devised by the Archives' staff, . . . work proceeded on the negatives until by 1970 every glass plate had been removed from its original envelope, handwashed, and re-housed in separate envelopes, each negative dated and identified, and a complete inventory prepared.¹⁷⁸

The catalogue also provides a list of the 83 series titles of the Public Works Department photographic negatives, their arrangement being that of the archivists. The exhibition is an attempt, however, in the catalogue if not in the display, to explain to the public how archival material is arranged and preserved. An entire exhibition could be built around the process of rescuing the negatives and the archives' involvement in the process, rather

¹⁷⁸ Department of the City Clerk, 1980, 5.

than around "giv[ing] belated recognition to the life and work of a man who played a significant role in the history of Canadian photography."¹⁷⁹

Part of most archivists' reluctance to mount exhibitions that address these issues, however, stems from the belief that such topics hold little interest for the audience. That view is not necessarily correct. Wurl, for one, suggests that "[i]ronically, although archivists work hardest at marketing collections, it may be archival methods, particularly preservation skills, that most intrigue the general public." Satisfying that curiosity allows archivists to make an important initial connection with potential users. Wurl continues by arguing that

[p]eople who are wholly unfamiliar with the significance, usefulness, or even the meaning of archives often are extremely interested in learning how to manage and care for their own records. For instance, how many archivists, after trying to explain what they do for a living, have been greeted with the reply, "I have these old photographs in my attic what should I do with them?" The archivist's ability to satisfy such interests offers the opportunity to cultivate closer ties between the archival community and the rest of society.

Wurl's methods for making such connections are numerous and reflect some of the usual types of outreach in which archivists become involved. He notes that

[s]ome of the more common include lectures or workshops on basic conservation practices, consultation services about establishing archives, and assistance in producing historical displays for various types of community institutions or groups.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., preface.

¹⁸⁰ Wurl, 184.

The lecture, consultation and exhibition are common outreach activities that are used to educate people about archives. Wurl's goal, noble though it is, however, would be better served if the "historical display" he speaks of were replaced by the functional exhibition. Such an exhibition would be of more use in teaching people about archives and the profession than a strictly historical one whose focus on the development of an historical theme would perpetuate the idea that archives operate in a subject, rather than provenance based, universe.

As in the case of institutional exhibitions, some archives have recognized the value of functional exhibitions and have written their creation into their mandate and mission statements. For example, the British Columbia Archives and Records Service's mission statement for the Client Services Section mentioned earlier notes that one of the Section's goals is to "[p]repare and mount exhibits which display the holdings of the branch and which publicize the **role** [this author's emphasis] and uses of archives."¹⁸¹ Similarly, the City of Calgary Archives recognizes the importance of the functional role of archival exhibitions. According to the Archives' exhibition policies and procedures guidelines,

[t]he regular display of archival materials both in and away from the Archives will give people who would ordinarily not use the Archives the experience of seeing and reading about archival materials. It is important for the Archives to maintain this 'invisible' relationship with the public we never see (and doubtfully ever will) since, as the taxpaying public, we are as

¹⁸¹ British Columbia Archives and Records Service, 1.

answerable to them as to our civic administration.¹⁸²

Thus, the exhibition program is an important part of the Archives' outreach program.

Kane, writing about the experience of the Minnesota Historical Society, acknowledges the popularity of the thematic -- in her words, historical -- exhibition. She also notes, however, that the educational potential of the functional exhibition offers great value.

[t]he purpose of most of the exhibits discussed thus far [she explains] has been the presentation of subject matter, the content of history. We are, of course, interested in this type of education. But there are other kinds of instruction to be imparted through displays. One type fundamental to our needs is the encouragement of records preservation through a simple demonstration of the nature of manuscripts. Our experiences in collecting are common to most institutions gathering non-official papers. While valuable letters and diaries often go into the incinerator rather than into our vaults, well meaning people bring in useless papers they consider to be of great value military bounty land warrants, scrapbooks of miscellaneous clippings, and land deeds.¹⁸³

Even though Kane makes her argument from the perspective of an historical society, her objective -- to promote an understanding of the nature of manuscripts through exhibition -- can be accomplished in an archival context. Archivists are ethically bound to work within the principles of original order and respect des fonds and to preserve the nature of the archival material in their care. Functional exhibitions play a role in familiarizing

¹⁸² City of Calgary Archives, "Exhibit Policies and Procedures," 1.

¹⁸³ Kane, 43-44.

people with the theory, methodology and practice employed by archivists in respecting that work ethic.

In mounting this type of exhibition, archivists have to bear in mind the nature of the audience they are attempting to teach and focus on the needs of that audience when educating it about archival science. Kane notes, for example, that the Minnesota Historical Society "tr[ies] to combat uncritical preservation by displaying before groups who hold meetings in the building types of papers they should be saving and encouraging others to save."¹⁸⁴ The idea is equally applicable in archival institutions. Functional exhibitions focusing on acquisition can be designed to encourage and educate donors or those regularly transferring material to the archives, if no formal records management program exists, to give the right kinds of records. Such exhibitions offer the ideal opportunity to demonstrate the type of material the archives is interested in acquiring. They target both the records creators, showing them what to offer or transfer, and the users, showing them what is available and how to use it.

In analysing the general public as potential visitors to museums, one can identify a small group that is relatively happy and at ease with what it finds in the institution, and a much larger group of occasional or non-attenders -- the audience targeted -- for whom

the idea of going to a museum for a learning experience is not enticing or pleasing. It is exactly this large

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 44.

group of people that museums need to attract in order to broaden the base of museum relevance. It is this group, too, that finds the present nature of museums intimidating, but that is also less willing to find ways of beginning to understand museums. For these people the 'educational' aspects of museums are vital. and here we must be careful not to equate 'museum education' with 'classroom learning' in our minds.¹⁸⁵

In this case, the author is discussing education programs in general rather than specific exhibitions aimed at educating audiences about museums, but the point about intimidation still is valid. It is exactly how many people feel about archives. Archivists need to reach out to them, show them what archives are all about and make them less intimidating sources of information and evidence.

Rex Gerald argues that

[m]useums have acquired an image in the public mind as dull, dusty places in which one never finds anything more exciting than a stuffed owl or speaks above a whisper. This image, while deserved in the past perhaps, is now largely outdated, at least in the minds of museum directors. But how do we go about changing the image in the public mind?

He adds that "our main need is for a new public image of the museum and its function. Carefully oriented museum publicity can reshape that public image."¹⁸⁶ Similarly, archivists need to improve public relations and encourage people to understand the function of archives and correct their misconceptions about the nature of archival material. To do this, they need to be willing

¹⁸⁵ Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, "Some Basic Principles and Issues Relating to Museum Education," Museums Journal 83 (September / December 1984): 127.

¹⁸⁶ Gerald, 128.

to put more resources into mounting the functional exhibition.

CONCLUSION

In mounting exhibitions, archivists first need to establish the purpose of the project and to select a particular type of exhibition to create, bearing in mind their institution's mandate and the exhibition's targeted audience. However, they also need to consider the body of archival theory that guides the work of archivists. That theory demands that archival material be treated in a different manner from the material in the custody of libraries, museums, or any other organization that may create exhibitions. Thus, the nature of archival exhibitions is defined, in large part, by the fundamental concepts of archival theory. The theoretical limitations imposed by the nature of archival material limits the way in which that material can be used in an exhibition. Respecting these limitations helps to ensure that the exhibitions mounted by archival institutions send the most appropriate and valuable messages to their intended audience.

The basic types of exhibitions usually mounted in an archival environment have been identified in this thesis as four: thematic, celebratory, institutional, and functional. The thematic type of exhibition is an outcome of the popular perception that archives only deal with the preservation of history. To this end, it uses archival material to document an

historical subject, much as museums use artifacts to illustrate historical themes. The problem is that the development of the exhibition theme takes precedence over the principles governing the nature and treatment of archival material.

The celebratory exhibition draws attention to a person, place, or thing which warrants special recognition at a specific time. As the anniversary of a significant historical event approaches, an exhibition exploring some aspect of that event also provides some often needed publicity to the archives: in those cases where the occasion is well known, the archives would appear to be doing its part to aid in the celebrations; if instead the targeted audience is largely unaware of the occasion, the archives can use the celebratory exhibition to generate some awareness and understanding of the event in question. However, it might risk promoting the event, rather than the position of the archives within the event being celebrated. These exhibitions are subject to many of the same problems encountered with thematic exhibitions. They have the potential to violate various archival principles by presenting the material as discrete items, isolated from their documentary context. Also, the measure in which archival exhibitions are interpreting archival material by assembling items for the purpose of telling a story, should be addressed each time.

Less frequently found in an archival environment are institutional and functional exhibitions. The role of the institutional exhibition is to make potential users aware of the sources available in archives. In some cases, the institutional

exhibition serves to show wider audiences that archival institutions and their holdings actually exist. Functional exhibitions, on the other hand, are mounted in order to educate viewers about archival theory, methodology, and practice. Such exhibitions clarify the often misunderstood differences between professions in the cultural field.

An exhibition focusing on archival ideas and methods can be used to explain the archivist's work and the theoretical and methodological foundation on which the profession is based. The process of developing an understanding of the profession behind the institution mounting the exhibition and of drawing attention to the holdings and the institution itself has the potential to translate into increased use of archival holdings and even into financial generosity. Also, an illustration of the nature of the archival material and of its many interrelationships would make potential users knowledgeable about the infinite ways in which archival documents can be sources of information, and would make them understand why they cannot change the order of the material given to them in consultation, why they cannot always have the original of a document and so on.

In the eyes of most writers on the subject, however, mounting thematic and celebratory exhibitions continues to take precedence over mounting institutional and functional ones. In turn, institutional exhibitions are considered more effective, from an outreach point of view, than functional exhibitions. This author, however, believes that the functional exhibition and its institutional counterpart may be more valuable components of an

archives' exhibition program than most archivists consider them to be. These two are the types of exhibition that have the potential to bring the greatest benefit to the archives mounting them. In fact, archival exhibitions have the primary function of making the public aware and appreciative of archival institutions, of encouraging the use of archives, of informing about holdings, of educating on archival functions and services and on the nature of archival material, of encouraging donations, increasing acquisitions, teaching methods of research on archival sources, and encouraging further or new research. Institutional and functional exhibitions are, by definition, designed to accomplish these educational and promotional goals. Consequently, archivists need to focus their exhibition resources on the creation of these two types of exhibitions, rather than on the creation of the less useful, museum-oriented thematic and celebratory exhibitions that send the wrong messages to the audience.

Exhibitions that promote or serve the archives and those which negatively affect them, however, sometimes are difficult to distinguish from one another. Allocating resources for an exhibition program which, in the final analysis, misconstrues what archives are about defeats its purpose. Furthermore, although exhibitions can bring a number of benefits to an archives, even a relatively small exhibition can demand a large expenditure of time and effort on the part an archivist, resources that many archivists may feel should be devoted to the tasks of acquiring, gaining intellectual and physical control of, and providing access to archival holdings. Meeting the challenge of providing the

safest physical environment for the material also adds to their cost. In tough economic times, justifying the expense becomes even more difficult.

In order to reap the benefits of archival exhibitions, the archival institution has to be willing and able to allocate a considerable amount of financial and human resources to their preparation. The amount of committed resources, however, has to be in line with the secondary nature of the role exhibitions play in archival institutions. There needs to be some sort of balance between the cost of mounting exhibitions and the cost of carrying out the archives' primary responsibilities. In times of fiscal restraint, a natural reaction is put the resources that do exist into these primary responsibilities and to scale down, or even eliminate, outreach activities, including the exhibition program. In doing so, however, archivists lose a useful public relations tool at a time when positive public relations activity and visibility may be most beneficial.

A less drastic alternative is to reevaluate the archival world's conventional approach to exhibition, and, by extension, its approach to public programming. This thesis has argued that there are fundamental theoretical difficulties with the idea of placing archival material on exhibition. One solution for dealing with these difficulties is for archivists to look to more appropriate forms of outreach which can better explain the nature of archives and the work of archivists. The exhibition program, after all, is only one part of an archives' outreach activity. In order to be effective, however, this activity ideally possesses

the same institutional and functional focus as its exhibition component. It does not rely on a thematic interpretation of archival material, but instead offers information promoting the understanding of the nature of archival material and the archival profession. This applies regardless of the form the activity takes, be it, for example, a publication, an open house, or promotional video.

On those occasions when an exhibition is chosen as a method of outreach, however, it must be remembered that thematic and celebratory exhibitions, in particular, are based on an a-priori interpretation of the documents, and make it extremely difficult to present the material without corrupting its meaning. In fact, any archival exhibition, whatever its institutional context, purpose, audience, and type, must respect the nature of archival material. It must protect that material's impartiality, make all its administrative and documentary interrelationships intelligible, and authenticate its meaning by showing, with the material items, their immaterial context.

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