

“ALL SHOOK UP”

**The Archival Legacy
of TERRY COOK**

SAA Preview

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The Archival Legacy
of TERRY COOK

EDITED BY

TOM NESMITH, GREG BAK,

AND JOAN M. SCHWARTZ



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About the Cover: Photograph of Terry Cook celebrating Elvis at a 1950s party thrown in 1984 by archivists at the Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa. Courtesy of the photographer Andrew Birrell. Ed Dahl’s assistance gratefully acknowledged. Terry Cook’s quote on the back cover is from his essay “Hugh Taylor: Imagining Archives” in *Imagining Archives: Essays and Reflections by Hugh A. Taylor*, ed. Terry Cook and Gordon Dodds (Lanham, MD, and Oxford: Society of American Archivists and Association of Canadian Archivists in association with The Scarecrow Press/Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, 2003), 19.

To the memory of
Hugh A. Taylor (1920–2005)
scholar-archivist, inspiration, mentor

*“[Hugh A. Taylor] has inspired a generation of
archival thinkers, of whom I am proud to be one.”*

—Terry Cook

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword ▪ ix

IAN E. WILSON

Preface ▪ xi

TOM NESMITH, GREG BAK, AND JOAN M. SCHWARTZ

- 1 **A Portrait of the Archivist as a Young Man: Terry Cook, a Life in Archives Begins** ▪ 1
TOM NESMITH
- 2 **Terry Cook's Bookshelf** ▪ 16
NANCY BARTLETT
- 3 **Love Media Tender . . . Eventually: Playing Cook's Archival "Record"** ▪ 21
ALA REKRUT
 ***The Tyranny of the Medium: A Comment on "Total Archives"*** ▪ 27
TERRY COOK
- 4 **Archiving's "Archival Turn": Looking Back on the History/Archives Debate in Canada** ▪ 38
JENNIFER DOUGLAS
 ***From Information to Knowledge: An Intellectual Paradigm for Archives*** ▪ 45
TERRY COOK

- 5 **Records and Recordkeeping History: The Fundamental Archival Task** ▪ 70
BARBARA L. CRAIG
Paper Trails: A Study in Northern Records and Northern Administration, 1898-1958 ▪ 77
TERRY COOK
- 6 **Intelligent Dominion: Emancipation from a Worm's-Eye View** ▪ 105
CHRIS HURLEY
Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal ▪ 112
TERRY COOK
- 7 **Fonds Memories: Cook, the Series System, and Beyond** ▪ 142
GEOFFREY YEO
The Concept of the Archival Fonds in the Post-Custodial Era: Theory, Problems and Solutions ▪ 152
TERRY COOK
- 8 **Simply Archives: A Recordkeeping, Post-Custodial Perspective** ▪ 169
ANNE J. GILLILAND
Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The Revolution in Information Management and Archives in the Post-Custodial and Post-Modernist Era ▪ 176
TERRY COOK
- 9 **Giving History a Nudge: Indigenous Peoples and Cook's Emerging Vision for Justice with Archives** ▪ 203
JOANNA SASSOON
Indian Legacy, Aboriginal Future ▪ 211
TERRY COOK
- 10 **Cook's Copernican Turn** ▪ 220
ERIC KETELAAR
What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift ▪ 227
TERRY COOK
- 11 **Cook's Australian Voyages: Towards the Continuum's Fourth Dimension** ▪ 275
MICHAEL PIGGOTT
Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage ▪ 285
TERRY COOK

- 12 **Archives in the Midst: Terry Cook and the Quarrel of the Moderns and Postmoderns** ▪ 305
BRIEN BROTHMAN
Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives ▪ 313
TERRY COOK
- 13 **“Teaching by Examples”: W. Kaye Lamb and Archival History** ▪ 336
HEATHER MACNEIL
An Archival Revolution: W. Kaye Lamb and the Transformation of the Archival Profession ▪ 344
TERRY COOK
- 14 **Power, Memory, and Identity: Explaining the Archival Landscape to Historians** ▪ 395
RANDALL C. JIMERSON
The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape ▪ 403
TERRY COOK
- 15 **Healing Discourses: Community-Based Approaches to Archiving and Recordkeeping** ▪ 437
ANDREW FLINN
Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms ▪ 444
TERRY COOK
- Epilogue: Riffing Archive and Legacy, Life and Death** ▪ 476
VERNE HARRIS
- The Writings of Terry Cook: A Comprehensive Bibliography** ▪ 485
JENNIFER RUTKAIR
- Acknowledgments** ▪ 499
- About the Authors** ▪ 500
- Index** ▪ 506

FOREWORD

I WATCHED AS A GROUP of archival studies students recognized Terry Cook at the far end of the hall. Attending their first meeting of the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA), they rushed forward, asking to take photos with him and shake his hand; one or two even ventured archival ideas. With his patient, respectful, and affable manner, he quickly welcomed them as colleagues in the archival endeavour. Terry had earned this moment, a taste of the “rock star” life of his musical idol, Elvis. Terry joined the then Public Archives of Canada in 1975 when professional entry was by apprenticeship and the infrastructure of both the discipline and the profession in Canada was only just emerging. His vision helped the ACA’s *Archivaria* become a leading international journal, and through his intellectual leadership he provoked, challenged, and guided significant changes in professional practice, rooted always in solid theory.

The editors of this tribute to Terry found ready cooperation from archival thought-leaders around the world in selecting some of his most influential articles and in providing informative contextual essays to introduce each. These are insightful reflections, placing Terry’s contributions in the broad landscape of archival theory, focusing on the transformations, sometimes disruptive, that he brought to old habits of mind. Each of these essays is enlivened by the close interaction he had with the authors over decades. Each demonstrates the impact of his thinking and originality through scholarly articles, discussions, mentoring, lectures, and friendships, all forming a powerful influential blend. Terry aimed to provide the intellectual foundation for archival studies as a respected scholarly discipline, the basis for a distinctive profession.

His election as a Fellow of the Society of American Archivists (1995), Fellow of the Association of Canadian Archivists (2009), and Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada (2010), one of the highest honours a Canadian scholar can receive, recognized this achievement and confirmed the success of his mission.

Terry's articles and the essays published here by colleagues illuminate his intellectual contributions, but he also had significant impact on archival practice and institutions. This is more difficult to define. His great strength arose from his thinking: his articles and teaching were based on his practical experience in helping sculpt and manage massive multimedia archival holdings. For Terry, practical considerations demanded guidance from theory, and theory, in turn, shaped practice. His thinking on his signature contribution to appraisal, what he called macroappraisal, was driven by his responsibility at the National Archives of Canada for modern government recordkeeping systems, and the experience of explaining institutional disposition and appraisal policies on the witness stand in 1985 before the Canadian government's Royal Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals (the Deschênes Commission). While he could write about theory, he also had managerial responsibility to implement it, and he valued both. He and his staff collaborated, argued, piloted, revised, and modified macroappraisal as it was operationalized. The resulting appraisal recommendations were thoughtful, comprehensive, and models of their kind.

Even less well known is Terry's influential role as an advisor to colleagues at all levels of the National Archives and especially as informal advisor and confidant to successive national archivists. Jean-Pierre Wallot, Lee Macdonald, and I each valued his advice as realistic, informed, and, above all, honest. I often found that a half-hour discussion with him provided more insight, feedback, and encouragement than a full-day planning session. And as a respected advocate for public policy issues affecting archives, he had no equal. Through his personality and wisdom, Terry held a special place in the life of the National Archives.

Like Elvis, Terry Cook is still with us. He has not returned to his home planet nor is he living incognito in a small town in eastern Ontario. As these essays eloquently attest, his thinking and friendship continue to shape archival theory and our institutions. His articles yet live to challenge, mentor, provoke, and, above all, inspire new generations of archivists.

IAN E. WILSON

National Archivist of Canada (1999–2004)

Librarian and Archivist of Canada (2004–2009)

PREFACE

THIS BOOK EXPLORES THE ARCHIVAL IDEAS and legacy of Canadian scholar and archivist Terry Cook. We have chosen for inclusion here thirteen of Cook's previously published articles that in our view illustrate this particularly well. The articles span his career as an archivist, starting with one of his first forays into archival literature in 1979 and ending in 2013, a year before his death. They deal with his major professional preoccupations over an extraordinary diversity of archival topics. When first published, Cook's articles were frequently pathbreaking interventions in often vigorous discussions of key professional issues. They were published in leading archival journals and are regularly cited by an international readership. Some articles appeared in lesser known and less widely circulated publications. There is much value in bringing them together here where they can be a focal point for discussion of Cook's legacy, an entry to the broader archival literature to which he contributed, and, most importantly, a bellwether for the intellectual impact he had on the profession and beyond.

A truly *meaningful* legacy, however, is not just an inheritance of something created and appreciated in the past and reproduced today. It becomes meaningful when it inspires ways of adapting to new circumstances along pathways that help guide us into the future. That is why we have invited a group of leading scholar-archivists from several countries to reflect on Cook's legacy as scholar, colleague, educator, and mentor. Their commentaries on the influence and ongoing relevance of his articles highlight his pivotal contributions to archival thought and practice. The collection is bookended by an essay on Cook's thinking as a graduate student on the historical and political ideas that later shaped

his writing as an archivist and by a reflection on memory and his career in archives written during the difficult final year of his life as he dealt with cancer.

Cook wrote mainly for his colleagues in the archival profession, and so his legacy is addressed first to them, and especially now to the student-archivists, young scholar-archivists, and new professional archivists who will shape archival thought and practice in coming years. This book will be invaluable to those who have just begun to explore the history and power of archives. The editors hope it will be a source of encouragement, knowledge, and even delight on that journey into archives with a companion who loved Elvis, warm friendships, lively dinner conversations, dogs, and laughter.

This book is also for scholars in many disciplines who have taken "the archival turn" and now view archives as a subject of study relevant to their work but have yet to discover the professional literature. Indeed, Cook's writings have been prominent among the first archivists' writings that scholars in other fields have turned to as an entry into how archives shape information and thereby scholars' understandings of the issues and societies they study. We hope that the book will find a prominent place in libraries, too, opening to others the endless breadth of human experience available through archives.

The contributors to this book identify the many strands of the legacy that Cook has left us—the concepts he elucidated, the fresh insights he effectively applied to problems, and the important and durable values in the ever-shifting archival landscape that he understood so well. When drawn together these strands form the basis of a life distinguished by a constant striving to see the realm of the archivist holistically. Cook viewed the archivist's field of knowledge and endeavour as an interrelated whole and challenged others to do so as well. He also saw it as much larger than many assumed, and he probed further into its intellectual underpinnings than most, always trying to make connections, borrowing across a range of related fields, from ancient history to computing, and keeping in view the fullest conception of an expanding archival world. He resisted what he perceived as narrowness and sought new ways of pursuing archival aims in the face of new pressures. He drew on past experience to integrate the new in order to preserve the whole.

In essence, Cook wanted his colleagues and readers to see archiving as a complex human activity that shapes how we think and what we can know and do. He saw archiving as a profoundly humanistic and humanizing endeavour as opposed to a bureaucratic or technical function, performed with little awareness of its animating intellectual underpinnings and social outcomes. He was a master at integrating the many dimensions of archives work by closely examining an archival record, concept, function, or problem, seeing it from historical and contemporary perspectives as well as its potential implications,

and bringing it all together in a new whole, one pointing to greater depths of understanding and intellectual pursuit. Cook's legacy resides in this powerful mastery of a holistic way of thinking about archives, memory, history, and society. To be sure, this does not mean that his was the last word on a topic. But he often moved the profession forward. His overall approach, so inclusive of the ingredients of sound archival judgement, made him unsurpassed in his time as a scholar-archivist. Few archivists had thought quite like him before. We hope this book fosters many more who do.

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Nota Bene: In reprinting the articles by Terry Cook, new page numbers have been assigned. To ensure concordance with original page numbers, we have used square brackets in the endnotes, both in the reprinted articles and in the contributor commentaries, to indicate the new page numbers in this volume; original page numbers appear just before the square brackets. The notation style for the original version of Cook's articles has been left unchanged; however, typographical errors have been corrected.