

**TELLING STORIES AROUND THE “ELECTRONIC CAMPFIRE”:
THE USE OF ARCHIVES IN TELEVISION PRODUCTIONS**

BY

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**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

**Department of History (Archival Studies)
University of Manitoba
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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to develop an archival perspective on the use of archival documents in television productions and to explore the significant public programming opportunities presented to archivists by the growing history-on-television industry. It will be argued that television has become a significant "teacher" of history and that it is essential that archivists acquire a basic level of visual literacy. Archivists need to be able to view television programmes and the television production process critically. While some debate over the merits of historical television programmes and films has developed in the literature of professional historians, such archival literature is limited. The contextual approach to archives, grounded in the idea that the intellectual focus of archival administration is knowledge of the history of the records or the context of their creation, will provide the theoretical lens through which the use of archives on television will be analyzed. This study incorporates a number of components, including research into television programmes which use archival documents, an interview and correspondence with archivists who have worked with the television clientele, a survey of documentary producers and researchers, and an archival critique of one prominent televised Canadian documentary, *No Price Too High: Canadians and the Second World War*. The thesis will conclude with several suggestions to archivists for public programming designed to facilitate and improve the uses of archives in television broadcasting. The thesis will show that archivists can make a vital contribution to historical understanding and the public interest by taking advantage of opportunities provided by television.

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Kathleen Epp
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Introduction

As the twentieth century comes to a close, history is being discussed and discovered through a wider variety of media formats than ever before, and history-based audio-visual productions in particular appear to be capturing the minds and imaginations of an ever-growing audience. Feature films exploring a wide range of historical topics, such as *Titanic*, *Schindler's List*, *Braveheart*, and *Elizabeth*, continue to achieve both popularity and acclaim. They seem to ignite an interest in history in the viewing public, whether or not the films are deemed historically accurate. Audio-visual presentations of history, however, are not limited to the big screen. History has also garnered a presence on the small screen, as the television industry has increasingly discovered the entertainment value and the audience growth potential of historical programming. Eminent documentary producer Ken Burns has defined television as the "electronic campfire" around which people gather to learn, to debate and to be entertained by the past.¹ Historical content on television, whether in the form of drama, documentary or within a newscast, is probably making a significant impact on the historical consciousness of society. Through this programming, more people than ever before are viewing or hearing archival documents. To the archival profession, which has often lamented the relatively small proportion of society

¹Robert Brent Toplin, "Introduction," in Robert Brent Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's THE CIVIL WAR: Historians Respond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), xxii; Thomas Cripps, "Historical Truth: An Interview with Ken Burns," *American Historical Review* 100, 3 (June 1995), 741, 749, 760; and *The West* web site <<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/>>.

which actually enters an archives and directly uses archival holdings, wide-ranging "access" to archival documents through television presents an important opportunity to increase and improve the visibility and role of archives and archivists in society. Both the makers and the viewers of television programmes which use archival documents represent a significant audience for archival public programming. This opportunity challenges archivists to increase their own visual literacy and to participate actively in the very public, and often very animated, processes of remembering history.

The purpose of this thesis is to develop an archival perspective on the use of television in "writing" history and the use of archival documents therein. Television's contribution to the fostering of historical memory in society will be examined. It will be argued that television has become a significant "teacher" of history. It is, therefore, essential that archivists and television viewers in general acquire a basic level of visual literacy. Archivists need to be able to view critically television programmes and to understand the ways in which archival sources are used, or misused, in these productions. The thesis will explore the challenges, benefits and drawbacks of using television for the presentation of historical facts and interpretations. While some debate over the merits and deficiencies of historical television programmes and films has appeared in the literature of professional historians, such archival literature is limited. This project will attempt to stimulate more discussion among archivists of the uses of archives on television. It also aims to make a contribution to the archival literature on public programming. It will discuss an increasingly important but so far largely

overlooked use and user of archival records. With the development of a greater degree of visual literacy or the ability to read critically the televised use of archival records, archivists will be better able to provide knowledgeable assistance to television clientele and the general viewing public.

The contextual approach to archives will provide the theoretical lens through which the presentation of archives on television will be analyzed and assessed. The contextual approach is the intellectual foundation of the archival profession.² It moves archivists beyond a content and/or subject orientation to a respect for and study of the origins of the records themselves. The approach asserts that the integrity of archival records is protected only when they are understood in relation to their provenance. Knowledge of the creator of a record, the functions of the creating office or individual, the purpose for which records are created, the form of the records, recordkeeping systems and the original order of records are components of contextual information which are employed by archivists to appraise, describe and provide access to archival records. Further understanding of a record is gained through the exploration of the societal context in which records were created or the history of a particular medium of communication. Finally, the history of an archival record might also

²See, for example, discussions of the contextual approach in David Bearman and Richard H. Lytle, "The Power of the Principle of Provenance," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter 1985-86), 14-27; Terry Cook, "From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-85), 28-49; Tom Nesmith, "Hugh Taylor's Contextual Idea for Archives and the Foundation of Graduate Education in Archival Studies," in Barbara Craig, ed., *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 13-37; Tom Nesmith, "Introduction," in Tom Nesmith, ed., *Canadian Archival Studies and the Rediscovery of Provenance*, (Metuchen, N.J. & London: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1993), 1-28.

include a history of its use, the granting of "archival" status through appraisal and description and, ultimately, its use by researchers. The more that is known about the life of a record, the more valuable the record is as evidence of past actions and events. Records appraised or described with no regard for their provenance, on the other hand, lose their integrity as evidence. The content of a letter or a memo, for example, has limited meaning if its author or office of origin are unknown. Similarly, a film clip which has no identifying information (date of creation, the creator or the location) other than the images on the screen cannot be accorded the status of evidence. Contextual knowledge provides the key to the interpretation of archival documents and is the essential information through which both archivists and the users of archives can find meaning in the words and images contained within the documents. By assisting both the direct and the indirect users of archives to understand the nature of archival records and to examine critically their use in historical productions, archivists will position themselves in new ways, not only as experts on the uses of the archival record, but as active contributors to the societal process of remembering and interpreting the past.

Chapter one will present a review of the archival literature related to public programming. In so doing, the chapter will examine the two main schools of thought on the relations of archives to the public. They have been defined as the "client-centred" and "materials-centred" approaches. More specifically, this chapter will look at the various archival perspectives on the relationship of archivists to the users of archives and to society as a whole. In this chapter, it

will be argued that archivists should adopt a more active role in promoting public memory and in defending the integrity of the archival record beyond the archival repository. It will be argued that the "materials-centred" approach need not negate the outward-looking attitude promoted by "client-centred" advocates. Rather, archivists should use their knowledge of archival documents as the focus of public programming services and the promotion in society in general of a more critical eye in viewing archives on television.

Chapter two will explore the uses of archives on television in order to indicate the variety of television programmes which use archival sources. The introduction of channels devoted solely to historical programming and the success of Ken Burns's historical documentaries, including *The Civil War* and *Baseball*, will be discussed.

Chapter three will outline and illustrate the key aspects of an archival response to the use of archives on television. The chapter will examine the benefits, drawbacks and complexities of presenting both history and archives on television. Criteria for critiquing television productions from an archival point of view will be proposed. Archivists' opinions of and experiences with historical television productions will be included from surveys and an interview conducted by the author for this study. As well, former Canadian Broadcasting Corporation archivist Ernest Dick's analysis of the controversial Canadian documentary *The Valour and the Horror* will provide an example of an archival examination of a historical television series.

Chapter four will provide an archival review of an historical documentary

using the criteria outlined in chapter three. *No Price Too High: Canadians and the Second World War*, which first aired in 1996, will be the subject of the review.

Some comparisons will be made to its counterpart, *The Valour and the Horror*.

The use of archives and the incorporation of actual documents into the programmes will be the subject of inquiry. The contextual approach to documentary analysis will guide this critique.

Finally, chapter five will propose several ideas for archival public programming which address the challenges and opportunities presented by the increasing use of archives on television. These ideas are intended to encourage the development of visual literacy among archivists, a better understanding of documentary makers as users of archives, and a vision for more active participation in public discussions of history on television. The conclusion will include the responses of documentary makers (producers and researchers) to a survey conducted for this study which asked about their experiences with and impressions of archivists and archival institutions.

Television is now an important medium for relaying and teaching history and there is a need for intelligent and critical viewing. This thesis will show that archivists may find new ways to contribute to the collective memory of society, by helping both television producers and viewers to interpret the past with fuller understanding of the nature of the documents being used or presented. As archival records move out of their vaults and to new uses and audiences on the television screen, so too must archivists consider a further move beyond the

walls of their institutions. They ought to become more visible as educators in devising uses of the archival record which respect knowledge of the context of their creation. In so doing, archivists will continue to play an important role in shaping the collective memory of their society.

Chapter 1

Archivists Reaching Out: A Review of Literature Related to Archival Public Programming

On 21 March 1996, archivists were launched into prime time situation comedy television. On this night, the pilot show of NBC's *Boston Common* was aired and viewers were introduced to a secondary character named Leonard Prince, a reclusive, awkward and largely irrelevant archivist whose arcane specialty is eighteenth-century New England footwear. Even before the show had been launched, there was lament once again on the Archives and Archivists listserv of the proliferation of baneful stereotypes of archivists.¹ The characterization of the archivist in *Boston Common* and the reaction of the archival community strike at the core of the issues and challenges in archival public programming as well as the power of television. The literature on public programming has developed considerably over the last decade, as archivists have been motivated to explain the rationale for their work, particularly in the face of fiscal restraint and downsizing, and to understand their relationship to the wider society they serve. Included in this discussion are concerns about the image of archives and archivists in society, the perceived lack of understanding

¹For example, Barbara Floyd, "Archivist in TV sitcom," Archives and Archivists Listserv <ARCHIVES@MIAMIU.ACS.MUOHIOEDU>, 21 March 1996. Responses to this post were generated on 21 and 22 March 1996 by Elizabeth Cassidy, Paul Gray, Jim Whittington, Glenn T. Smith, Weston Thompson, and Daniel German. This phenomenon re-occurred in October 1996, on the same listserv, when the discussion of archivists on television and in the movies started again and postings poured in, listing the various productions on which archivists have been featured, usually in the same stereotypical manner. See the archives of the Archives and Archivists Listserv <<http://listserv.muohio.edu/archives/archives.html>>.

of and appreciation for archival institutions, and the need to identify current and potential users of archives in order to deliver the best possible service.

This chapter will examine various archival perspectives on the relationship of archivists to the users of archives and to society as a whole. The two main schools of thought on public programming, the "client-centred" and the "materials-centred" approaches, will be outlined. It will be shown that there is a significant gap in the literature in regard to the use of archives on television, the implications of wide-reaching indirect "access" to archives through television, as well as the opportunities for outreach and education provided by television. The argument will be made that archivists should adopt a more assertive role in promoting public memory and in sharing their understanding of the archival record beyond the archival repository and, in particular, as it is used in television. It will be argued further that the "materials-centred" approach need not negate the outward-looking attitude promoted by "client-centred" advocates. Rather, archivists should use their knowledge of archival documents as an impetus for public programming and for promoting an appreciation of the characteristics and uses of the archival record among both indirect and direct users of archives.

Archival institutions face a significant challenge in their attempt to communicate effectively with the public, in order both to foster financial support and to encourage wide use of their holdings. American archivists Mary Jane Pugh and Elsie Freeman were among the first archivists to identify problems in

the relationship of archives to the public.² Each challenged traditional assumptions about the users of archives and questioned the applicability of conventional finding aids and public service in serving the needs of archival users. Furthermore, both Pugh and Freeman argued that the archival principle of provenance might in fact complicate and frustrate a researcher's quest for information.

Elsie Freeman's writing has become a starting point for the debate surrounding public programmes for archives. She classified her approach to archival administration as "client-centred," under which an archives would devote itself to systematic studies of the users and uses of archives:

... the identity and the research habits of our users - who they are, how they think, how they learn, how they assemble information, to what uses they put it - must become as familiar a part of our thinking as the rules of order and practice (sometimes called principles) that now govern the acquisition, processing, description, and servicing of our records.³

Freeman would, thus, restructure archives so that the knowledge of archival clients' needs and wants would be the reference point for all archival functions, instead of being guided first by the traditional archival principles. The tasks of appraisal, arrangement, description and conservation would be tailored to the perceived needs of the contemporary user. In Freeman's argument, the duty of

²Mary Jane Pugh, "The Illusion of Omniscience: Subject Access and the Reference Archivist," *American Archivist* 45, 1 (Winter, 1982), 33-44; Elsie T. Freeman, "Buying Quarter Inch Holes: Public Support Through Results," *The Midwestern Archivist* 10 (1985), 89-97; and "In the Eye of the Beholder: Archives Administration From the User's Point of View," *American Archivist* 47, 2 (Spring 1984), 111-123.

³Freeman, "In the Eye," 112.

the archival institution, as it relates to the wider society, is to provide efficient service and easy access to the information which users desire. Provenance, then, is viewed as something to be weighed in terms of its relevance to optimum use of records and not as a guiding principle which is used to protect the integrity of records as evidence.⁴ Information on researchers, as opposed to contextual knowledge of records, would guide the creation of imaginative, user-friendly finding aids, geared to various user groups and not, as she maintains, intelligible only to archivists.⁵ User information would also be used to develop a public relations program targeting the myriad of current and potential users and user groups.⁶ Freeman, thus, would create an archival institution which caters directly to and is guided by its public, leaving archival principles and the potential "needs" of the archival record itself to be subject to such market-defined determinants as efficiency and demographics.

In a 1986 article, American Paul Conway examined further the need for systematic study of who uses the archives and why.⁷ Conway, like Freeman, focused on the needs of users, and gave scant attention to the archival record.⁸

⁴Ibid., 120-122.

⁵Ibid., 117-120.

⁶Freeman, "Buying Quarter Inch Holes," 96.

⁷Paul Conway, "Facts and Frameworks: An Approach to Studying the Users of Archives," *American Archivist* 49 (Fall 1986), 395, 399.

⁸Ibid., 399. Conway's use of "integrity" as one of the criteria through which he looks at the use of archival records, for instance, is concerned solely with the physical defence of the record and the protection of the record for further use. However, no consideration is given to the preservation of the *intellectual* integrity of the record.

Notably, however, Conway broadened the definition of a user, challenging archivists to look beyond the direct users of archives to the indirect or "invisible" users who never enter an archival institution. Thus, he defined the user as "all beneficiaries of historical information."⁹ In addition, Conway recommended that archivists study the use of archival records so that they might understand more keenly the societal role of archives and the impact of archival records on the study of history.¹⁰ Conway argued, then, that archivists must go far beyond the repository, examining the wide variety of users and uses of archives, in order to be better able to provide service and to promote increased use of archival holdings.

While Conway focused on user studies, other American archivists such as David Gracy and Randall Jimerson have called on archivists to address both the perceptions and the practices of the archival profession which act as obstacles to effective relations with the public.¹¹ Gracy argued that archivists have perpetuated an image of themselves as minimally relevant, stagnant and akin to one who delights in finding "value beyond reckoning in what others discard."¹² He stated further that archivists' own understanding of their work is problematic

⁹Ibid., 396.

¹⁰Ibid., 398, 400.

¹¹See David Gracy, "Archivists, You Are What People Think You Keep," *American Archivist* 52 (Winter 1989), 72-78; and "Is There a Future in the Use of Archives?" *Archivaria* 24 (Summer 1987), 3-9; Randall C. Jimerson, "Redefining Archival Identity: Meeting User Needs in the Information Society," *American Archivist* 52 (Summer 1989), 332-340.

¹²Gracy, "Archivists, You Are," 73.

because they have traditionally emphasized the preservation of "noncurrent records" for "use at a later time."¹³ Conversely, Gracy contended that the public needs to be shown that archives are relevant *now*, "vitaly and broadly important to the contemporary world."¹⁴ Both Gracy and Jimerson argued that archivists must redefine their identity and integrate themselves more effectively into the institutions and societies they serve. They held that archivists must market their profession, develop programs to target user groups, make themselves indispensable to their resource allocators, and take advantage of the "value of nostalgia" in the wider society.¹⁵ Jimerson and Gracy, thus, would bring the archivist out of the dark, dingy basement into the world of aggressive networking and self-promotion.

Following the call for a redefinition of the archival profession, Canadian archivists Gabrielle Blais and David Enns challenged their colleagues to include public programming as a core archival function, instead of maintaining it at the "periphery of archival tradition."¹⁶ Public programming would become a matter of ongoing consideration. It would inform but not necessarily guide (as in Freeman's conceptualization) all archival work. Blais and Enns discussed four

¹³Gracy, "Is there a Future," 5; in "Archivists, You Are," 74, Gracy quotes the Society of American Archivists' definition of archives as "the noncurrent records of an organization or institution preserved because of their continuing value."

¹⁴Gracy, "Is there a Future," 5.

¹⁵Jimerson, "Redefining Archival Identity," 337-339.

¹⁶Gabrielle Blais and David Enns, "From Paper Archives to People Archives: Public Programming in the Management of Archives," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), 101-102.

components of public programming which are central to this re-orientation of archival institutions: image, awareness, education and use.¹⁷ Like Gracy and Jimerson, Blais and Enns proposed that archivists need to be concerned with their image in society and should promote an image of dynamism, vitality and relevance. This would be done, at least partially, through awareness raising activities such as exhibitions, publications, and cooperative programs with school systems.¹⁸ In addition, archivists should be more active in developing education programmes for users of archives which explain to them the "intellectual tools" (or archival principles, structures and research strategies) needed in effective archival research. This would ensure that researchers would have a more satisfying experience, as they would be more capable of navigating their way through the records.¹⁹ In the end, Blais and Enns argued that "use provides the ultimate justification for archives"²⁰ and that traditional one-on-one reference service is inefficient. Archival energies would be better channelled into the production of better finding aids and user studies.²¹ Blais and Enns have called archivists to a more inclusive appreciation of archival clientele. They said that archivists should incorporate the needs, characteristics, and interests of all potential user groups into the daily tasks of the archivist.

¹⁷Ibid., 103.

¹⁸Ibid., 104-105.

¹⁹Ibid., 106-107.

²⁰Ibid., 107.

²¹Ibid., 107-108.

American Timothy Ericson continued the discussion of the use of archives and argued that, in their very focused attention on the archival record, archivists have failed to promote adequately the use of their materials. Like Blais and Enns, he would also include outreach as an integrated, ongoing archival function and not a mere "afterthought" to the traditional central tasks. Instead, he states: "The *goal is use* Identification, acquisition, description and all the rest are simply the *means* we use to achieve this goal."²² Rather than assuming a minimal future use of records, archivists must actively promote their holdings and perform their functions in a way that attracts a high level of use. Ericson argued that society in general is interested in archival (historical) records. Archivists must capitalize on this interest, anticipating and organizing commemorations of historical events and the celebration of anniversaries, and place archives at the centre of a society's need and desire to remember the past.²³

In his article "Towards a Vision of Archival Services," Canadian Ian Wilson shifted the discussion of client-centred archives by stating a vision for archival institutions which would be based on the premise of free and equitable access to all citizens. Wilson asserted that archives could emulate museums, which have become major tourist attractions and have thus established a diverse audience and support base. Wilson argued that archives have not promoted equal access and, in fact, that they have been structurally and intellectually oriented toward the

²²Timothy L. Ericson, "Preoccupied with our own Gardens': Outreach and Archivists," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), 117.

²³*Ibid.*, 118-119.

elite, academic researcher.²⁴ Unlike museum visits, visits to the archives are generally time-consuming and dependent on the expertise of an archivist.²⁵ He added that such features as hours of operation (often limited to the working day), inadequate publicity (geared to scholarly users) and the difficulty of doing research without going to the archives all create barriers which prohibit many potential users from using the archives.²⁶ Essentially, then, it is Wilson's position that all citizens have a right to equitable and free access to public archival holdings and, therefore, it is the obligation of archives to ensure that this is provided and that favouring of one user group over another is not justifiable.²⁷

The client-centred approach, as defined by these authors, has argued clearly for the importance of tailoring archival services and functions to the needs and demands of the users of archives. It is, indeed, essential for archivists to examine users more closely, to look at the variety of users which enters archival institutions, to work continually towards better service and to develop outreach programmes which might target new or "invisible" users. Clearly, archivists will be better able to promote their institutions if they comprehend more fully their

²⁴Ian Wilson, "Towards a Vision of Archival Services," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), 97.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 95.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 97-98.

²⁷The relationship between human rights and information in archival holdings has also been discussed by Danielle Laberge in "Information, Knowledge, and Rights: The Preservation of Archives as a Political and Social Issue," *Archivaria* 25 (Winter 1987-88), 44-50. She argues that public access to archives is fundamentally important in our "rights era". She states that archives are politically and socially relevant to the protection of rights and redress of past wrongs. Thus, archivists must ensure that the need for information and records by a wide and diverse public must inform all aspects of archival work.

public and the ways in which archival records make (or could make) an impact on the wider society. However, a complete shift in focus away from the archival record to the users of archives has serious implications for the preservation of the intellectual integrity of archives. Archivists must question whether their institutions will be “user-friendly” in the long run, if records are appraised and described according to the changing demands of users and if contextual knowledge of the origins of the records and, by extension, their status as evidence is lost.

The customer-oriented marketing perspective which defines the client-centred approach has generated strong reactions from a number of archivists. Terry Cook led the “materials-centred” critique with his essay. Writing in the early 1990s, Cook charged that the arguments of the most prominent theorists of public programming reflect the “customer-obsessed” “Reaganomic” rhetoric of the 1980s. This view, he said, is short-sighted and misguided.²⁸ While Cook agreed that public programming ought to be an important aspect of archival work, he rejected Elsie Freeman's assertion that archives need to be turned upside down so that all archival functions stem from public programming issues:

...archives must not be turned into the McDonald's of Information, where everything is carefully measured to meet every customer profile and every market demographic - and the only things left on the shelf, behind the jar of Big Mac sauce, are quality and excellence.²⁹

²⁸Terry Cook, “Viewing the World Upside Down: Reflections on the Theoretical Underpinnings of Archival Public Programming,” *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), 124-126.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 127.

Cook argued that the archival record must remain at the centre of all archival functions. Archival records are complex and cannot simply be reordered and collected to satisfy the most dominant user groups.³⁰ Cook argued that the archivist's work is a quest for knowledge (as in contextual information) as opposed to being mere distributors of information bits. Instead of being a "McDonald's of Information", Cook likened the archives to a forest through which archivists are continually exploring, leading users and finding new paths to archival knowledge.³¹ Knowledge, in the archival world, is thus derived from records and not from users, as client-centred theorists might suggest. By focusing on the record, by communicating contextual knowledge and by arranging and describing records in a way which protects the original nature of records, archivists will preserve the integrity of their records as evidence. Consequently, users will be well-served. If, on the other hand, the provenance of records is lost or disregarded and the records of various creators are re-organized for convenient retrieval, records will not be able to "prove" past actions to users.

Cook pointed to the dangers of the client-centred approach and the implications for the archival record. Archivists, he asserted, must not operate merely according to the demands of their users and their accompanying research fads and whims.³² In contrast to the "customer is always right"

³⁰Ibid., 130.

³¹Ibid., 128.

³²Ibid., 130.

approach, archives cannot and should not sacrifice archival principles for the sake of improved public service. In this, archivists cannot simply perform their functions according to the needs of the users but, instead, they must work to convince potential users of the value and possibilities of the archival records which they hold.³³ As such, Cook did not deny the need for increased public programming, he simply maintained that archivists must not lose sight of the record in order to satisfy clients in the short term.

Cook's position has been reinforced and expanded on by a few others. In her article, "What are the Clients? Who are the Products?", Barbara Craig presented a summary and critique of the four essays on public programming presented in *Archivaria* 31. She suggested that, while Ericson, Blais and Enns offer an important critique of archivists' lack of knowledge of the users of archives, she agreed with Cook that the focus of archival administration should remain the record. She cautioned that archivists must study their own past more carefully before trying to make radical changes for the future:

Perhaps ... we do cling to debilitating myths about our past. However, without a sound knowledge and understanding of our past and present condition, we run the risk of replacing one set of myths with another equally unfounded in reality.³⁴

Craig argued that user surveys must be accompanied by intensive study of archival history.³⁵ A study of the history of archives is necessary in order to learn

³³Ibid., 132.

³⁴Barbara Craig, "What are the Clients? Who are the Products? The Future of Archival Public Services in Perspective," *Archivaria* 31 (Winter 1990-91), 139.

³⁵Ibid., 137-138.

about public programming initiatives which have been developed to address user needs in the past. Archival history shows that the users of archives have changed before, and will continue to change. Craig argued, however, that through all of the changes in archival administration and in archival user groups, the record must remain at the centre and she countered the customer-oriented theories by redefining the "clients" as the archival record and the "products" as the users.³⁶ The challenge for public programming is to find ways to encourage and facilitate an exciting process of discovery of the rich archival record for researchers of all user groups.

While Craig suggested that archivists must look within, at definitions of their work and their history, to plan public programmes, American Richard Cox proposed that archivists must look outside, at the wider society in which they exist. In his 1993 article, "The Concept of Public Memory and Its Impact on Archival Public Programming," Cox expressed his support for Cook's position on public programmes. Cox examined three historical works which discuss public memory in American society. He noted that none of the three authors considered the relationship between archives and public memory.³⁷ He argued that archivists need to acknowledge the importance of public memory in planning archival outreach: "The most essential issue...may be that such aspects as image, awareness, education, and use operate within the context of how society

³⁶Ibid., 141.

³⁷Richard Cox, "The Concept of Public Memory and its Impact on Archival Public Programming," *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), 130.

views the past."³⁸ In other words, archival public programming must be firmly grounded in an understanding of the public and its concept of the past and of historical knowledge. While Cox stressed the importance of public programming and of knowing the user, he insisted that archivists see the archival record as the constant focus of their work:

...archivists should remain more focused on their primary responsibilities. This does not mean that they should abandon the idea of public programming, but that they should keep in mind priorities and not allow themselves to be caught in the changing winds of society's interest in the past.³⁹

With this, Cox joined Cook in promoting the necessity of maintaining respect for the archival record in public programming. He made it clear that the needs and demands of users are fluid and unpredictable over the long term. Archivists, however, must remember that changes to the record for the sake of public programming are permanent.⁴⁰ Once provenance has been destroyed, it usually cannot be restored. As such, archivists must learn to balance the need for increased public programming with a respect for and commitment to the properties of the archival record.

In the last decade, public programming has become a crucial issue as archivists endeavour to justify their existence and to define their services and responsibilities to the public. Archivists have addressed the lack of knowledge about users, the importance of user studies, the problem of image in society and

³⁸Ibid., 132.

³⁹Ibid., 133.

⁴⁰Ibid., 131-132.

issues of public relations and outreach. Those proposing a client-centred approach have argued that archival administration needs to be re-oriented to the user and that knowledge of user groups and user needs must inform and guide all archival functions. Contrary to this, materials-centred theorists have argued that the record must remain the focus of archival work and that to perform archival functions with the user as the focus is fundamentally shortsighted and will greatly endanger the archival record. At the heart of both theories, however, is a realization that archivists do relate to people from many different fields and backgrounds, and that some form of public relations activity is necessary for wide-ranging, effective use of the archival record and, indeed, for the survival of archival institutions.

An examination of the public programming debate may lead one to view the issue as either client-centred or materials-centred. Perhaps, however, archivists would do well to take the best of both sides. Concern about the records does not equal disregard for the user, just as concern about users does not equal disregard for records. While archives exist to preserve records as evidence of the actions of their creators, these records and the existence of archives as a whole are of questionable value if no one knows that they exist or makes use of them. As is the case with other archival functions, public programming is about action as much as theory. Archivists must listen to each other, to their clientele, to their sponsors and to the wider society in order to learn more about their work and the ways in which they might improve their service to their various publics. Ultimately, however, one must acknowledge that users of

archives, and society in general, will always be changing. In order to be of assistance to the widest range of researchers over the long term, archivists must continue to provide and respect the knowledge of the origins of the records. This also means that archivists must understand and protect the original order or interrelationships between records which their creators established. Archivists must not undermine provenance simply for reasons of convenience or efficiency in the short term.

The challenge for archivists comes in finding the appropriate areas for action in improving public service and relations. Within the public programming literature, there are several suggested ways in which archivists can better reach and serve the public. Improved user-friendly finding aids, exhibitions, and more aggressive marketing tactics have been suggested as means to increase visibility and access. Also, more recently, archivists have begun to deal with the impact of information technology and the opportunities and challenges which are presented to archives by world-wide computer networking.⁴¹ Archivists are busy developing web sites through which the Internet navigator can have access to information about the institution, the records held within and possibly also research actual archival documents.

In discussions aimed at increasing the visibility and accessibility of archives in society, however, archival theorists have almost completely neglected

⁴¹Avra Michelson and Jeff Rothenberg, "Scholarly Communication and Information Technology: Exploring the Impact of Changes in the Research Process on Archives," *American Archivist* 55 (Spring, 1992), 236-315. In this essay, the authors explore the implications for archives of evolving information technologies and encourage archives to provide access to archives on the ever-expanding global computer networks.

the seemingly obvious medium of television, and the public programming opportunities which it presents. Two essays in Elsie Finch's *Advocating Archives* only briefly touched on the interaction between archives and the media. Megan Sniffin-Marinoff offered a practical guide for archivists who want to understand how to use the media to increase awareness of and support for their institutions. For example, she encouraged archivists to offer themselves as "local experts" by writing a regular newspaper column or planning exhibits to coincide with television "events" such as Ken Burns's *The Civil War* series.⁴² In the same book, Philip Mooney contended that archivists must capitalize on the willingness of Americans to watch history on television "if it is presented in an enticing package":

Archivists should not only advocate more programming time for their materials, but they should also stand ready to actively participate in developing these programs.⁴³

Both Sniffin-Marinoff and Mooney recognized the power of television. However, they did not address in detail how archives might become more involved with television. If public programming and Mooney's encouragement to "actively participate" are geared only to increasing the direct users of archives and to providing these users with fast, hassle-free service, the only concern regarding archives on television would be quick and easy access to the film

⁴²Megan Sniffin-Marinoff, "In Print, On Air: Working with the Media," in Elsie Finch, ed., *Advocating Archives: An Introduction to Public Relations for Archivists* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1994), 51.

⁴³Philip F. Mooney, "Modest Proposals: Marketing Ideas for the Expansionist Archives," in Finch, ed., *Advocating Archives*, 60-61.

footage or photographs which are desired by a particular producer. However, if public programming includes increased knowledge of the users and uses of archives, a better appreciation of the indirect users of archives, and a concern for the historical consciousness of a society, then television and its use of archives to present and interpret the past are of great significance.

Through television, thousands and even millions of viewers become beneficiaries of historical information and, thus, indirect users of archives even though many may not realize the presence of the archival record or the archival institution behind it. For archivists concerned with access and visibility, television becomes an unmistakable opportunity for outreach and education. Archivists who wish to better serve the television broadcaster will want to understand more fully the use of archives in television. While archivists might be well-versed in the use and critique of documents used in a textual study, they are quite likely less skilled at "reading" a television production. Book reviews, for instance, are common and plentiful in archival journals, but there is no tradition of reviewing television and film productions. By gaining an appreciation of the production process and of how archives are used in a production, and by incorporating their knowledge of documents and the contextual information necessary to appreciate the meaning of an archival document, archivists will be better equipped to comment on how the use of archives might be improved and, by extension, how a production might be strengthened in its presentation of history.

The opportunities for public programming, however, do not end with the broadcaster. On the other side of the television production is its audience, an

excellent target group for archival outreach. As archivists learn to become critical television viewers, they can not only better assist the television broadcaster, but they can also help the viewer, the indirect user of archives, to appreciate and analyze the use of the archival record in the production. By offering themselves as experts on the archival record, archivists can enter the debate which may surround a television production and, thereby, both sensitize the public to the use of records and articulate how the record could be used in the realm of television. If television is a dominant mode through which archival documents are used and through which history is being taught and promoted, then archivists would do well to gain visual literacy for themselves and to promote the same for the viewing public.

Paul Conway challenged archivists to expand their definition of archival users to include those who never enter their institutions and to study the use and reception of archival records once they have "left" the institution. Conway maintained that this knowledge is essential in order to defend archives "from the users' point of view" and in so doing improve services and ensure continued funding.⁴⁴ Knowledge of the users and uses of archives, however, could be employed also to defend, uphold and promote the integrity of the archival record itself. Public programming provides an opportunity for archivists to use their expertise in the characteristics of the archival record and to involve themselves in the debate and process of the continuous creation of public memory.

⁴⁴Conway, "Facts and Frameworks," 395-396, 405.

While television cannot be the only outlet for archival public programming, archivists can use it to involve themselves in helping viewers to decipher, critique and understand the past. Archivists can help equip them with intellectual tools for television viewing and challenge them to become more than passive receivers of history on television. If so, archivists will become more relevant to society through participation in one of the dominant contemporary processes of historical remembering.

Chapter 2

Battles and Biographies: A Survey of the Uses of Archives on Television

In recent years, archivists have acknowledged the increasing diversity of the users of archives. As many theorists of archival public programming have stated, academic historians are no longer the mainstay of the archival clientele. Just as the users of archives diversify, so too do the uses of archival records and the products of archival research. The television industry is making significant use of archives for television production. On any given day, archival documents might be seen, heard or otherwise incorporated into such programmes as the evening news, retrospective programmes, talk shows, sports coverage, documentaries, and docudramas. Because of the nature of the medium, television has been able to incorporate archival materials in various media, including textual, photographic, moving image and sound, documentary art and cartographic records.

While it is virtually impossible to compile a comprehensive list of television productions which have used archival documents or have been history-based, this chapter will examine recent developments in historical programming and draw attention to specific television networks, significant productions, ongoing series and programme genres which make use of archival documents. In addition, the chapter will examine some of the implications of television as history "teacher." It will look at ways in which television programmes and

networks are becoming involved in and, perhaps, are shaping historical understanding and inquiry. Whether historians and archivists like it or not, history is being interpreted and debated on television for a wider audience than a university class or most history books could ever hope to reach. Historical programming on television is expanding and its demand for archival documents will increase. Archivists, then, can best help themselves and their clients to make their way in the television age by first understanding the growing history phenomenon accessible in virtually every home that has a television.

Historical programming which uses archival materials has always been a part of the television landscape. The "serious" documentary is a standard genre in which historical topics from politics to religion, and from war and disaster to sports and popular culture, have been explored at length. Documentaries, however, do not usually achieve the highest ratings and are not the most popular programmes on television. Television networks and production companies have tended, as a result, to devote much of their resources and prime-time schedule to more popular tastes in programmes. Robert Brent Toplin writes that in the mid-1980s historians despaired at the dearth of historical programming on the major American networks.¹ In the last decade, however, the world of television has undergone considerable change. During the 1990s, cable television has expanded quickly and successfully, introducing "specialty channels" to the list of options, with networks devoted solely to such subjects as news, food, golf,

¹Robert Brent Toplin, "History on Television: A Growing Industry," *Journal of American History* 83, 3 (December, 1996), 1109.

cartoons and, notably, history. History-oriented productions have, as a result, enjoyed increased air time, production dollars, creative energy, and viewer popularity.

Some historians and television critics argue that Ken Burns's nine-part eleven-hour documentary *The Civil War* which aired in 1990 on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) was a turning point for history on television in the United States and elsewhere.² Instead of using dramatizations, Burns relied heavily on original documents to retell history and bring to life diaries, letters, artwork and, most notably, photographs. His careful use of original sources seemed to encourage a widespread emotional connection to the people and events of the American Civil War. The series broke PBS audience records for an educational series by attracting 13.9 million American viewers for the first episode and forty million viewers for one or more episodes over the course of the series.³ Since then, Ken Burns has produced other PBS documentary series including *Baseball* and *The West*. His style and success have heightened expectations for historical programmes in the minds of both programme producers and the television audience. Burns has provided a high standard to which others strive and by which new programmes are judged.

Because of the resources poured into ambitious historical documentary series, they have the potential to become major television "events." At times

²Toplin, "History on Television," 1110; Gary Edgerton, "Ken Bum's [sic] American Dream: Histories-for-TV from Walpole, New Hampshire," *Television Quarterly* XXVII, 1 (1994), 59.

³Robert Brent Toplin, "Introduction," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's THE CIVIL WAR*, xv.

they achieve high viewer audiences and may well make a notable impact on the public's perception of a historical era or topic. Documentaries such as *The Civil War* make significant use of archival records. Unlike other historical productions, they often have the luxury of time, resources and staff for research. The research for and production of *The Civil War* took five years and involved several prominent historians as consultants.⁴ In 1997, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) aired the five-part series *Dawn of the Eye*, which it co-produced with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The series presented a "history of visual news for the past hundred years."⁵ The production team spent two years researching in one hundred different archives for moving images, photographs and other sources. The team also conducted interviews with and collected records from private individuals. Currently, the CBC is preparing a major thirty-hour documentary series on the history of Canada. It will air in 2000.⁶ This series is expected to make wide use of Canadian archives and to exploit the expertise of Canadian historians.

Not every historical programme reaches a vast audience and few are in production for several years. In today's expanding multichannel television universe, however, a niche has been created for historical programming. While the production dollars and audience ratings of historical programmes may not

⁴Edgerton, "Ken Burn's [sic] American Dream," 59.

⁵Jeannette Kopak, "TV series on the history of reporting news through moving images," E-Mail to Association of Moving Image Archivists Listserv <AMIA-L@LSV.UKY.EDU>, 16 January 1997.

⁶"CBC plans epic series on history of the nation," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 22 March 1996, D7.

rank with prime-time situation comedies or television dramas, many viewers are turning to television for information about history. More than ever before, television viewers are being introduced to a variety of programmes on historical topics, many of which make considerable use of archival documents. Currently, there are historical programme series on both American and Canadian networks. *American Experience* is a weekly hour-long PBS show which debuted in 1988. This show explores various topics in American history, using original documents, some dramatizations, and, often, the advice of professional historians.⁷ The CBC's *Witness* showcases documentaries which examine both contemporary and historical topics. *Biography* is an hour-long programme which has aired on week nights on the Arts & Entertainment Network (A & E) since 1987. Each show presents the life story of one person. The subjects run the gamut from politicians to movie stars and saints to criminals and Jesus Christ to Madonna. The *Biography* format has been copied and adapted by other productions, including CBC's *Life and Times*, which debuted in 1996, and *Herstory* on the Women's Television Network (WTN). The former features weekly hour-long biographical sketches of contemporary and historical Canadian personalities and the latter highlights the lives of individual women. These series use film clips, photographs, documentary art, journals, and correspondence and interviews with the subject and related individuals or "experts" to document the lives of the individuals being profiled.

⁷See the *American Experience* web page
<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/amex/aeabout.html/>>.

The proliferation of specialty channels and the popularity of historical programmes on A & E spurred the launch of The History Channel by A & E on 1 January 1995. This channel provides twenty-four hours of historical programming each day and has a mandate, according to vice-president of programming Charles Maday, to bring "flesh-and-blood stories alive for a popular audience."⁸ The History Channel features series such as *Year by Year*, in which each programme highlights a specific year, *In Search of History*, a prime-time show featuring documentaries on the "hidden stories" in history, and *History Undercover*, which "looks at recent revelations, new information and investigations of past events with an eye toward setting the record straight."⁹ In addition, the network's programming includes historical movies and special documentary series.

A major development in the broadcasting and production of Canadian historical programming occurred on 17 October 1997 when the Canadian-owned specialty channel, History Television, was launched. The network's mandate is to "give special emphasis to documentary and dramatic programming relating to Canada's rich and colourful history."¹⁰ History Television will devote a minimum of 30 percent of its schedule to Canadian programming. This will increase to as

⁸Libby Haight O'Connell, "Viewing History: The Pros and Cons of Presenting History on Television," *History News* 49, 5 (September/October 1994), 17.

⁹See The History Channel web site <<http://www.historychannel.com/>>.

¹⁰Richard Rotman, Director of Communications, Alliance Broadcasting (Showcase Television and History Television), E-Mail to the author, "Re: The History and Entertainment Network," 18 March 1997.

much as 50 percent as subscribers increase. The network will air a "minimum of 180 hours of independently produced Canadian programmes in the history genre each year, rising to 215 hours at the end of the licenses [sic] term in 2003."¹¹

Like its American counterpart, History Television features special documentaries, historical films, and several ongoing series including: *History Presents*, which features documentaries and series; *It Seems Like Yesterday*, in which each programme examines one week in history; and a history quiz show, *Time Chase*. Undoubtedly, the networks devoted solely to history programming will increase the demand for documentary specials and ongoing series to deal with a wide range of historical topics.

The uses of archives in television are in no way restricted to traditional historical programming. Television newscasts, for example, make significant use of archives. Unlike the intensive research time which is put into some documentaries, archives used in a newscast will need to be located and filmed very quickly. On any given evening a viewer might see photographs, moving images and other records used to illustrate a news story and, at times, the use of archives will move beyond illustration to assist in more in-depth analysis of the historical context to current events. Natural disasters, deaths, and important anniversaries often warrant historical reflection at local, national and international levels. The 1997 flooding of the Red River in southern Manitoba and North Dakota, for example, prompted journalists to search for records containing

¹¹Ibid.

information and images of flooding in years past. The death of such famous people as Princess Diana and Mother Theresa resulted in significant use of photographs, film footage, and other records to commemorate their lives.

Similarly, the transfer of Hong Kong to China in 1997 led news networks to examine the history of British colonialism and of Chinese communism. Once again, archival film, photographs and textual records gave context to the contemporary event.

Often the archival documents used in television programming will be the moving image records generated by television itself. As television grows older, it has cause to reflect on its own past. From this comes a popular "historical" genre of retrospective programming. Just as towns and families might create history books to record their past, so also are programmes created to look back fondly, and largely uncritically, at a successful television series. One example is the CBC comedy series, *Wayne and Shuster in Black and White*, a series aired during the 1996-1997 television season. These programmes were hosted by Frank Shuster, who relayed personal anecdotes about the famous Canadian duo and introduced the archival segments which formed the bulk of the shows. During the 1997-1998 broadcast season, CTV's *Canada AM*, a weekday morning news and information programme, celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. In order to commemorate this anniversary, the programme included regular montages of film clips of significant newscasts and interviews from the programme's history. Another somewhat related use of television archives can be seen on the popular American afternoon talk show, *The Rosie O'Donnell*

Show. O'Donnell uses television archives to show old and often obscure programmes and advertisements which portray her guests in earlier years.

The archives of television, and possibly other records as well, are also used in advertising. Advertisements for Shake 'n' Bake Chicken have incorporated historical clips from earlier advertisements of the product. This shows the evolution of the product and its use by satisfied North American housewives. In the fall of 1996, CBC launched an advertising campaign, "T.V. to call our own," which featured the current national evening news anchors, Peter Mansbridge and Hana Gartner, against a backdrop of footage of former newscasts and current affairs programmes.

Sports programming also makes considerable use of archives. The coverage of the 1996 Olympic Games on the CBC and American networks, for instance, included many historical vignettes in the coverage of the games, profiling athletes, moments and events from other years. Similarly, McDonald's advertising used footage of past games to convey a sense of a historical tradition which built on themes of national pride and global unity through sport. In 1997, CBC's coverage of the Stanley Cup playoffs included a short segment entitled "From the Files" which used film footage to illustrate significant events in hockey history. In 1995, during the National Hockey League players strike, the CBC broadcast three complete games from the archives. Interestingly, these games (from the 1950s, 1960s and 1975) were watched by a large audience, one

almost as high as for a live contemporary game.¹²

Undoubtedly, there are many uses for archives on television as the presentation of history on television takes on a variety of forms and topics. One of the perceived dangers of film and television becoming a primary teacher of history to mainstream society is that historical discussion and inquiry will be discouraged and the moving image production will be taken as historical truth. Theorists such as Neil Postman have argued that television is by its nature an anti-intellectual medium, more simplistic in its content than discourse in print and with entertainment, not education, as its "supra-ideology."¹³ There are several examples, however, in which television, and historical programmes specifically, are demonstrating an ability to stimulate further interest and inquiry. Following the broadcast of the nine episodes of *The Civil War*, for instance, book sales on Civil War topics and attendance at related historic sites and museums rose dramatically.¹⁴ The A & E Network has recognized television's ability to stimulate reading and is encouraging viewers to read more widely about the subjects of its broadcasts. *Biography*, for example, now provides a bibliography of recommended books related to the person featured in each programme. A & E has also negotiated arrangements with the Barnes and Noble bookstore chain

¹²Interview with former CBC archivist Ernest Dick, March 1995.

¹³Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 46-51, 87. See in particular Chapter 4, "The Typographic Mind," and Chapter 6, "The Age of Show Business."

¹⁴Thomas Cripps, "Historical Truth," 747; and Toplin, "Introduction," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's THE CIVIL WAR*, xvi.

for the sale of videos and Random House publishers from whom the network will commission history books related to its documentaries.¹⁵

In Canada, at least one "television event" in this decade moved Canadians to debate history and to rethink the power of television and the role of the documentary filmmaker in interpreting history for the general public. This Canadian watershed in historical programming occurred with the broadcast in January 1992 on CBC and in March and April 1992 on CBC Newsworld of *The Valour and the Horror*, a three-part six-hour documentary produced and directed by Brian and Terence McKenna. Over four million viewers tuned in to at least part of an episode. The series generated an intense viewer reaction, by war veterans and historians particularly, over its presentation of history and the perceived threat to conventional wisdom about the country's participation in the Second World War. The controversy over the series resulted in debates in newspapers across the country within the media and between professional historians and the producers of the series, hearings held by a sub-committee of the Canadian Senate, and a report by the CBC Ombudsman on the accuracy, integrity and fairness of the McKenna brothers' presentation of history.¹⁶ In fact, Ernest Dick argues that the series was controversial precisely because of its use of archival documents: "[the series] got under peoples' skin because it used

¹⁵Toplin, "History on Television," 1111.

¹⁶See David J. Bercuson and S.F. Wise, eds., *The Valour and the Horror Revisited* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994). The book contains William Morgan's "Report of the CBC Ombudsman," 61-72, as well as Brian and Terence McKenna's "Response to the CBC Ombudsman Report, November 10, 1992, Galafilm Inc.," 73-88.

archival sources generally well and extensively. People couldn't dismiss it as just an interesting interpretation."¹⁷ With the airing of *The Valour and the Horror*, Canadian television viewers, broadcasters and academics were awakened to the power of television and its potential for teaching, challenging and, possibly, distorting historical understanding.

Television has increased its potential to encourage further learning and inquiry with its entry onto the World Wide Web. Web pages are being created to supplement television programmes and to provide avenues for discovery stimulated by television. The implications for archives, their use in television productions and their "invisible" use by the viewer and the web browser is significant. Archival documents are "received" by television viewers in quick succession making a more studied approach to the documents difficult. Web pages permit viewers to probe more deeply into the sources used in historical productions and, perhaps, to make better, more informed judgments on the use of original sources and on the merits of the historical interpretations being given.¹⁸ For instance, Ken Burns's documentary *The West* has its own web site where web browsers can examine documents used in each episode. The site also allows the browser to read the full texts of some of the memoirs, journals,

¹⁷Interview with Ernest Dick, March 1995. See Dick's two articles for further archival analysis of the series: "History on Television: A Critical Archival Examination of 'The Valour and the Horror,'" *Archivaria* 34 (Summer 1992), 199-216; and "'The Valour and the Horror' Continued: Do We Still Want Our History on Television?" *Archivaria* 35 (Spring 1993), 253-269.

¹⁸Some examples of television network web sites which have pages for specific programmes and series include: The History Channel <<http://www.historychannel.com/>>; The Arts and Entertainment Network <<http://www.aetv.com/>>; Public Broadcasting Service <<http://www.pbs.org/>>; and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation <<http://www.cbc.ca/>>.

diaries, and letters and to look at photographs and maps used in the series, as well as some which were collected but not used in the production. The site also provides links to other related sites and sources of information.¹⁹ Five years after the broadcast of *The Valour and the Horror*, a web site was created under the same name.²⁰ The site includes original sources used in the series as well as additional sources. In an attempt to continue the historical discussion, the site encourages visitors to contribute their own opinions and asks war veterans to contribute their memories and reflections for inclusion on the site.²¹ The television industry, as such, may be creating a forum at last in which viewers can "talk back" to a production, obtain additional information regarding the objectives or rationale for a production, look more closely at sources used (and perhaps sources not used) and participate in a dialogue about and also beyond the televised presentation of history.

By making efforts to encourage further exploration into history, such as reading recommendations or its entry onto the World Wide Web, television may be positioning itself even more strongly as a co-ordinator, facilitator and participant in the ongoing development of historical consciousness. The pervasive influence of television cannot be denied. Television has the ability to create and feed on "hot" topics in history, be they the Civil War, the Second

¹⁹See *The West* web site <<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/>>.

²⁰See *The Valour and the Horror* web site <<http://www.valourandhorror.com/>>.

²¹Maxim Engel, "Info: Canada and WWII major site," E-Mail posting to H-Net List for Canadian History, 22 June 1997.

World War, baseball or the Beatles. When Oliver Stone's film *Nixon* was released in the theatres in late 1995, numerous television networks entered the "discussion" with their own interpretations, including the Turner Network Television (TNT) cable network's docudrama, *Kissinger and Nixon*, *Biography's* special documentaries on both men, and the rebroadcast on PBS of the 1990 *American Experience* documentary on Nixon.²² Similarly, PBS responded to Hollywood's *Apollo 13* with its own "true" version, featuring actual footage and documents.

Beyond its ability to interpret and entertain with history, however, television also has the ability to "make" history. In this century, more and more events and personalities have been recorded on film and, since the 1950s, have been interpreted for the public through television. For example, images of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the Paul Henderson goal in the 1972 Canada-Soviet hockey series or the sea of flowers left in remembrance of Princess Diana are etched in the minds of millions of people. Major events of this century are increasingly understood through their television images. By both interpreting history and defining what will be "historic" the television industry has positioned itself as a major contributor to collective memory.

At the end of the twentieth century, there is no shortage of history on television and it is not hard to assume that television will teach many people

²²For a comparison of all of these productions see Bernard S. Redmont, "In the Camera [sic] Eye: Kissinger and Nixon," *Television Quarterly* XXVIII, 2 (1996), 14-19.

more about history than any other medium or influence. This chapter has shown that the television industry as a whole has a significant and growing interest in historical productions. The expansion of cable television and the creation of specialty channels devoted to history will ensure that the demand for documentary specials and ongoing historical series will continue to rise. In the last decade, however, interest in historical programming has not only increased in quantity but also in expectations for quality. Ken Burns has proven with several of his PBS documentary specials, most significantly *The Civil War*, that it is possible for a history production to compete successfully in prime-time viewing hours, to achieve high audience ratings and to make history on television provocative and exciting through the use of original documents. In Canada, the McKenna brothers also proved the power of televised accounts of historical events first by attaining high audience ratings for a history series, and then by igniting a nationwide debate over their interpretation of the Second World War in *The Valour and the Horror*. Considering the power of television to generate mass interest in history and, consequently, in archival documents, archivists must decide how to respond to this increased demand and attention. The television industry will continue to produce history programming as long as it generates interest, ratings and revenue. Archivists must choose, then, whether they will involve themselves more fully in this process of historical remembering. Having developed an appreciation for the variety of uses for archives in television production and the growing demand for historical programming, the archivist must turn to a more in-depth analysis of television, the benefits and

drawbacks of history being taught through television and, more specifically, what "happens" to archival documents when they are used in a television production.

Chapter 3

Stoking the “Electronic Campfire”: Analyzing the Impact of Television on History and Archives

In his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Neil Postman argued that we are living in the Age of Television and of Show Business and that American society in particular is deeply influenced by the television image.¹ It is not difficult to find examples of this impact. In 1984, images of starvation in Ethiopia motivated the world to respond to the crisis. The home video footage of Los Angeles police officers beating Rodney King in 1991 brought racial politics to a crisis point in the United States, leading to some of the worst riots in the country's history. In Canada, videotapes of hazing rituals in the Canadian Airborne Regiment led to a public outcry and a government inquiry which put the Canadian military under a microscope and led to the disbanding of the regiment. Viewers worldwide watched "live" coverage of the Persian Gulf War, the O.J. Simpson murder trials, and the funeral of Princess Diana. Television is, indeed, a medium through which a large segment of society "experiences" and understands the world. Postman argued further that television has replaced the printed word as the primary source of information and of "truth."²

History is being mediated for a mass audience as much or more by

¹Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 7-8, 63.

²*ibid.*, 22-27.

television as by historians. The television industry has claimed history as part of its territory, proclaiming certain contemporary events as "historic" and offering viewers a window into "history-in-the-making." Communications theorists Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz argue that "television has entered into competition with the historian for the role of the chronicler of the present and interpreter of the past."³ In an effort to understand the impact of television on historical understanding, this chapter will examine some of the benefits and drawbacks of presenting history and archives on television. The viewpoints of historians, archivists and television producers will be presented and discussed. Following this, the chapter will explore some points to be considered when critiquing a historical documentary from an archival point of view. It will be contended that archivists must become visually literate and familiar with the language of television in order to understand and engage this increasingly significant avenue for historical exploration and the use of archival documents.

The demand for and popularity of history programming on television was demonstrated in chapter two. Networks, documentary series and programmes devoted to history have become a mainstay on television, while historical movies continue to be popular in theatres and on television. The entertainment industry has been able to (re-)capture the historical interest and imagination of millions of people as academic history has become seemingly more isolated and less

³Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, "Political Ceremony and Instant History," in Anthony Smith, ed., *Television: An International History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 182.

accessible.⁴ Indeed, the presentation of history on television has several strengths. While studies in academic history often focus on very specialized levels of inquiry, television has helped to resurrect storytelling as part of historical learning. Television programmes are designed to capture the attention of viewers and to prevent them from moving on to the next channel. They rely, therefore, on "a good story," with an unfolding plot, climax and resolution.⁵ Producer Ken Burns, who refers to himself as "an historian of emotion," criticizes academic historians for neglecting the art of storytelling and for failing to educate Americans about their history. In contrast, Burns compares television to an "electronic campfire," a new Homeric form around which the stories of history will be communicated and discussed.⁶ Burns and his colleagues invite viewers to enter and experience the stories of history and, thereby, to make emotional connections with the events and the personalities of the past.

In addition to its storytelling approach, the appeal and accessibility of history on television is enhanced by the medium's ability to bring history to life. An audio-visual production takes words off the printed page and permits the viewer to enter into a multi-sensory presentation of the past, creating the illusion that the viewer can leave the present and enter directly into the atmosphere of

⁴Robert A. Rosenstone, "History in Images/History in Words: Reflections on the Possibility of Really Putting History onto Film," *American Historical Review* 93, 5 (December 1988), 1175.

⁵O'Connell, "Viewing History," 16.

⁶Toplin, "Introduction," in Toplin, ed, *Ken Burns's THE CIVIL WAR*, xxii; Thomas Cripps, "Historical Truth," 741, 749, 760; and *The West* web site <<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/>>.

history, including its sights, sounds, and "feel".⁷ Documentaries breathe new life into archival records, allowing viewers to see and hear actual people, places and events in ways that the written word cannot. History on television, as such, encourages the viewer to consider facial expressions, vocal inflections, body language, landscapes and artifacts as all part of the historical picture. Because visuals are an effective component of learning, images of the past as shown uniquely on television through dramatization or through documents are often able to make an indelible mark on viewers.

The ability of television to bring history into our living rooms is not, however, without problems. The demands of the television industry and of the audio-visual medium change the discourse on history. Television is accused frequently of simplifying history, requiring a linear story with a satisfactory conclusion, often focusing on the life and struggle of one individual (usually male) or presenting a complex episode in history as a classic battle between good and evil. As a result, most productions are not able to deal with complexities of motive or character nor the multiple contextual factors which might have contributed to the historical period in question.⁸ A television programme will not usually debate multiple interpretations of history, nor will it include an exhaustive discussion of all of the related and existing evidence. In reality, television cannot be expected to adhere to the rigours of academia in its productions. The television industry's

⁷Rosenstone, "History in Images," 1179; and Dan Sipe, "Media and Public History: The Future of Oral History and Moving Images," *Oral History Review* 19, 1-2 (Spring-Fall 1991), 79-80.

⁸Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to our Idea of History* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 55-60.

need to make history entertaining and to provide an engaging story with captivating visuals in order to grab a corner of the viewing market, however, presents an obvious limitation to the topics which will be addressed. Subjects and events which represent highly dramatic points in human history and for which good visuals are readily available will be favoured by television, as is evidenced by the proliferation of documentaries on World War II. Topics and issues that are not easily dealt with on the screen, for which no footage or photographs exist or which have minimal popular appeal, will likely be neglected by television.⁹ Likewise, television documentaries will often incorporate archival photographs or moving images based on their visual appeal rather than their value as evidence.¹⁰

The tendency for television productions to present relatively simplistic, formulaic histories is not only a result of the limitations of the medium. Television history productions are often conservative, in simply reflecting the values of the filmmaker, the network, the advertisers or the targeted audience.¹¹ Film historian Eric Breitbart argued that the subjects dealt with by television are limited by sponsors who are reluctant or unwilling to advertise during a production which is depressing or without a happy ending. He notes that CBS had difficulty finding

⁹Jill Godmilow & Brooke Jacobson, "Far from Finished: Deconstructing the Documentary," in O'Brien, Mark and Craig Little, eds., *Reimagining America: The Arts of Social Change* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1990), 178; and Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 116-117.

¹⁰Clifford M. Kuhn, "A Historian's Perspective on Archives and the Documentary Process," *American Archivist* 59, 3 (Summer 1996), 314; Jerry Kuehl, "Television History: The Next Step," *Sight and Sound* 51, 3 (Summer 1982), 190-191.

¹¹William H. Cohn, "History for the Masses: Television Portrays the Past," *Journal of Popular Culture* X, 2 (Fall 1976), 281.

advertisers for a docudrama about the Holocaust because the account ended consistently on "low points."¹² Historians William Cohn and Mark Carnes have argued that most viewers want history productions which are uplifting and reinforce their view of the world and contemporary values and politics.¹³ Historian Eric Foner argued that *The Civil War* series allowed all Americans (whether from North or South or whether black or white) to feel good about their past. The series perpetuates a vision of the war as "a tragic conflict within the American family, whose great bloodshed was in many ways meaningless, but which accomplished the essential task of solidifying a united nation."¹⁴ Similarly, Daniel P. Murphy contends that the lives of former U.S. presidents Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter as presented on A & E's *Biography* are diluted into "morally reassuring narratives" which serve primarily to support the American dream.¹⁵ Historical presentations on film and in television may thus be more likely to reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate cultural and historical myths than to challenge them. Productions which present interpretations which run counter to accepted official memory, such as the controversial interpretation of Canada's involvement in the Second World War in *The Valour and the Horror* or *Oliver*

¹²Eric Breitbart, "From the Panorama to the Docudrama: Notes on the Visualization of History," *Radical History Review* 25 (1981), 119.

¹³Mark C. Carnes, "Hollywood History," *American Heritage* 46, 5 (September 1995), 79-82; Cohn, "History for the Masses," 281-287.

¹⁴Eric Foner, "Ken Burns and the Romance of Reunion," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's THE CIVIL WAR*, 114.

¹⁵Daniel P. Murphy, television review of *Jimmy Carter: To the White House and Beyond* and *Ronald Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime*, A & E Biography, *American Historical Review* 83, 3 (December 1996), 1140.

Stone's movies *JFK* and *Nixon*, which interpret American history through a conspiracy theory framework, are discredited by some as dangerous influences on impressionable youth and other uninformed viewers.¹⁶

Both historians and archivists have also expressed concerns which relate specifically to their interactions with filmmakers. Several historians have commented on the challenge of working as consultants on history film projects. There is tension when they try to encourage historical "accuracy" and filmmakers play with details and manipulate images in order to strengthen the visual impact or entertainment value of their production.¹⁷ Similarly, archivists have experienced frustration with the way archives have been used in documentary productions. Several archivists, including some surveyed in March 1995 for the purpose of this study, responded almost unanimously that for the most part filmmakers are extremely demanding because of their time constraints. They usually require extensive assistance from archivists to find appropriate documentation, make copies of it and, especially in the case of moving and still

¹⁶See Dick, "History on Television," 199-216; and "The Valour and the Horror' Continued," 253-269; David Taras, "The Struggle over *The Valour and the Horror*. Media Power and the Portrayal of War," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* XXVIII, 4 (December 1995), 725-748; Art Simon, "The Making of Alert Viewers: The Mixing of Fact and Fiction in *JFK*," *Cineaste* XIX, 1 (1992), 14-15. Taras gives an interesting analysis of *The Valour and the Horror* controversy as a struggle over historical memory between the guardians of official history (such as the Canadian Senate and veterans' groups) and journalists and the CBC. The article points to the potential danger in challenging conventional historical wisdom on television and, particularly, on publicly funded television.

¹⁷Geoffrey C. Ward, "Refighting the Civil War," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's THE CIVIL WAR*, 150-151; and Natalie Zemon Davis, "Any Resemblance to Persons Living or Dead": Film and the Challenge of Authenticity," *Yale Review* 76 (Summer 1987), 460.

image records, to obtain copyright clearance.¹⁸ Beyond these practical concerns, not surprisingly the surveyed archivists also stated that most filmmakers have little knowledge of or patience with the intricacies of archival description. For most, the need for a good picture usually outweighs the desire for historical accuracy. Documents are often used as generic representations of a particular period, or are misrepresented in order to achieve the desired visual or dramatic effect.¹⁹ Filmmakers might expect from archives the same detailed shot lists and quick access to generic images as provided by stock shot libraries, but archival institutions do not necessarily have the ability nor willingness to provide such detailed description for all of their visual holdings. In the end, although several archivists have recognized benefits in having documents included in television productions, their relationship with filmmakers seems to be one of damage control and appeasement rather than a constructive partnership.

Several historians have argued that the historical profession is itself at a crisis point, because the dominance of print culture and the underlying assumptions of written history are being challenged.²⁰ The history of the twentieth-century and of the future cannot be conveyed without consideration of the huge body of visual and audio-visual evidence which has been generated.

¹⁸E-Mail Survey responses received in March 1995 from Evelyn Barker, Rosemary Bergeron, J. Robert Davison, Herbert J. Hartsook, Jeannette Kopak, W. Mark Ritchie, and Rob Spindler; see also Dick, "History on Television," 201.

¹⁹E-Mail Survey responses received in March 1995 from W. Mark Ritchie, Allen Specht, and Rob Spindler.

²⁰Sipe, "Media and Public History," 75-87; and Hayden White, "Historiography and Historiophoty," *American Historical Review* 93, 5 (December 1988), 1193-1194.

Canadian archivists in the "total archives" tradition have long understood the value of preserving and studying a wide range of documentary evidence, including records in various media forms. While neither dismissing written work nor relegating it to inferior status, historians, archivists and other academics are beginning to understand the need to employ other media, such as film and television, to communicate history. Historian Hayden White has argued that historians must stop treating visual evidence as a mere complement to or illustration of the written word and start to accord this evidence the respect and rigorous investigation which textual sources receive.²¹

Acknowledging the importance of sources other than textual ones, however, is in itself a recognition of the limitations of print culture and the written text, which can only transcribe an oral history interview or describe the action in a moving image. The audio-visual medium is able to incorporate elements of human communication and interaction which go beyond the written word. In the search for new forms, then, film becomes a necessary component of the process of historical study.

Many historians have recognized that their profession cannot ignore television and film interpretations of history. They believe that historians should become more involved in helping film and television histories to achieve "greater historical integrity."²² They have argued that while historians may be able to lend

²¹White, "Historiography and Historiophoty," 1193.

²²John E. O'Connor, *Image as Artifact: The Historical Analysis of Film and Television* (Malabar, Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1990), 3.

their expertise in the production process, a more important task may be that of educating people to become critical viewers of television and film. Just as students are taught to read and analyze written historical texts, they must also be taught critical techniques for viewing history on television. In this effort, Robert Rosenstone argued that historians must hold filmmakers and film productions accountable for their presentations and interpretations of history. Historians, likewise, must learn about the tools of filmmaking and develop critical standards for historical presentations on film and television based on the capabilities and limitations of these media. They ought not to expect filmmakers to follow exactly the criteria of written history.²³

In order to provide a forum for the discussion of television and film, numerous historical journals now include a film review section. Both *American Historical Review* and *Journal of American History*, for instance, include regular film reviews. In its December 1996 issue, the latter journal introduced a series which offers television reviews, as well as an opportunity for contributors to examine history-oriented programming, its relation to historical scholarship and its contributions to historical learning.²⁴ Historians such as Robert Brent Toplin, John E. O'Connor and Robert Rosenstone have written numerous essays and edited collections on the representation of history on television and film. In addition,

²³Robert Rosenstone, "Film Reviews," *American Historical Review* 94, 4 (October 1989), 1031; and "History in Images/History in Words," 1181.

²⁴Toplin, "History on Television," 1111-1112. *The American Historical Review* includes film reviews in the fourth issue every year. Canadian journals lag behind their American counterparts. Since 1996, *The Canadian Historical Review* has included only a few film reviews.

some collections of essays deal specifically with one documentary series. *Ken Burns's The Civil War*, edited by Toplin, includes essays by eight historians and one by Burns. They debate the merits and weaknesses of Burns's presentation and historical interpretations. Similarly, *The Valour and the Horror Revisited*, edited by David Bercuson and S. F. Wise, includes essays by the authors and three other historians. They comment on the historical interpretation presented in the series and on the ensuing controversy.

While historians have begun to address the "history explosion" on television, archivists, unfortunately, are conspicuously absent from the debate. Archivists Ernest Dick, Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin have argued that archivists must become more visually literate so that they can better appraise, describe and preserve records in all media, provide improved assistance to the television production clientele, and make more thoughtful and informed critiques of the use of archives in these productions.²⁵ The collections edited by Bercuson and Wise and by Toplin could have benefitted from the inclusion of an essay by an archivist, because while historians critique productions for their interpretation of history, they give little attention to the use of records. Ernest Dick's two essays on *The Valour and the Horror* stand alone as a critique of a historical documentary from an archival point of view. In these essays, Dick issued a strong challenge to archivists. Like historians, he said, archivists must

²⁵Interview with Ernest J. Dick, 10 February 1995; Dick, "History on Television," 213-214; and "'The Valour and the Horror' Continued," 263; and Elisabeth Kaplan and Jeffrey Mifflin, "Mind and Sight: Visual Literacy and the Archivist," *Archival Issues* 21, 2 (1996), 107-108.

understand the audio-visual medium and develop critical standards with which to evaluate the presentation of archival documents in television and film productions.²⁶

Dick's articles serve as a valuable example of the informed comment an archivist can provide on a historical documentary. The essays discuss some of the key issues involved in presenting history on television, especially in light of the controversy over the series' interpretation of history; Dick takes a close look at the use of sources. It is necessary, however, to take a step back and ponder the nature of an archival critique. While archivists and historians are concerned similarly with the ways in which history is being presented and interpreted on television, the critique of a production by an archivist will be significantly different from that offered by a historian. The historian's purpose in analyzing a production is to assess the particular interpretation of history, commenting, thereby, on the perceived historical accuracy, on the particular interpretation being given and, perhaps, the correlation to contemporary historiography. Archivists, meanwhile, will take a step back from the historical interpretation and look at the ways in which the archival sources are incorporated and represented. The challenge, then, is in determining how the archivist's knowledge of records can be incorporated into useful critique of the presentation of history on television.

The basis for an archival critique is found in the contextual approach, or the materials-centred approach as outlined in chapter one, which maintains that

²⁶Dick, "History on Television," 199-216; and "The Valour and the Horror' Continued," 253-269.

the archivist's first concern is the preservation of the integrity of records. At the intellectual foundation of the archival profession and of the contextual approach is the principle of provenance which, in essence, emphasizes that a record must be understood in terms of its context of creation, its creator and its relation to other records. Archival records are arranged and described according to these principles and common descriptive practice requires archivists to include information regarding the creator and the original functions and form of the records. The defence of the integrity of records, however, must move beyond the level of arrangement and description and into the public programming arena. Archivists should be ready to communicate their knowledge of the origins of the records and raise questions about the records which should be dealt with in order to best interpret them. A critique of the use of archives in television production will incorporate a contextual understanding of the archival record and ask, for example, whether any acknowledgement is given to the creator, the creating process, the type of record, and the circumstances under which the record was maintained and archived. While archivists should not expect every historical documentary to be an exploration of the records themselves, they might point out where additional information about the records could make an argument or a production stronger and, perhaps, more interesting.

An archival review of a documentary will involve, first, a look at the production as a document with its own creator, context of creation and form. As such, the archivist might ask questions regarding the producers of the documentary, sources of funding and support for the production, the motivation

behind the production, and the relation of the production to other works by the same creator. The archivist might also look at the documentary's audience: to whom the production was directed and how it was received both by critics and the general public. Finally, the reviewer will want to determine the production's form or genre. Undoubtedly, a different critical eye will be required for the use of archives in a historical documentary, a game show, a docudrama, historical drama, or a television retrospective. Historical documentaries, the genre to which the proposed criteria will be applied, deserve a different, more analytical level of critique as it is in the body of these productions themselves that grand claims of truthfulness, importance and seriousness are often made. In fact, Neil Postman has argued that "television is at its most trivial and, therefore, most dangerous when its aspirations are high, when it presents itself as a carrier of important cultural conversations."²⁷ Therefore, when historical programmes and documentaries promise to "set the record straight" (*History Undercover*), provide a "definitive family portrait" of Canada (CBC's *Life and Times*) or tell "the true story" for the first time (*The Valour and the Horror*), they need to be held accountable for their presentations of the past.

Once the background of the television production has been explored, the critical viewer must enter into an examination of the language of the television medium. Perhaps the greatest challenge in attempting to examine critically the use of archival sources in a production is the need to dissect the variety of

²⁷Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 16.

sources, both visual and oral, with which the viewer is being confronted. Video recording machines have given viewers the ability to stop, start and review the bombardment of images and sounds. Web sites have provided a forum through which a visitor can examine documents more closely and, in essence, talk back to a production and debate with other visitors on-line. However, these are not the suppositions on which the production of a television programme is based. The pace of a television programme is an essential element of how the production "works" and while the use of archival sources at particular points in the production might be questioned, the production must also be analyzed as a package.²⁸

In order to analyze a production, archivists must become familiar with various production techniques such as editing, lighting, the speed of film, camera angles, focus, sound effects, music, and the colour of the film. They give important clues as to the perspective of the production and its treatment of historical sources.²⁹ The critical viewer might look at editing and ask questions about the pace of the production, the juxtaposition of images, and what material has been omitted. The viewer might also question the effects of close-up shots, a soft or sharp focus, or the use of slow motion.

Influencing the editorial and compositional decisions of many

²⁸Dan Georgakas, "Malpractice in the Radical American Documentary," *Cineaste* 16 (1987-88), 49.

²⁹O'Connor, *Image as Artifact*, 30-31; Kaplan and Mifflin, "'Mind and Sight'," 112-113. The National Film Board of Canada's series *Constructing Reality* is an excellent guide to the methods of documentary construction. Included in the series are six videos and a resource guide. See *Constructing Reality: Exploring Media Issues in Documentary*, Arlene Moscovitch and David Adkin, directors, (National Film Board of Canada, Montreal, 1993) and Arlene Moscovitch, *Constructing Reality: Exploring Media Issues in Documentary, Resource Guide* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1993).

documentaries are some "conventions of truth" which are used to enhance the credibility and authoritative status of a production. Filmmakers might decide, for example, to use black and white film instead of colour, because it appears to be more honest and more realistic. They might include the customary, authoritative "voice-of-God" narration which keeps a tight rein on the interpretation of evidence. In addition, they might choose original or original-looking footage (filmed with a shaky camera, or containing scratches and dirt), expert and eyewitness testimony and authentic music, all used to convince viewers that what they are seeing and hearing is true.³⁰ Historian Elazar Barkan contends, for instance, that, by deciding to film all of *Schindler's List* in black and white, Steven Spielberg allied his film with documentaries instead of fiction film and challenged viewers to see the film as a true story.³¹ Paul Cowan, in *The Kid Who Couldn't Miss*, a Canadian docudrama about Billy Bishop, recreated the "look" of original footage by filming with a shaky camera at 18 frames-per-second (to be projected at 24 frames-per-second) using scratched and dirty black and white film stock.³² No indication was given that the footage was fabricated and most viewers might assume the footage was authentic. It is essential for the critical viewer to become familiar with some of the techniques of television in order to appreciate the ways in which "truth-enhancing" techniques and decisions regarding composition can affect the nature

³⁰Arlene Moscovitch, *Constructing Reality, Resource Guide*, 118-127.

³¹Elazar Barkan, Film Review of *Tango of Slaves, Korcazc*, and *Schindler's List*, *American Historical Review* 99, 4 (October, 1994), 1247.

³²Moscovitch, *Constructing Reality, Resource Guide*, 124, 127.

of the evidence being used or, as in the case of the previous examples, how these techniques can be used to represent replication as authenticity.

After educating themselves in some of the compositional and editing techniques of television, archival viewers will be able to apply their knowledge of archival documents to the analysis of their use. The archival principle of provenance points to several questions for consideration in the use of all types of archival records in a historical documentary. First, is the creator of the document identified? Is any information given about the creating process? For instance, was the photograph staged; for what audience was a newsreel created; to whom was the letter being written? One might also ask questions about the type or form of record which is used, and whether or not the distinction of type is acknowledged. A moving image, for instance, is not taken simply at face value. Government propaganda films, newsreels and amateur home movies will each have been created under distinct circumstances and with unique motivations. Likewise, the type of information found in a personal diary will be different from a formal letter addressed to a colleague. Are archival documents distinguished from fabricated or fictionalized elements? Are letters or newspaper articles ever shown or are they merely referred to? Are archival radio recordings distinguished from an actor's reading? Respect for original documents will also require archivists to analyze to what degree records are allowed to speak for themselves or to what extent the use of a narrator or of quick editing silences and manipulates the records to serve the filmmaker's intent. For example, how much of a journal entry or letter is read? Is film footage shown in short bites or are

longer excerpts used? Is the original soundtrack included? Are photographs, maps, or works of art shown quickly or is the viewer allowed to "look" more closely at the details? Finally, insofar as the viewer can determine, are archival documents being used in context or are they being used to represent something different from their content?

The misrepresentation of documents is likely most problematic in the use of still and moving images. In their use of visual sources, documentaries reinforce the maxim that "a picture is worth a thousand words." An image can be given multiple meanings, depending on the accompanying text. Archival images are often used to convince viewers that they are seeing more than they really are. Close-ups on a person's face and especially on the eyes convince viewers that they are seeing through the subject's eyes to their soul and motivation. Another common technique is for the camera never to show a photograph's edge, creating the illusion that the image goes on in all directions.³³ This denies the creator's act of framing and "editing" in composition and denies, in a sense, the form of the record.

While visual evidence is being used increasingly by historians for the information it contains, still and moving images are often used as an afterthought in a production. Several archivists have complained that images are frequently chosen after the script has been written and that filmmakers are usually more

³³Moscovitch, *Constructing Reality, Resource Guide*, 11.

interested in an image's aesthetic or dramatic appeal than its value as evidence.³⁴ Archivist Mark Ritchie cites an example of a filmmaker who was creating a documentary on the Spanish Civil War and chose footage of soldiers based on the direction they were moving (left to right or right to left) instead of for which side they were fighting simply in order to maintain the action and continuity of the film.³⁵ The reviewing archivist might then ask whether the photographs and moving images appear as mere illustration or are incorporated more fully as part of the historical inquiry.

Ken Burns's series, *The Civil War*, was applauded for incorporating still images effectively. His "still-in-motion" cinematography brought photographs to life, as the film camera panned landscapes and focused on specific details.³⁶ He was criticized, however, for not acknowledging the context in which the photographs were created and the role of the photographer in interpreting and framing the historical record.³⁷ While the photographs used were not necessarily related directly to the text being read, they are offered as proof of the text's assertions and as generic illustration of an era. On the other hand, *Dawn of the Eye*, a CBC/BBC documentary series on the history of television news, used

³⁴E-Mail Survey Responses from Stewart Renfrew, W. Mark Ritchie and Rob Spindler; Jerome Kuehl, "Too Good to be True, Too Hard to Get Right," in *Documents that Move and Speak: Audiovisual Archives in the New Information Age* (München: K.G. Saur, 1992), 275-277.

³⁵E-Mail Survey response from W. Mark Ritchie.

³⁶Edgerton, "Ken Burn's [sic] American Dream," 58-60; and Toplin, "Introduction," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's The Civil War*, xx.

³⁷Joseph P. Reidy, Film Review of *The Civil War*, *The Public Historian* 96, 4 (Fall, 1991), 89.

examples of "staged" footage, including World War II footage shot in New Jersey, to show how news was "created."³⁸ In effect, this documentary "de-mystified" the footage for the viewer by providing its context. Other documentaries, however, might use the same footage, represented as reality, and continue the myths which were created when the film was shot. The archivist as reviewer must assess to what degree artistic license is acceptable and at what point the misrepresentation of documents represents a distortion of historical evidence and a serious flaw in the presentation of history. Without any contextual information or direct reference to images given, the viewer is left to assume the correlation between image and story.

The visual components of a documentary, including the original stills and moving images being used, are given meaning through the "invisible" yet equally powerful counterpart, sound. A documentary production may use a variety of sound elements including synchronous sound, wild sound, sound effects, voice-overs, narration, music and silence.³⁹ Archival sound recordings which might be used in a documentary include radio recordings, oral history interviews and the original soundtrack accompanying a moving image. Ernest Dick has suggested, however, that original recordings are often disappointing to viewers and that original sound is often replaced or enhanced in contemporary production.⁴⁰

³⁸*Dawn of the Eye*, Mark Starowicz, executive producer, (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/British Broadcasting Corporation, 1997).

³⁹Moscovitch, *Constructing Reality, Resource Guide*, 3.

⁴⁰Dick, "History on Television," 207.

Considering the dramatic, persuasive and invisible power of sound, archivists must keep themselves attuned to its usage and manipulation in a production. The sound component of a film might be considered as part of the film's "original order." Is the film, then, allowed to "speak" or is its original sound replaced by a narrator's interpretation of events or recreated sound? If no original sound existed or if that sound has been replaced or enhanced, what is the impact on the interpretation of the image? How does, for example, the addition of gun shots or crowd noise manipulate the interpretation of an archival photograph or moving image? Furthermore, how does the use of music affect the interpretation of images and text? Music and other sound effects have a powerful capability to create a mood, cuing viewers to feel a range of emotions, from nostalgia and romance to disgust and horror, about the history which is being presented. Because images are vulnerable to multiple readings, the deconstruction of the use of sound, including narration, music, sound effects and voice-overs is essential to the analysis of the representation of visual documents.

In order to tell the story and to bring continuity to the evidence being presented, documentaries often use a narrator, eyewitness, and/or expert testimony. Each needs to be considered in terms of the weight and authority they are given. The use of an authoritative male narrator, in particular, is one of the conventions of truth used commonly to enhance the credibility of a documentary production. The viewer must measure, however, the degree to which the narrator dominates and leads a production and, in consequence, the degree to which the records are allowed to speak. Clayton R. Koppes, Robert Brent Toplin and David

Wiener have cited filmmakers who have chosen to dispense with the authorial narrator and have allowed the actual archival sources to tell the story, confident that the audience will be able to draw the appropriate conclusions.⁴¹

Wiener referred specifically to the documentary *Survivors of the Holocaust* in which eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust provide the foundation for the story instead of a narrator. Wiener contended that a narrator "could not find [the] depth" that is provided in a first person account and that the combination of testimony with archival stills and footage makes for a more powerful and compelling production.⁴² To the contrary, however, John O'Connor argues that documentaries which do not use a narrator are more dangerous. They raise the viewer's expectation of truth and "seriously limit the voice of the historian". He adds that they rely too much on eyewitness testimony which can result in privileging memory and emotion over historical evidence.⁴³ The sampling of eyewitnesses must be questioned and the viewer must consider whether a person is speaking as an individual or being used by the filmmakers to represent the experience of a larger group. The challenge for the filmmaker is to determine the appropriate balance between narration, testimony and archival records. In the end, the critical viewer must try to discern whether the incorporation of these

⁴¹Clayton R. Koppes, "Radio Bikini: Making and Unmaking Nuclear Mythology," in Rosenstone, ed., *Revisioning History*, 134; Robert Brent Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," *American Historical Review* 93, 5 (December 1988), 1214; and David Wiener, "A Testament to Tragedy," *American Cinematographer* 77, 1 (January, 1996), 70.

⁴²Wiener, "A Testament to Tragedy," 70-72.

⁴³John O'Connor, *Image as Artifact*, 32.

voices, narrator, expert or eyewitness, provides a helpful guide and complement to other evidence and to the interpretation as a whole, or if they serve to limit the "voice" of the original documents and to stifle the historical enquiry.

Another frequently used component of historical documentaries is dramatization. The challenge for the critical viewer is to be aware of the possible use of dramatized, staged portions and to be able to understand the role of re-enactments in the context of the whole production. Re-enactments might include dramatizations by actors or re-created footage which may or may not be identified as a fabrication. One of the most controversial aspects of *The Valour and the Horror* was, indeed, its use of dramatization. Actors were used to represent men and women involved in the war with the scripts being taken directly from textual documents and oral history interviews. The connection between the actors' words and the original sources from which they were obtained was not made clear, however, and the portrayal of some military leaders was seen to be inflammatory and unjustified.⁴⁴ The use of unseen actors in *The Civil War* to read excerpts from journals, letters and other documents, on the other hand, was both artistic and respectful of documents, especially with the incorporation of the author's name at the end of each statement.

Another example of the use of re-enactment can be seen in an episode of *American Experience* entitled "The Wright Stuff." The documentary outlines the history of the Wright brothers. Along with some compelling interviews and well-

⁴⁴Dick, "History on Television," 205; and S.F. Wise, "The Valour and the Horror. A Report for the CBC Ombudsman," in Bercuson and Wise, eds., *The Valour and the Horror Revisited*, 18.

used archival sources, including the first moving images shot from an airplane, the programme includes a re-enactment of the Wrights' first flight in a replica of their airplane. The only indication that the scene is re-enacted is given in the credits at the end of the show, which identify the replica's builder and flyer. The footage is filmed in black and white and gives the impression that the film might be authentic, although shot from multiple angles and not scratched nor dirty.⁴⁵ Regarding the use of dramatization and re-enactment, archivists might encourage filmmakers to indicate the fictional status of re-created footage while making clear, when applicable, the connection between a dramatization and original sources.

The presentation of archival documents in audio-visual format is radically different from their incorporation into written works. Given the nature of television, acknowledging both clear limitations on historical inquiry as well as distinct possibilities for incorporating records of varied media, archivists and historians alike must determine what can be expected from a television production. Television must be recognized as a different medium from the written word and cannot be judged solely by the standards applied to print culture. Written studies allow for a complex analysis of sources and theories, while film and television tend toward a linear, comparatively simplistic, narrative approach to history.⁴⁶ Textual studies allow the reader to reflect and review the evidence,

⁴⁵Interestingly, the show's web page included considerable detail about the plane's replication which was obviously not deemed appropriate for the television show <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/amex/aeabout.html>>.

⁴⁶Rosenstone, "History in Images," 1176-1177.

piece by piece, at her/his own pace. Audio-visual presentations, however, are much more complex and, despite the rewind and freeze-frame innovations on a video machine, the viewer is bombarded with a multiplicity of images and sounds, in which a number of archival records might be presented simultaneously, along with the fictionalized or creative elements of a production. Because of this multi-media barrage, the viewer finds it more difficult to dissect and analyze the various bits of evidence as each "must be 'read' differently within the context of the whole if their full meaning is to be understood."⁴⁷ The presentation of history can make a significant impact on the viewer without encouraging or allowing the viewer to analyze or question the evidence which is being submitted as proof of the particular interpretation of historical events. David Herlihy argues that historical productions, and movies in particular, grant the viewer the illusion of being eyewitnesses to history, engaging them in the historical event rather than encouraging a critical distance. Herlihy explains that "doubt is not visual," and that television viewers are more inclined to link a historical film with reality than to question what they see.⁴⁸ As such, some viewers may be seduced easily into the presentation of history as seen on television or in the movies without being aware of production techniques or the point of view from which the programme has been created. Active critical viewing, from an archival point of view, involves an examination of the archival sources which are used and the production

⁴⁷Hugh A. Taylor, "The Valour and the Horror: Hypertext as History?" *Archivaria* 36 (Autumn 1993), 191.

⁴⁸David Herlihy, "Am I a Camera? Other Reflections on Film and History," *American Historical Review* 93, 5 (December 1988), 1187-1189.

techniques, both sound and visual, which affect the presentation of the documents and their reception by the viewing public. By asking questions regarding the origins of archival records, viewers become more aware of how sources are used and manipulated by television to convince them of the historical interpretation being made. In order to defend the record in this very public arena, archivists must become intelligent, critical viewers, promoting visual literacy to the wider society and challenging documentary makers to a greater level of respect for the richness of the archival record.

Chapter 4

Television from the Trenches: An Archival Review of *No Price Too High*

Few events, if any, have received as much attention in historical documentaries as the Second World War. Because the war was one of the most significant world events in recent memory and also because it generated an unprecedented amount of visual and oral documentation, it is an obvious choice for documentary filmmakers. Indeed, the Canadian specialty channel History Television has been criticized for offering little else.¹ In Canada, the 1992 broadcast of *The Valour and the Horror*, a documentary on the history of the Second World War, was a watershed moment in the public debate over history and collective memory. Professional historians, journalists, veterans and others became actively involved in a debate over the presentation of the history of the war on television. Veterans who felt that they were being portrayed unfairly and that Canadian history was being sacrificed to made-for-television historical conspiracies were motivated to provide what they believed would be a corrective to *The Valour and the Horror*.² One of the results was the production of another documentary, *No Price Too High*.

No Price Too High: Canadians and the Second World War premiered on

¹Christopher Moore, "History Television: Stay Tuned," *The Beaver* 78, 1 (February-March 1998), pp. 50-51. For a discussion of the proliferation of Second World War documentaries, see Eric Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of Non-Fiction Film*, Second Revised Edition (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²Christopher Moore, "Living History, History Dying," *The Beaver* 78, 4 (August-September 1998), 54.

the Canadian Bravo! Network in January and February 1996 after being refused by the three major Canadian networks (CBC, CTV and Global). It has been re-broadcast several times, on various networks such as Bravo!, History Television, PBS and, finally, the CBC. The television premiere of the series was accompanied by the publication of a companion book co-authored by Terry Copp, historian and historical consultant to the documentary.³ The documentary was aired in its entirety to commemorate Remembrance Day on History Television in 1997 and on the Bravo! Network in 1998. Finally, in the spring of 1998, after much lobbying on the part of the supporters of *No Price Too High* and with the support of CBC President Perrin Beatty, the CBC featured the documentary under the umbrella of a continuing Sunday night series entitled *Remembering Canada at War*.⁴ The series, thus, had a less prominent debut than *The Valour and the Horror* and, likely because its perspective was more conventional, it did not receive the media attention accorded its more controversial counterpart. In fact, a search of Canadian newspapers revealed no articles or reviews written in response to the 1996 premiere. The few reviews written in 1998 concentrate more on the documentary's relationship to *The Valour and the Horror* and the battle to have it aired on the CBC than on its

³Terry Copp and Richard Nielsen, *No Price Too High: Canadians and the Second World War* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1996). The book was intended as a complement to the series and, while it incorporates some of the script and sources, the text is not a duplicate of the documentary script. Both the companion book and videotapes of the series were advertised for sale at the end of each episode.

⁴See related stories in Greg Quill, "War Series Finally Airs on CBC," *The Toronto Star*, Metro Edition (14 May 1998), A29; and Anthony Wilson-Smith, "A 'Happy Warrior' Wins -- His Way," *Maclean's* (1 June 1998), 11.

merits as a historical documentary.⁵

No Price Too High incorporates a wide range of archival sources and provides an interesting point of comparison to *The Valour and the Horror*. Historians may debate the merits and deficiencies of the historical interpretations presented in the two series. An archival review, however, will necessarily examine the incorporation of original documents. This chapter will review *No Price Too High* using the criteria established in chapter three. The contextual approach to archival records, based on knowledge of the origin, original purposes and characteristics of records, will guide this analysis. To aid this analysis, some comparison will be made with *The Valour and the Horror* which has been reviewed by archivist Ernest Dick.⁶ This chapter, however, will focus primarily on an assessment of the use of archival sources in *No Price Too High*. It will be contended that some of the most effective stories in the documentary are those which respect the original nature and provenance of records and make explicit the connections between related records.

Not surprisingly, the production of the two documentaries was guided by very different motivations. *No Price Too High* was produced largely because some veterans and military historians wanted Canadians, and especially younger Canadians, to be given a comprehensive visual historical lesson which would

⁵Quill, "War Series," A29; Jeffrey Simpson, "CBC Series Marks Proud Page in Canada's War History, Warts and All," *Globe and Mail* (15 May 1998), A16; Wilson-Smith, "A 'Happy Warrior,'" 11.

⁶Dick, "History on Television" and "The Valour and the Horror' Continued."

teach them the veterans' opinion of the significance of the war and that the sacrifice made by veterans directly affects the quality of life in Canada today.⁷ *The Valour and the Horror*, on the other hand, was produced by two CBC journalists, Brian and Terence McKenna, who approached the subject as investigative reporters and who, as members of a younger generation, were interested in examining the war from a critical distance and exposing the evils on all sides.⁸ *No Price Too High* was produced by Richard Nielsen and Anderson Charters. They worked together with the No Price Too High Foundation which was chaired by the Honourable Barnett J. Danson, a veteran of the war and former Minister of National Defence. The foundation consisted of politicians, veterans and other interested citizens. The foundation raised more than \$1.5 million for the production of the series and also established an Advisory Committee made up of "distinguished veterans" who provided comment at various stages of the production process. The executive producers of *No Price Too High* had the undeniable support of veterans who were "seek[ing] ways of re-establishing an accurate collective memory of the meaning of the sacrifices of war."⁹ Terry Copp, the academic historian who served as consultant and on-air commentator for the series, indicated further that the series was produced as a response to books and films which, in his view, were portraying the war critically

⁷Moore, "Living History," 54.

⁸Dick, "History on Television," 202-203.

⁹Copp and Nielsen, *No Price Too High*, 9.

and unfairly, with seemingly little regard for the sacrifices of men and women who participated.¹⁰ At the end of each episode, the credits include a dedication “to the generation that met the challenges of World War II, in particular those who fought and those who died.”

The Valour and the Horror consists of three issue or event-oriented episodes. *No Price Too High* is more traditional in its format and traces the story of the Second World War by giving a chronological overview. The series consists of six one-hour episodes which, at least in its premiere broadcast on Bravo!, were aired without commercial interruption. The six episodes constitute a re-telling of the events leading to the war, the war itself and the aftermath of victory. The series focuses on the Canadian experience, at both the political and the grassroots levels, at home and overseas. Because of the chronological format, each episode deals with a variety of subjects and issues which are separated from each other like chapters in a book by the insertion of titles. Each episode consists of a variety of basic elements: a narrator, a few “expert” comments given by Terry Copp, archival documents in various media and contemporary footage of some relevant European locations.

Both *No Price Too High* and *The Valour and the Horror* feature archival sources prominently and extended their search for sources far beyond archival repositories. Each seeks to tell the story of Canadian participation in the Second World War from the perspective of the ordinary men and women who were

¹⁰ibid., 9.

involved, instead of focusing solely on an examination of high level military tactics or political details. As a result, the sources used necessarily had to move beyond the official public record to the documents created by private individuals and organizations. In fact, it is clear throughout *No Price Too High* that the narrative and direction of the production were set in consultation with the original sources as opposed to the common technique of writing a script and then going to the archives to find the “perfect” images to match the story. Executive Producer Anderson Charters led the nationwide search for sources for *No Price Too High*. Undoubtedly, the strong presence of veterans in the No Price Too High Foundation, as well as the strong opposition to *The Valour and the Horror*, provided a valuable network and led to untapped records stored in the homes of Canadians. The credits for each episode include numerous archival institutions as well as a special appreciation of people who offered diaries and letters for use in the production. The footnotes to the companion volume reveal many individuals who offered their private records for use in the series. The wide-reaching search for sources conducted by the No Price Too High Foundation is impressive to archivists who promote a “total archives” approach to the historical record. Records from both private and public sectors are used to create a more inclusive view of the past. Letters, journals, photographs and other records represent both anglophones and francophones, men and women, high ranking officials, politicians, enlisted men and conscientious objectors. Throughout *No Price Too High* the original nature of the documents is respected and, as Jeffrey

Simpson stated in his review, the voices and faces of those represented in the documents who participated in the war are allowed to be the “stars of the show.”¹¹

Another important element of the total archives equation is research into and the incorporation of records of different media. As has been discussed in chapter three, one of the strengths of an audio-visual presentation is its ability to create a multi-sensory product which allows viewers the opportunity to see historical footage and photographs and to hear sound recordings or excerpts read from textual documents all in one production. *No Price Too High*, like *The Valour and the Horror*, includes several documentary media. The visual element of *No Price Too High* is largely archival. Photographs, whether informal snapshots, portrait shots of soldiers in uniform or “official” photographs of the war taken by military personnel are featured prominently. The series also makes use of a wide and impressive array of moving images which include Canadian and German newsreels, German propaganda films, amateur footage (in Canada and Hong Kong), training films and various other images taken on the home front and on the battlefield. Finally, a few pieces of documentary art, including conscription posters and one painting, are shown. (While documentary art is virtually ignored in *No Price Too High*, war artists and the documentary record are featured in *The Valour and the Horror*.) In addition, several sound documents were also incorporated into *No Price Too High*. CBC and BBC radio

¹¹Simpson, “CBC Series Marks Proud Page,” A16.

reports were included along with recordings of speeches made, for example, by Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler and William Lyon Mackenzie King.

While the documentary is strongly visual, textual documents are the cornerstone of *No Price Too High*. Textual records, such as diaries, letters, telegrams and newspaper articles, are incorporated effectively using a technique perfected and made popular by Ken Burns's documentary series *The Civil War*. In this method, actors read the original text and identify the author of the text at the end of the quotation. The actors are never seen; instead, the text is illustrated by moving and still images and, at times, punctuated by additional sound effects. Thus, the makers of *No Price Too High* avoid one of the most contentious elements of *The Valour and the Horror*. In the latter, actors in period costume dramatize the contents of textual documents and oral history interviews. This technique de-emphasizes the original nature of the texts while making the dramatized words of the soldiers appear to be fictionalized. Many of the quotations, for example, are taken from oral history interviews conducted in the 1970s, but the actors portrayed soldiers and other characters as if the words had been said or written during the wartime experience. The reading of original texts, as incorporated in *No Price Too High*, accompanied by related footage and photographs, is a respectful way to bring words off the page and is a respectful method of incorporating written sources.

Beyond the wide range of documents which are used, several techniques employed throughout the series emphasize the original nature of the documents, connecting them directly with the acts of creation and with their creators

(provenance) and with other related records (original order). Contextual details are frequently made explicit in the use of records of all media. The reading of letters often begins with the date of writing and the customary salutation. At the end of the quote, the actor will state the name of the author and, when applicable, will often include his/her rank and regiment. The context of the creation of these records is enhanced further when numerous letters by the same author are read or when a series of correspondence is read, including letters between two or more people. Several episodes, for example, feature correspondence between Jean Partridge and William 'Pat' Patterson, a young couple who were married in 1942 before Patterson went overseas with the Royal Canadian Air Force. While these letters are read, photographs of Jean and Pat are shown. In the fifth episode, several of Pat's letters to Jean are read, with all of the dates given showing the progression of letters. At the end of these excerpts, a newspaper clipping is shown reporting that Pat Patterson is missing in action, and then the voice portraying Jean Partridge reports the circumstances of Pat's death. His grave is shown in the final scene of the episode.

Another example of the use of related records is found in the fifth episode which includes several letters written by Lance Corporal Alec Flexer to his parents. The letters are illustrated by, among other visuals, his portrait in uniform. Following excerpts from Flexer's letter, his death is acknowledged. It is then explained that, even though she had been notified of his death, his mother continued to write to him. The excerpts from Mrs. Flexer's letters to her dead son, accompanied by pictures of him as a boy, are more powerful and

meaningful because the context of their creation has been explained. The letters exchanged by Jean Partridge and Pat Paterson and by Alec and Mrs. Flexer are given meaning because they are not treated as isolated paragraphs disconnected from their respective creators. Rather, they are connected directly with related records, including photographs and the newspaper clipping, with dates and with surrounding circumstances. Letters, and statements within letters, are better appreciated when read in the context of continuing correspondence and with at least some understanding of their authors and their relationship to each other.

Identifying elements are provided for other documents as well. Several original sound recordings of radio broadcasts are used. Most include an identifying statement by the reporter at the beginning or end of the report in which he states his name, his affiliation and, often, his location. Particularly in a series in which ambient sound is re-created, and actors read the words of historical figures, features which delineate a sound recording as original are crucial to their authenticity. In the sixth episode, for example, a newsreel is shown. The clip begins with its title shot, "Food for North Holland. Canadian Army Newsreel" which unobtrusively identifies both the creator and the form of the document. Having identified the Canadian Army as the creator, the viewer will understand immediately that the clip is not, for instance, a commercial newsreel but that it was created by the army for a specific purpose. It is also clear that the original soundtrack was not removed from the footage. This maintains the "original order" of the newsreel and allows the viewer to pick up

oral clues to help interpret the corresponding visuals.

The emphasis on form and the relationship between records strengthens the use of documents and the presentation of history within the documentary. The presentation of documents in this manner, however, is not consistent. While the Partridge/Patterson and Flexer interchanges are certainly not the only examples of multi-media documents being used effectively and within context, there are several examples where related documents are presented but linkages are not made or where opportunities for connecting documents are missed. In the first episode, for example, during the discussion of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King's visit to Germany and his meeting with Adolf Hitler, numerous excerpts from King's diary are read. One mentions a gift Hitler gave to King: an autographed portrait of himself. While this is read, a portrait of Hitler is shown but no autograph. If the gift photograph is still in existence, it would have been a powerful visual and an excellent corollary to the text. On the other hand, if the picture could not be located, there may have been a very interesting story in its disappearance.

Another example is found in the fourth episode which includes a few excerpts from the journal kept by war artist Charles Comfort. Oddly, before the excerpts are read, both moving and still images show Comfort in uniform and painting. The images, however, are in no way connected to the text and make no sense within the context of the production. Better editing and more explicit image identification could have been used to connect image and word. Also, a viewer might ask why this war artist was introduced without any real mention of

his work or shots of the documentary art record he produced. The speed at which a television production moves allows for inconsistencies to go unnoticed, particularly by a one-time viewer. Several inconsistencies found in the documentary, in fact, could only be confirmed by comparing the television series to the companion volume. The challenge for the archival reviewer, then, is to point out the relative strength of the portions which emphasize at least some original elements of the records used as opposed to those which do not.

Another point where the use of original documents could be strengthened is in the presentation of textual records. While the use of textual documents in *No Price Too High* is extensive and generally respectful, the impact of these “original” words read from diaries, letters and other records could have been enhanced by showing some of the actual documents. The only textual documents shown are newspaper clippings. In the fourth episode, an excerpt is read from a letter in which Lieutenant Frank Hall apologized that his poor handwriting resulted from the “throbbing of the ship’s engines.” A shot of this letter may have been a good illustration. In addition, shots of such documents as pages from the diary of Mackenzie King in which he describes his first impressions of Adolf Hitler or his communications with his dead mother, a telegram notifying a family of the death of a son or husband, or the last letter Jean Partridge received from Pat Paterson could be powerful images. They would remind the viewer that the quotations being heard were created deliberately by an individual in a specific historical time and place. Textual documents, after all, are more than just words on a page. Visual elements such

as a postmark, handwriting or a typewritten script all add authenticity and personality to their documents.

Photographs and moving images are used consistently in *No Price Too High* to illustrate the words which are being spoken, whether through narration or original texts. These images, however, have differing degrees of connection to the specific events or persons which are being presented. Some photographs, as in the examples above, are connected explicitly to specific individuals and events and their connections are made obvious as the viewer is shown several images of the same person or as the same image is shown every time a specific individual is quoted. Some moving and still images (and even some radio recordings) include a caption which clarifies for the viewer the name of the person being shown or heard. These captions are used inconsistently and infrequently, however, and so seem out of place when they do appear. Other images are connected to the text but are not linked clearly. Again, the only way a viewer can discover some of these linkages is through the series' companion book. Finally, many images are used generically as illustration and are connected to the text only because they represent a similar subject, time, location, battle or person. The use of images in this manner is inevitable. Television is inherently visual and an archivist cannot and should not expect every image to link directly to every quote or every event being presented. Certainly, such a production would put even archivists to sleep! Instead, the question becomes one of balance.

When photographs are used out of context or when the context behind a

photograph is not made explicit, it becomes very easy to construct a meaning to fit the argument or perspective being presented. For example, portrait photographs of individual soldiers are shown frequently throughout *No Price Too High*. While a quote is read by an off-screen actor, the camera focuses more and more closely on the soldier's eyes as if looking in the man's eyes will allow the viewer to really "see" the person in the uniform, to understand his deepest motivations and, if the quote is actually his, to truly comprehend what he is saying or, if the quote is not his, to appreciate that probably every soldier felt the same thing. No consideration is given to the fact that the photograph and the text were likely created at very different times and in very different locations and that studio shots were probably created in an artificial, unnatural setting. In these instances and others, the use of images in *No Price Too High* re-enforces the assumption that individual photographs are snapshots of "reality" and not subjective documents framed by an author.

Undoubtedly, the best and most archivally sound use of photographs is found in the sixth episode in the section on the entry of Allied forces into the Nazi concentration camp at Belsen. The photographs shown were taken by King Whyte, a Public Relations Officer in the Canadian First Army. Whyte sent the photographs home to his wife along with a letter describing the contents of the pictures and his impressions of the camp. Excerpts of Whyte's letter to his wife are read by an actor. They include significant detail about the photographs being shown. The images of the Belsen concentration camp are striking on their own,

but become much more powerful when they are coupled with the words of the photographer as he describes to his wife the horrific scenes which he has witnessed. The photographs provide much more than mere illustration. Their status as evidence is enhanced because the pictures are connected directly to their creator. They not only provide specific information about the concentration camp but also the surrounding context of action that was taking place beyond the frozen image of each photograph.

In his brief review and discussion of *No Price Too High* in *The Beaver*, Christopher Moore suggested that the series “skillfully explores the rich archive of film that Canadians created between 1939 and 1945.”¹² An archival review must consider the quality of this exploration. Indeed, there are many archival moving images which are incorporated into the documentary and the creators of *No Price Too High* are to be applauded for resisting the “easy” method of using stock shot moving images.¹³ Unfortunately, these documents are the ones most frequently used in many documentaries. Moving images are rarely given a clear contextual connection. There are many scenes showing, for instance, soldiers falling, men in combat, men and women in the military dancing or socializing in pubs, naval ships coming upon beaches, and wartime industrial production at home in Canada. Most moving images are used solely as illustration. For most of the footage shown, it is unclear who the cameraperson might have been, for

¹²Moore, “Living History, History Dying,” 54.

¹³No stock shot libraries are listed in the credits.

what purpose the film was created, or even if the scenes being shown connect directly to the action (specific battle, place and time) being described. Unless the reviewer has extensive specialized knowledge of all of the records being used, it is nearly impossible to know whether or not archival footage is showing the events, places or people being discussed. The reviewer must assess to what degree this correlation, or lack thereof, matters. Is it acceptable to use footage of one battle to depict or illustrate another? Does it matter if a photograph of one soldier is shown throughout the reading of a quote by another soldier? Do most viewers assume the connection of image and word? The inconsistency of the identification of records in *No Price Too High* may be problematic in this regard. Because some records are connected so clearly, the viewer may well assume that all records are. Considering that veterans reacted most strongly to the perceived misrepresentation of the words of soldiers and other documentary evidence in *The Valour and the Horror*, one might ask whether the unclear or generic presentation of visual evidence in *No Price Too High* is not equally deceptive. Unfortunately, however, it seems that as long as the historical interpretation does not become a point of public controversy for viewers, the misrepresentation or unclear representation of historical evidence will not be questioned.

In addition to examining the respectful use of archival documents in terms of clues to the history and meaning of the records being used, it is important for an archival review to consider, at least briefly, some of the production elements which are employed and how these affect the “reading” of archival documents by

the viewing audience. *No Price Too High* uses, for instance, many of the “conventions of truth” discussed in chapter three which are used to lend credibility and authority to the production. The perspective from which the documentary was produced has a distinct effect on how documents are portrayed. *No Price Too High* chooses to situate its interpretation of the war in a distinctly patriotic framework which, first and foremost, honours the bravery and sacrifice of Canadian participants. Indeed, the standards set for the production are somewhat lofty: to create a definitive and “true” telling of the war. The Bravo! Network introduction, which preceded each episode of *No Price Too High*, indicated that the documentary would “take an honest look” at Canada’s involvement in the Second World War. It is important, then, to recognize elements of the production which promote the overall impression of authority.

The truth status of the documentary is constructed throughout the production with the use both of a “voice-of-God” narration and the expert testimony of a professional historian. The narrator, Arthur Kent, is never seen and his voice, which is not particularly distinctive, allows him to maintain a quasi-omniscient status. This technique is a contrast to *The Valour and the Horror* which uses Terence McKenna, a prominent journalist whose voice is recognizable to many Canadian viewers and who, in a technique which might be viewed as a healthy acknowledgement of bias, appears on camera at a few points in the series. The role of the narrator in *No Price Too High* is to give background information and to guide the telling of the story, especially as it takes topical leaps. The narrator seems to be more prominent in the earlier episodes,

with a decreased presence as the series progresses and as personal accounts are used to tell more and more of the story. The truth status of the narration is promoted further by the “expert testimony” of Terry Copp who appears between two and four times per episode. Copp is a professor of history at Wilfrid Laurier University who has written extensively on the Canadian military in the Second World War. Throughout the series, Copp’s comments orient the viewer to the larger picture and tie together some of the sources being shown or read and the stories being told. Both “authority figures” used in this documentary appear, in a sense, as teachers “instructing” students. They add credibility and perspective to what could be a disjointed presentation of footage and archival texts. Fortunately, the makers of *No Price Too High* did not allow either of these figures to dominate the production. Rather, they appear as effective partners and guides through the chronological tour of the Second World War.

In assessing the balance between narration/expert testimony and the use of records, the reviewer must examine the degree to which documents are allowed to “speak for themselves” and the impact of pacing and editing on the presentation of documents. In this, the length of quotations or film footage and the time spent showing photographs or other images must be considered. Photographs are used in a style similar to Ken Burns’s “still-in-motion” cinematography, in which the film camera often lingers on individual photographs, panning the entire image and focusing on specific details. Moving images, particularly the newsreels mentioned above, are often shown in lengthy clips. There are numerous moments in *No Price Too High* when the voices of

the past are heard very clearly and in which the stories of the war are told directly by its participants rather than the narrator. One example is found in the fifth episode. A journal entry of 8 July 1944 written by F. H. Metcalfe of the Queen's Own Regiment is read in its entirety. The entry describes a full day of battle based on one man's experience. Equally strong is the use of William Lyon Mackenzie King's diaries. In the first episode, the diaries are particularly effective. Lengthy excerpts are read which describe King's meeting with Adolf Hitler in 1937. He describes the events of the visit, his conversations with Hitler, and the degree to which both Hitler and the strength of the German economy impressed him. Another quote includes a detailed description of Hitler's facial features. These lengthy excerpts represent a general respect for the information being conveyed in the documents, as the viewer is able to hear whole paragraphs instead of mere disembodied phrases. Because the filmmakers allowed time for the documents to "speak," viewers are better able to appreciate the spirit and intent of original records and, at least to some extent, to weigh the merits of the evidence being presented.

Film speed is another creative element which relates directly to the pacing and editing of the documentary. *No Price Too High* includes some examples of "fast motion" film. Several clips of World War I footage are shown in the first episode. This footage was shot originally at sixteen to eighteen frames-per-second. When the clips are projected at the customary twenty-four frames-per-second, the motion appears to be jerky and almost comical but, as fast motion film is commonly associated with old Hollywood movies, the viewer is reminded

that this footage, too, is “very old.” More often, the makers of *No Price Too High* employed slow motion techniques when showing archival footage. Images of battles, of artillery being fired, of men being shot or running away from explosions are shown at a surreal, slowed pace. Slow motion allows the viewer to examine the action more closely, as the normal speed of the film might be too quick to absorb. The technique achieves other effects as well, as is argued by Richard Gollin: “For expressionistic purposes, slow motion can present a dreamlike world, languorous, lyrical, ecstatic, interminable, sodden or horribly entrapping in time as well as space.”¹⁴ *No Price Too High* incorporates many of these effects and encourages an uncritical, romanticized reading of the archival images being shown.

Another production element which contributes to the impressions given by the documents as well as to the overall authority status, is the use of sound. The documentary employs “foley” sound throughout. In other words, the sounds of battle (artillery firing, screams), parties in bars, and crowds cheering are added to otherwise silent footage or, possibly, to replace or add to the original sound from the film footage. These sound effects also commonly accompany and punctuate the actors’ readings of original texts, adding drama to the words being spoken and giving the impression that the viewer is hearing a voice from the past even though this is obviously not the case. Music is another extremely effective aural tool which establishes a mood and encourages an emotional response to what is

¹⁴Richard M. Gollin, *A Viewer's Guide to Film: Arts, Artifices and Issues* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1992), 41.

being viewed and heard. *The Valour and the Horror* features quite prominently Gabriel Fauré's "Requiem". It creates an ominous and foreboding mood. The use of music in *No Price Too High* is quite different. Several pieces including "The Maple Leaf Forever" and "O Canada!" (played by a solo trumpet at the end of the last episode) construct a distinctly patriotic tone. Popular songs such as "Lili Marlene," "After the War" and "When the Lights go on Again" are heard throughout the series. Like other techniques, these songs are used to transport viewers back in time, instructing them to feel that they have entered the culture and the camaraderie of the war and encouraging, again, a romanticized reception of both the original records being presented. The music featured in *No Price Too High* helps to create what Ken Burns described as an "emotional consensus,"¹⁵ in which the documentary invites viewers to "feel good" about its interpretation of the past.

In the final analysis, an archival review must add up all the various components of the critique and decide whether or not the total production is satisfactory, in terms of the use and representation of original sources. It must be remembered that the primary goal of the producers is to entertain and, secondarily, to educate. Provenance and contextual information are not their guiding philosophies, nor should archivists expect them to be. However, if an archivist can point to areas where these details might strengthen a production or at least be able to comment intelligently on the strengths and weaknesses of a

¹⁵Cripps, "Historical Truth," 746.

production after the fact, they might be able to contribute to further understanding and respect for the distinct characteristics of original documents.

No Price Too High illustrates some of the challenges of the television documentary, particularly in the frequent use of archival images as illustration as opposed to evidence. The strongest element of the production, from an archival standpoint, is its ability to bring together related documents, including those of different media, and to give them meaning by situating them within the lives of real people, their creators and their subjects. Archivists must challenge each other and researchers to consider all archival media as information technologies with distinctive characteristics and capacities for carrying information about the past which need to be read and interpreted. In this documentary, it is much more likely that the context behind a quotation from a textual document will be made explicit than it is for a still or moving image. Clearly, however, still and moving images become much more powerful when the context of their creation is known and when they move beyond illustration to evidence, as was shown in the example of the Belsen concentration camp photographs. The challenge comes, obviously, in introducing this information without making the production laboured or pedantic. Would it be possible for the “omniscient” narrator to become more engaged in the process and perhaps to point directly to the images being shown? Perhaps the narrator could name the cameraperson who filmed a certain battle, give details about why he was there, how the record came to be created, maintained and archived, or on specific details in the image itself. Could captions be used more effectively to add meaning and context to visual

documents?

No Price Too High was a deliberate attempt to issue a corrective to a perceived deficiency in Canadian documentaries on the war and to provide a forum for Canadian veterans to participate more fully in the presentation of World War II on television. Because this documentary did not provoke a controversy, its profile was much lower than *The Valour and the Horror* and, as such, viewers might not even think to question its interpretation and presentation of the past. This chapter has neither challenged nor upheld the historical interpretations presented in the six episodes of *No Price Too High* and has, instead, focused on an archival critique of the use of original sources and the ways in which the inclusion or omission of archival details affect the quality of the production. In the end, *No Price Too High* achieved a respectable balance of documents used as evidence and as illustration. While there are many points at which details of context and content are left unknown, there are also many examples where the provenance of archival documents is enunciated clearly and where the original order of related documents is maintained and, therein, is used effectively as a tool for connecting stories and individuals. The documentary is to be applauded for bringing to the screen a wide variety of documents, created by a diverse cross-section of authors in different media, to portray the history of the Canadian experience in the Second World War. It serves as an excellent example for archivists trying to understand better the effect of television on the interpretation of the records they are charged to defend.

Chapter 5

The Role of Archivists in the Television Age

In 1998 historian J. L. Granatstein asked the question "Who killed Canadian history?" in a book of the same name. In the book, Granatstein despaired of the lack of historical knowledge of Canada and of a national historical memory which has fallen prey to the specialization of academic historians, the lack of a national history curriculum, and the political correctness of multi-cultural policies.¹ Meanwhile, at the 1999 "Giving the Past a Future" conference at the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada in Montreal, CBC documentary producer Mark Starowicz declared that "Canadian society has had a stroke which has virtually eliminated long-term memory...."² A survey conducted in conjunction with the conference, however, showed that not only are Canadians very interested in learning more about their history, 67 percent said that they would go to television to find out about history, followed by museums and historic sites (44 percent), books (43 percent) and archives and libraries (24 percent).³ Both the perceived crisis in national memory and the expectation that

¹J. L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998).

²Mark Starowicz, "Erasing History: The Fate of Memory in the Digital Age," Address at "Giving the Past a Future: A Conference on Innovation in Teaching and Learning History" (Montreal, 30 January 1999). Available on Giving the Past a Future web site <<http://www.historymatters.com/sp10.html>>.

³"EnviroNics History Survey Results," "Giving the Past a Future" web site, January 1999 <<http://www.historymatters.com/form-res.html>>; and "Interest in Canadian History: Highlights of a New National Poll," "Giving the Past a Future" web site, January 1999 <<http://www.historymatters.com/PR-sondage.html>>. The poll was conducted in December 1998

television is a good source of information about history should be of interest and concern to archivists. Archivists might ask whether they have a responsibility to become involved in the promotion of historical consciousness beyond the preservation of recorded memory. In the previous chapters, it has been demonstrated that television is playing an increasingly prominent role in conveying history to the viewing public. Beyond teaching about history, television has become a significant user of archives and a lens through which viewers see and hear archival documents. These "invisible" users of archives are a user group which is difficult to define. They represent, however, an important audience which archivists may or may not choose to address. This final chapter will provide some public programming ideas which might help archivists capitalize on the rise of history on television and to participate in the stimulation of interest in Canadian historical memory. It will be argued that archivists should seize the opportunities that television provides to promote wider awareness of the importance of archival records and to look for ways in which archival public programming can make a lasting and constructive impression on the visible and invisible users of archives in the television age.

Archival public programming may involve various initiatives in the areas of image, outreach, education and use. Before developing tactics for addressing the public, however, archivists must first acknowledge and come to some

and January 1999 in conjunction with the "Giving the Past a Future" conference held at the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, Montreal, 29-31 January 1999. Among numerous workshops, the conference included workshops on "Teaching Canadian History on Film," "Uneasy Partners: The Producer and the Historian," and "History on Television: The Challenge of Representation in the Documentary."

understanding of the role of television as history teacher and the ways in which historical programming affect on historical consciousness. Paul Conway has argued that archival user studies should include a study of the uses of records and, in conjunction, the impact of use "beyond the repository." In other words, archivists should find out where their records "go", who "sees" them and what impact the records have on the wider society.⁴ Such information would presumably advance the cause and perceived relevance of the archives to the society in which it functions.

Beyond the (necessary) goal of self-promotion, however, Richard Cox has argued that archival institutions and archivists exist to preserve the public memory and that, as such, archivists need to become "students of their society" in order to understand how a society "views its past."⁵ Thus, if society is receiving much of its historical knowledge from television and film, archivists must learn more about the audio-visual production process and the implications of having archival documents presented and interpreted in this manner. Chapter two responded to the challenges presented by both Conway and Cox by providing an overview of the uses of archives on television and a discussion of the rise in quantity, quality and popularity of historical programming on television. In particular, the success of Ken Burns's documentaries, the controversy over *The Valour and the Horror*, and the development of specialty networks, such as

⁴Conway, "Facts and Frameworks," 399-400.

⁵Cox, "The Concept of Public Memory," 131-132.

History Television and The History Channel, were shown to be examples of the growing role and influence of television as a teacher of history and the ability television has to provoke an emotional connection to the past.

Once archivists have made themselves aware of the wide use of original sources in television productions, they must also consider increasing their visual literacy and encouraging an archival visual literacy throughout the profession, as was argued in chapter three. In order to be able to comment intelligently on documentaries, archivists must be able to “read” audio-visual productions and have some understanding of the components and techniques which are used to put them together. In their discussions of archival public programming, Terry Cook and Richard Cox both argued that archivists must remain grounded in the archival record and the contextual approach. This approach was used as the basis for chapter three in which criteria were established for the critical viewing of historical documentaries from an archival point of view. Chapter four provided an application of this criteria in an archival review of the documentary *No Price Too High*. Chapters three and four showed that knowledge specific to archivists, about the creation and characteristics of records, can provide an effective point of analysis on historical productions and serve as an excellent complement to critiques directed at historical interpretations.

Reviews of documentaries, as provided in chapter four, need to become a part of archival literature in order to develop a dialogue on the subject within the archival community. Archivists are accustomed to writing and reading book reviews related to archival theory or issues and, more broadly, to history and the

use of sources within historical writing. *Archivaria*, the professional journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists, includes regular sections for both book reviews and exhibition reviews. The *Archivaria* editorial board, as well as those associated with other professional archival journals, should be encouraged to consider expanding their reviews section to include audio-visual productions which make significant use of archival records. In addition, archivists might consider submitting reviews for publication in journals of related disciplines, such as history or film studies, thus opening avenues for participation in a wider multi-disciplinary dialogue. The presentation of reviews or demonstrations on visual literacy at professional conferences might also generate discussion and raise awareness of the issues related to the use of archives in television. Informal archival reviews of documentaries and other productions likely occur regularly in archives coffee rooms throughout the country as archivists view with interest and curiosity the programmes which have used their sources. It is time, however, for the reviews and the discussions of archives in television to move into a more formal, professional sphere in order to foster visual literacy.

In addition to the publication of reviews in professional and academic journals, archivists also need to turn their attention to the broader public. In this respect, public programming is not solely a matter of trying to get more researchers into archival institutions but becomes an opportunity to defend the archival record and to educate the people whom Paul Conway termed the "invisible" users of archives. As such, reviews and letters to the editor written for a more popular audience could be submitted to newspapers and magazines.

Reviews in this wider domain, however, are not always conducted in print. Archivists need to make sure that they are available and able to participate in interviews or panel discussions which may take place on television or on radio. In the aftermath of the airing of documentaries on television, historians often volunteer or are called upon to offer comment on the quality and historical accuracy of a particular production. Historians, for instance, were very vocal in the public debate over the controversial presentation of the history of the Second World War in *The Valour and the Horror* and some were called upon to advise the CBC Ombudsman in the ensuing report.⁶ This would have been an excellent opportunity for archivists to contribute their point of view, beyond Ernest Dick's excellent reviews in *Archivaria*, by commenting not on historical interpretation per se but on the origins, history, characteristics, and use of evidence. In addition, as the History Television network expands, more on-air commentary may be provided during which "experts" discuss the merits and/or drawbacks of a particular documentary before or after it is aired, as has been done to accompany broadcasts of *The Valour and the Horror*. Archivists will have to increase their public profile before they become as obvious a choice as historians for these discussions. They will also need to prove that they have an important perspective and some valuable insight to contribute. While

⁶One archivist, Carl Vincent, was included among several historians in the CBC Ombudsman's consultation process. Vincent, however, seems to have been solicited for comment on the basis of his historical writings on the Second World War as opposed to commenting on the use of archival evidence. See William Morgan, "Report of the CBC Ombudsman," in Bercuson and Wise, eds., *The Valour and the Horror Revisited*, 61-72.

documentaries are not always popular or contentious, when they do “make waves”, archivists should be on the ready to offer their comments and to contribute their insight to the public discussion.

The media is an effective tool through which archival institutions can reach their invisible users. In a posting to the Archives and Archivists listserv, American records manager Peter Kurilecz argued that archivists should “cultivate the news media” by providing ideas for stories, feeding information or images for upcoming anniversaries, and writing letters to the editor. He stated further that archivists should “complain when the information provided is misinterpreted, [but] applaud when they get it correct.”⁷ Archivists may need to be creative and assertive in order to take full advantage of the possibilities of using the media. The debut of a documentary which makes significant use of an institution’s holdings, for instance, might be a good opportunity for a press release issued by the institution, highlighting the incorporation of their materials into the project and drawing attention to sources available for further exploration. Also, television columnists of daily newspapers could be targeted and provided with specific information about the institution’s connection to the documentary before it is reviewed by the columnist. While the columnist may not have thought to contact an archival institution before writing an article, she/he might use the information provided as a hook to a story or as a way to provide a local or tangible connection to the history being presented. By developing relationships with the

⁷Peter Kurilecz, “Re: We don’t exist - My Take,” Archives and Archivists Listserv, <ARCHIVES@LISTSERV.MUOHIO.EDU>, 21 March 1999.

media and by finding ways to insert an archival agenda into reporting about television, archivists may indirectly influence public awareness of the presence of actual documents in a production and, perhaps, encourage more active, informed television viewing.

The broadcast of significant documentaries may provide archival institutions with excellent public programming opportunities directed at potential television viewers. Documentaries such as *The Valour and the Horror* or the CBC's upcoming Canadian History Project could provide an opportunity for archival institutions to "show off" their contributions to these important television events. Tours, lecture series or exhibitions developed by archivists and targeted to such groups as schools, seniors or the general public could include an exhibition of records used in a production and presentations by both archivists and producers on the challenges of creating a documentary using original sources. These programmes could also include input from historians, museum professionals, or others involved in the production process such as script writers, researchers, editors or camera operators. The development and delivery of such programmes could, ideally, encourage people to think beyond the television set and to establish in the minds of the audience a tangible, real connection between television productions and historical documents and the archival institutions in which these documents are preserved.

Taking a step back from public programming directed at television viewers, perhaps the most obvious avenue for public programming is to go directly to the users, the documentary makers. For the most part, as was

indicated in responses from archivists, interaction with people involved with the production of documentaries is most often defined by the need for quick service, a lack of understanding regarding archival institutions and a quest for "perfect" images as opposed to historically accurate ones. Archivists are accustomed to the exchange of ideas which might occur, both casually and professionally, with members of other significant user groups such as academics or genealogists. Perhaps, however, that dialogue needs to be extended more intentionally to the documentary making user group. Increased communication between archivists and documentary makers would promote an awareness of and appreciation for the work of both groups.

In a survey conducted for the purposes of this study, documentary producers and researchers stated unanimously that archivists are very important in "demystifying archives," pointing to relevant sources, and assisting in securing rights for the use of materials, to name just a few areas of importance.⁸ When asked what archivists and archival institutions could do to improve service to these users, the responses were varied. Some, including Patti Poskitt and Monica MacDonald, expressed a desire for increased on-line or Internet access to archival documents.⁹ Script writer Janine Dubé stated that "it would be good

⁸Survey conducted March and April 1999. Of approximately 25 surveys sent to documentary producers and researchers (mostly Canadian, one American) via both mail and electronic mail, 10 were completed and returned. Unfortunately, neither Mark Starowicz nor Ken Burns replied. See List of Respondents in the Bibliography.

⁹Monica MacDonald, E-Mail to author, 14 April 1999; Patti Poskitt, Response to Survey, April 1999.

to know [which archival institution] has what.”¹⁰ Others, including Marque Landells and Michael MacDonald, wished for more efficient service and a quicker turnaround time for locating as well as reproducing images.¹¹ Several respondents expressed difficulty in finding “precise” information when looking for images or other records showing specific people, dates, locations or other details.¹² Beyond these very practical details, however, almost all of the respondents indicated that historical accuracy was very important and some expressed a further understanding that archival documents are a “critical element” in attaining credibility, giving “life” to productions and making them valuable as educational tools.¹³ Finally, a response which confirms some of the assertions of this thesis was provided by Douglas Davidson, president of The Peer Group, who stated that it would be helpful to the work of documentary makers if archivists were more attuned to the “creative uses of material” and that “ideally archivists should have a strong understanding of [the] production process and how materials are used. Most don’t.”¹⁴ In this statement, Davidson points to the possibility of a closer relationship between archivists and documentary makers, one in which archivists could make insightful suggestions and

¹⁰Janine Dubé, Response to Survey, April 1999.

¹¹Marque Landells, Response to Survey, April 1999; Michael MacDonald, Response to Survey, April 1999.

¹²Doug Hutton, Janine Dubé, William O’Farrell, David Paperny.

¹³David Paperny, Patti Poskitt, Janine Dubé.

¹⁴Douglas Davidson, Response to Survey of Documentary Makers, April 1999.

comments on how archival documents might be used to further enhance their impact as evidence in a production. While this survey was only a beginning point in discovering some of the opinions and experiences of documentary makers, the clear respect for archivists and archival institutions demonstrated in the surveys points to some good possibilities for more in-depth consultation and discussion in the future.

In order to extend the dialogue with documentary makers into more practical applications, archivists may want to seek out additional areas of co-operation. Archivists, professional archival associations, and archival institutions might consider increasing their visibility by lobbying for the involvement of archivists as consultants in the production of documentaries. In their efforts to attain some level of historical credibility and accuracy, many documentary producers have invited historians to work both as consultants and as on-camera expert commentators. Ken Burns, for example, called on the advice of a panel of historians in the production of *The Civil War* series and included a few of them to comment on-screen throughout the documentary.¹⁵ Likewise, historian Terry Copp served as both consultant and on-screen expert for *No Price Too High* and the CBC Canadian History Project includes several historians on its advisory board. Archivists have not been included in this advisory process, other than through the provision of standard research assistance to those who enter or contact their institutions. Because these documentary productions made and will

¹⁵See C. Vann Woodward, "Help from Historians," in Toplin, ed., *Ken Burns's THE CIVIL WAR*, 5-15.

make extensive use of archival sources, it seems logical to call not only on historians for comment on the historical interpretation but also on archivists to offer more insight on the evidence being used. As advisors to a production, archivists would not necessarily represent a specific institution but would advise more broadly on the use of archival sources. In order to be effective in this capacity, however, archivists would need to be aware of some of the techniques and capabilities of documentary productions and would need to have some appreciation for the creative film-making process. Most likely, an archivist who acts as the "documents police" expecting and demanding rigidly contextual usage of archival records would be unwelcome in the documentary production process. If, however, archivists can work cooperatively in the creative process and advise on ways which contextual information behind a photograph, film clip or diary entry might strengthen and add interest to a presentation, archivists may become a valuable asset.

Another area in which increased cooperation and consultation could occur is in the development of Internet web sites which are created in conjunction with documentaries. As was mentioned in chapter two, more and more television productions and networks have begun to use web sites to complement their programming. Several of Ken Burns's recent documentaries, for example, are represented on the PBS web site and each includes an "archives" or "sources" component wherein photographs, moving images, texts, maps and other original

documents are shown.¹⁶ These web sites provide an excellent avenue through which archival documents as well as the full text of interviews with “experts” or “eyewitnesses” can be examined closely at a pace decided, not by television, but by the navigator. This is a forum in which contextual details can be presented, full texts can be included and photographers and image contents can be identified more fully. A web site, as such, provides an easy first access point for the television viewer who wants to know more about the history which has been presented on television. Many web sites include lists of books for further reading or links to other web sites, as well as providing opportunities for discussions between web site visitors. Besides ensuring that good usable information is available for the web sites being produced and encouraging the accurate citation of records, archivists should encourage the producers of the web sites to include links to the web sites of the archival institutions where specific records are found. Archival web sites might, in turn, incorporate links back to those web sites which incorporate their own sources. Similar to the exhibits and tours suggested above, archival web sites, with or without the co-operation of the television producers, could take advantage of the airing of documentaries and create a virtual exhibition highlighting the institution’s contributions to the documentary as well as additional holdings related to the same historical topic.

Public programming is a crucial function for archival institutions that want to increase their profile, draw attention to the importance of keeping and

¹⁶See for example, *Lewis and Clark* <<http://www.pbs.org/lewisandclark/>>; *Jefferson* <<http://www.pbs.org/jefferson/>>; and *The West* <<http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/>>.

preserving records and contribute to the overall collective memory of society. Beyond public programming, increased interaction with the users of archives associated with television production might provoke archivists to discuss whether the other core archival functions, including appraisal, arrangement, description and preservation, might or should be affected by the needs of this user group. Should more attention be paid to the acquisition of the records of television and film?¹⁷ When appraising or describing records, should archivists learn to be more sensitive to records which are “televisable?” Do the needs and demands of documentary makers require archives to digitize all or part of their holdings? Do archivists need to ensure that archival texts, photographs or moving images are searchable in minute detail? These questions move somewhat beyond the scope of this study and will need further debate and discussion elsewhere. As was discussed in chapter one, client-centred and materials-centred theories on public programming divide on the degree to which the needs of researchers should affect the core archival functions. It has been argued in this thesis, however, that archivists need to remain grounded and focused on their first priority, the defense of the integrity of archival records, and that all initiatives stemming out of user studies or other public programmes must remain grounded in the contextual approach to archives.

Obviously, the television age does not bring with it increased staff, time or

¹⁷This challenge was addressed by the Task Force on the Preservation and Enhanced Use of Canada's Audio-Visual Heritage. See their report in *Fading Away: Strategic Options to Ensure the Protection of and Access to our Audio-Visual Memory* (Ottawa: National Archives of Canada, 1995).

resources for archival institutions. The reality of archival work and stretched resources is that the primary concern of archivists when dealing with television-related clientele is to answer their questions, to direct them to the images or other records that they want, to assist them in making copies or in filming documents. Because the use of archives by documentary makers is increasing and because their needs are significant, perhaps larger archival institutions need to consider appointing or hiring an archivist to work as a liaison with the production clientele, regardless of which record media they are needing for their productions. As a central point of contact, a liaison archivist could establish more significant relationships with the production community, orient them more fully to the archival institution and the archival research process and offer informed comment on the use of evidence in their productions. Many documentary makers may not see the need for any further assistance or advice than they are already receiving. Not every project will include an advisory board of history professionals, nor will every project have the luxury of time in which to carry out extensive research and consultation. However, when more extensive service and expertise is called for, archivists should be ready and able to provide more in-depth assistance. In the end, the more informed archivists are about the needs and characteristics of this specific user group, the better able they will be to provide any level of service to documentary makers and other television production clientele who utilize the resources of their institutions.

In his address to the McGill Institute conference on the teaching of Canadian history, Mark Starowicz challenged history professionals to become

involved with the history-on-television phenomenon. After stating the number of hours that the average Canadian spends in front of the television in a week (twenty-one), Starowicz argued that the power of television should not be dismissed. Rather, “anyone who holds precious any idea, cause or sensibility has the moral obligation to bring those ideas to where people are.”¹⁸ As a producer, Starowicz was speaking primarily about the need for more quality in Canadian historical programming. Archivists can apply his challenge to their own work and look for ways to become more integrally involved in the development, viewing and critique of television productions which incorporate archival sources. The growing interest in and industry of historical programming on television is undeniable and the opportunities for archival education and outreach are not to be missed. While increasing their own visual literacy and learning to apply the contextual approach, grounded in the archival principle of provenance, to critical analysis of audio-visual productions, archivists need to be more deliberate about increasing dialogue with the users associated with television production, including documentary producers, researchers and script writers. More knowledge of the needs and expectations of these users and of the production process, should help archivists provide better service and offer informed comment on creative and effective uses of evidence in documentaries. Obviously, the invisible users of archives, the television viewers, are more difficult to target. Archivists need to be creative in searching for or creating

¹⁸Starowicz, “Erasing History.”

forums through which they might begin to educate viewers about the characteristics of original records and to encourage them to move from passive viewing to a level of visual literacy which allows them to ask questions of both the historical interpretation and the strength of evidence being presented in a historical production. Perhaps interest in Canadian history, and in history in general, will be strengthened not by focusing solely on what facts society or students need to learn, but by encouraging an appreciation for the process of doing history built on a foundation of visual literacy and an understanding of how and why documents come into existence. If a large and increasing number of people are turning to television to learn about the past, then history professionals, including archivists, need to become involved as advisors, commentators, and proponents of active, critical viewing. The “electronic campfire” will, no doubt, continue to bring to life the sounds, sights and texts of the past while also stirring passionate debate about the meaning of historic events and the need to remember. As servants of their society, of records and of history, archivists must seize the opportunity to “pull up a log,” take their place around the fire, and become active, vocal participants defending the integrity of archives, increasing awareness of the importance of the documentary record, and contributing to the ongoing processes of keeping alive the collective memory.

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