

SAVE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA - Backgrounder

Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the federal institution responsible for preserving Canada's history and cultural heritage, is under threat. Badly conceived restructuring, a redefinition of its mandate, and financial cutbacks are undermining LAC's ability to acquire, preserve and make publicly available Canada's full documentary heritage.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers is launching a campaign to "Save Library and Archives Canada" and is encouraging Canadians to act decisively now to prevent the demise of this vital national institution.

1. Background: LAC's Mandate and Collection

Library and Archives Canada has a mandate to:

- acquire and preserve Canada's documentary heritage
- facilitate public access to that heritage
- house a permanent repository of publications of the Government of Canada and related records
- manage information and coordinate library services of government institutions
- support the development of the library and archival communities

Records available at Libraries and Archives Canada include:

- books, by Canadians and about Canada
- records and publications for federal, provincial, territorial, and foreign governments
- records and publications of various individuals and groups that have contributed to Canada's cultural, social, economic and political development
- Aboriginal historical information, ranging from land treaties to maps
- short and full-length films, documentaries
- architectural drawings, plans and maps, from as early as beginning of the 16th century
- photographic images, captured since the 1850s
- video and sound recordings
- works of art, from watercolours to sketches and caricatures
- Canadian sheet music, Canadian music documents, and recordings of all formats
- the Canadian Postal Archives
- a collection of medals, seals, posters and coats of arms
- national, provincial and territorial newspapers from across Canada, from dailies to student newspapers, and from Aboriginal magazines to ethnic community newsletters
- periodicals, microfilms, manuscripts and theses
- portraits of individual Canadians, including genealogical and family history documents, such as birth, death, and marriage certificates, and census information
- documents from Canada's diverse socio-ethnic groups, including immigration records, land grants and petitions, music, and film

2. "Modernization": Threatening Library and Archives of Canada's Mandate

The administration at LAC is undertaking major restructuring under the auspices of "modernization." This is narrowing LAC's role and cutting back on service to the many Canadians who rely on LAC, including researchers, authors, documentarians, historians, families tracking their genealogies, librarians, and Aboriginal communities.

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The changes have already resulted in:

- reduced public access
- decentralization of heritage materials to third party providers
- elimination of vital specialist archivist positions, such as newspaper specialist, library scientist and government documents specialist
- compromised quality of LAC's collections because of cuts to the acquisition of materials

The modernization process includes a "representative acquisitions model" where only Canada's "essential documentary heritage" will be maintained, rather than a comprehensive and inclusive collection coordinated by expert librarians and archivists.

The "modernization" process has led to a dramatic cut in materials being acquired for LAC's collection. In May 2009, LAC announced a ten-month moratorium on all purchased acquisitions. While the official moratorium was lifted in January 2010, acquisitions have not resumed. Holes in LAC's collection are the result of this cessation of acquisitions and will be difficult, if not impossible, to restore retroactively.

LAC is now contracting out collections to public and private regional institutions, resulting in the loss of a unified and national collector of Canadian resources. The resources and services for maintaining nationally-significant material are not available at the regional level and must remain a federal responsibility.

Decentralizing national collections will lead to increases in research costs for individuals needing to use records at LAC and result in increased user fees, a lack of public accountability, and restricting public access. Simply put, contracting out Canadian heritage undermines LAC's objective to increase public access to services and materials.

3. Take Action to Save Library and Archives Canada

"The preservation and availability of documentary heritage often seems like the air we breathe or the water we drink – taken for granted until something happens to it!"

— UNESCO statement on documentary heritage

CAUT is asking Canadians to join in ensuring our history and heritage is preserved by Library and Archives Canada – the only national institution with the mandate and capability to fill this role.

We are calling for:

- Amendments to the *Library and Archives of Canada Act* to more clearly specify LAC's obligation to maintain a comprehensive collection of Canada's documentary heritage
- The funding required to fulfill this obligation
- Restoration of LAC's comprehensive acquisition of published material and archival records
- Restoration of public services, including access to archivists and librarians; access to the general reference collection; and re-establishment of specialist archivist positions
- End fragmentation of collections resulting from decentralization

For more information on the Save Library and Archives Canada campaign, go to www.savelibraryarchives.ca or contact:

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