

2023 Staff Report- The United Church of Canada Archives

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I'm writing this report in August 2024, 10 years, to the month, since I became Keeper of the Archives. It feels impossible that ten years have passed- a lot of work has been accomplished, and much more work waits to be done. Archives, by their nature, are always growing. The work is evergreen in its reward and relentlessness.

Reference

In 2023, I received 381 archival requests. 325 requests were for reference assistance, and 56 requests were for records management help or discussions about donations and transfers of records to the Archives. In addition, 35 in-person researchers visited the Archives, I presented to 6 groups/ classes, and 1 media outlet filmed a story in the Archives. In total, there was 1,596 points of contact with researchers.

Sioux Valley Dakota Nation invited me to speak at their Healing the Generations Conference. I was honoured to talk to Survivors, their families, and Community members, about how archival research can help in the ongoing search for missing children and unmarked burials.

I hosted a workshop about decolonizing the archives at our Annual Regional Council Meeting in June 2023.

My contribution to the excellent Manitoba Indigenous Tuberculosis History Project (MITHP) continued in 2023. The MITHP is an Indigenous-led and community-engaged Indigenous health history research project, which aims to empower and educate community researchers who are looking for kin who died or went missing after being sent to TB sanatoriums. One way the MITHP is accomplishing this is to try to demystify Archives. I participated in a series of videos produced by Strongfront TV, where I introduced the Archives, and talked about our collections, policies, and what to expect. The videos can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQuAg_c6n2IQj87u0Q6PglxIJGCFa44V

The General Council Archives is increasingly taking the lead on researchers accessing records related to Residential Schools. The GC Archives has digital copies of all of the TRC records held regionally as well as at the denominational level. It reduces barriers to access for Survivors and others to talk to one UC Archive, and receive one complete answer.

Summer Internship

From May to August 2023, I hosted an Archival Studies Intern from the University of Manitoba Archival Studies MA Program. She reviewed, and briefly described, all of the archival records that have been received by the Archives since 2019, that have yet to be completely appraised and described. She also processed a few small collections.

The Archives Circle Gathering and the Association of Canadian Archivists Conference

In June 2023, the archivists of the United Church of Canada gathered for a few days together in Sackville, New Brunswick to discuss common challenges and network. A few of our number carried on to PEI for a professional development opportunity at the ACA Conference. It was a great time for connection and relationship building.

Looking for a Second Location

Lack of storage has been a significant problem for the Archives since 1996. Then, the Conference hired an off-site storage company to store a portion of our records, and this has been an acceptable, if not ideal, solution for almost thirty years. However, the cost of off-site storage and delivery has increased exponentially, and since 2016 our bill has increased by over ten times! This is not sustainable.

In November 2023, I researched and presented to the Executive a series of options going forward, including hiring a different off-site storage company and leasing space within a United Church building. Both have pros and cons, and the Executive decided to pursue the latter option. This option provides me with better access to the entirety of the archival collection, and lessens the Region's financial risk, while also keeping funds within the UCC. Consultations with different Communities of Faith are expected to take some time.