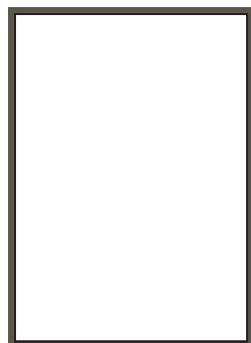


The Archives of Members of the Quebec National Assembly

by Speaker Michel Bissonnet, MNA in collaboration with Jocelyn St-Pierre

The National Assembly of Quebec has for several years been concerned with issues of institutional memory and heritage. Along with its partners, the National Archives of Quebec (NAQ) and the Archives Committee of the Amicale des anciens parlementaires du Québec (AAPQ), it intends to increase efforts with regard to parliamentary archives, more specifically the archives that it produces itself and those produced by its members or by other individuals or organizations having information on life at the Assembly. The Assembly wishes to conserve and promote documents bespeaking the achievements of the Members who made history, whether locally or on a larger scale.



It is a fact that in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada, Members' archives remain larger incomplete. In Quebec, since the creation of parliamentary institutions in 1792, some 2,343 individuals have been a part of Parliament as a Member, legislative counsel, governor or lieutenant-governor. These public figures sat in the Parliament of Lower Canada (1792-1838), in the Special Council (1838-1841), in the Parliament of the Province of Canada (1841-1867) and in the Parliament of Quebec since 1867. A systematic inventory of the archives groups of these very parliamentarians indicates that only 219 archives groups from 189 individuals are conserved in an archives

service. All in all, only 8 % of the aforementioned parliamentarians relinquished their archival documents. The results would likely be the same as regards the other provincial Members or federal Members. There evidently is a significant gap in our collective memory.

The term "archival documents" designates unique documents having evidential value and which concern the various aspects of an individual's life: childhood, studies, family, training, recreation, professional experience, social relations. Thus, in everyday life, a parliamentarian may produce and receive letters, reports, agendas, diaries, notes and speeches. He gives interviews and takes part in several public activities. These documents, which come in various forms – paper, diskette, audio recordings, photographs, video or film – are a reflection of his contribution to the development of the Quebec people and enrich Quebec's historical sources. The consultation of these documents enables researchers and citizens to understand the work of the Member and to have a comprehensive view of his achievements. All of these archives improve and complement the documentary heritage of Quebec.

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A Memorandum of Understanding

In view of the desire expressed by the authorities of the Quebec National Assembly to clarify roles and set out guidelines for workers as regards Members' archives, an agreement between the National Archives of Quebec and the National Assembly was necessary. This was a major challenge, since for over twenty years, such an agreement had continually been deferred.

On 12 March 2003, the *Memorandum of understanding on the archives of the Members of the National Assembly and of the Legislative Council* was signed by the National Assembly and the NAQ. This agreement specifies the responsibilities of each institution as regards acquisition, processing, conservation and promotion of the archives of parliamentarians. A single-window approach for archival group acquisition was established by the Library of the Assembly. Donation offers are transferred to the Coordination Committee responsible for the implementation of the agreement and for determining the place of conservation. Henceforth, Members having exercised a ministerial duty are invited to give their archives to the NAQ, since they complement the archives of the governmental administration. As for individuals having exercised a parliamentary duty, they are encouraged to give their archives to the National Assembly. Concerning the other Members, the National Assembly is especially attentive in this regard. It receives donation offers from the private archives of Members who did not exercise any ministerial or parliamentary duty. Such a Member may entrust his archives to the National Assembly or to the NAQ (regional archives centres or certified private archives services). Both partners recognize, however, that private archives produced in the course of a parliamentarian's private and professional life could be conserved in their place of origin. It should be noted that the desire expressed by the donator will strongly influence the selection of the conservation site.

Awareness and Training

Secondly, in order to increase awareness and to help parliamentarians and their personnel with regard to the management of their documents, two publications were jointly drafted by the National Archives of Quebec and the National Assembly: a pamphlet entitled *Vos archives, une contribution à la mémoire du Québec*, which briefly explains what an archives document is and how to conserve it. It accompanies a how-to guide on archives management: *Vos archives, une contribution à la mémoire du Québec, Guide à l'intention des parlementaires et de leur personnel*, which is intended for Members' staff and which proposes a typical classification scheme, records sorting

rules and a presentation of the various stages in the process surrounding the donation of an archival group.

In order to increase awareness on the importance of conserving parliamentary archives, the National Assembly has the intention of going even further. The Library of the Assembly expects to organize half-day information and training sessions for parliamentarians and their staff in order to answer their questions concerning the management of their documents. These training sessions will improve the support services already provided by the personnel of the Library via telephone or on site. These information and training services will address a need that has oftentimes been expressed by parliamentarians.

Along with the efforts undertaken by the National Assembly and the NAQ, the Archives Committee of former parliamentarians intends to establish a network composed of former parliamentarians and of regional archivists of the NAQ or of certified private archives services which will cover all of Quebec. Its mission will consist in identifying former parliamentarians or heirs thereof who are likely to have conserved political archives and urge them to give them to an archives service. A pilot project is currently underway in the Mauricie region and focuses primarily on the electoral division of Champlain. Following the analysis of results, similar projects will progressively be implemented in other regions of Quebec. In addition to the archives of former parliamentarians, this project should enable the collection of documents of political party advisors who made their mark, those of front-line organizers, of defeated candidates, but also documents from political parties and those produced during elections or referendums.

Promotion of the Archives of Parliamentarians

It is praiseworthy to conserve memory, but archives documents must be accessible. For this purpose, the Library has the intention of electronically publishing the *Guide des archives des parlementaires québécois*. This will be the third edition of the *Inventaire des fonds d'archives relatifs aux parlementaires québécois*. This guide will serve as an on-line reference aid and search tool which will be accessible on the Internet site of the National Assembly. For each parliamentarian, one will find a biography, a photograph, the texts of his speeches in the Quebec National Assembly and a reference to his archives groups. This subject guide will enable the user to find the archives documents of Members and of former legislative advisors and to locate the archives services where they are conserved here in Quebec or elsewhere in Canada. The on-line availability of this search tool will no longer be restricted to clientele that traditionally consult ar-

chives services, but will be extended to anyone in search of information.

Ever-mindful of promoting the archival heritage of parliamentarians, the National Archives of Quebec and the National Assembly have agreed, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of Quebec City celebrations in 2008, to jointly present an exhibition on the archives of parliamentarians, the theme will be *Quebec City, Political Capital*.

Offsetting the Assault of Time

The National Assembly of Quebec, in close collaboration with the National Archives of Quebec and the Amicale des anciens parlementaires du Quebec, wishes

that the memory of the actions of parliamentarians be not only conserved and accessible, but also promoted. Each parliamentarian embodied the hopes and expectations of his constituents: If no traces are left, how are we to remember him? If he leaves behind evidence of his achievements, his passage in politics will not have been in vain. Owing to these historical documents, future generations will benefit from these experiences, understand their present and better prepare their future. On 14 May 1874, Oscar Dunn wrote, in *L'Opinion publique*: "Let us therefore consider safeguarding from the assault of time the memory of those who honour our homeland". Such is sound advice from the close of the 19th century that our generation should hasten to follow.