

ACMLA Presidents Report 2000-2001

It is my pleasure to report to the membership of the Association of Canadian Map Libraries and Archives on the activities and state of the Association. As with all organisations, there is a certain fluidity regarding “ongoing” action items. Part of these continuous activities are, rightly, within the purview of our committees, and so I suggest you read those individual reports. However, I would be remiss if I did not say, on behalf of the Executive and all members, that we are most appreciative and thankful for the exceptional service and work of all committees and members in support of the Association. Without the steadfast efforts of the individuals who carry out the “real” work of the Association, ACMLA would be just a voice in the wilderness. On a personal level, I would like to express my continued thanks and admiration to those serving the Association. I could not, without a doubt, carry out any work on your behalf if it were not for the advice and support of the Executive and committee members – not to mention many of you who provide me with much wise counsel!

The past year saw many items added to our agenda, and it also saw many actions and activities reaching a stage of renewal and implementation. I am beginning my second and final term on the Management Board of GeoConnections. I feel that this program, to build and sustain the Canadian Geospatial Data Infrastructure, will continue to be the single most critical area where our focus should be directed. The foregoing statement is not to suggest in any way that digital spatial or cartographic information is the only development we should be concerned with. However, the reality is that GeoConnections is the single largest, national effort to develop a “spatially literate society”. Many of the activities within GeoConnections rightly focus on digital information. And yet the potential scope of GeoConnections (most likely after the six years of funding has transpired) may reach into all forms and formats of “geographic information”. You will also note that much of the work carried out by our members and committees seems to be impacting, as well as being impacted by developments within the geospatial infrastructure community.

Three recent developments in GeoConnections have had direct input from ACMLA. The most obvious is the Canadian Geospatial Data Policy Study. Your incoming President, Grace Welch, has been a most forceful and effective representative on the Policy Node of GeoConnections; the “committee” which funded the policy study. ACMLA provided input into that policy review process with the primary aim of supporting the principle that geospatial data has a “public good” which must be recognized, and that the overall access and use of that information within map libraries and archives (and further, into the whole public realm) is key to the success of the geospatial community (and industry) as well as to a more effective democracy and future access for generations to follow.

Let me assure members that, within the GeoConnections program, it is well understood and accepted that there is a role for libraries and archives – a role we will continue to define and make the case for – and that our viewpoints (especially on the notions of access, description and preservation) are respected and sought.

In relation to the above, the Policy Node recently established an Ad Hoc Working Group on Archiving Geospatial Information. Further to that, I would like to report to members that I have begun the process of seeking support (both financial and in principle) from GeoConnections for this Ad Hoc group *and* for additional work areas that have a direct impact on us and which we can have a positive influence on for others involved in GeoConnections. It is my fervant hope that, over the next year (and following the next GeoConnections Board Meeting in November) there will be a more substantively funded work area within GeoConnections – in collaboration with ACMLA and other geographically “inclined” associations – which will seek the ways and means to have a sustainable library and archive view as part of the core principles and operational framework of the Canadian Geospatial Data Infrastructure.

Many of you have seen the call for proposals from GeoConnections for *Public Sector Content and Connectivity* which is open to public sector agencies (such as libraries and archives) to put forward ideas for work to add information and services within the Canadian Geospatial Data Infrastructure (CGDI). Rather than go into details about what various groups are trying to do under this funding opportunity, I would like to report on the efforts that have been made to try to link in this aspect of GCDI with the above noted effort to create a “library-archive node”. Discussions with GeoConnections staff have been, to understate, very collegial and productive. There is an acceptance that ACMLA, and individual members and institutions can, and must, play a significant role in directing key elements of CGDI. It is now well understood and recognized that we have expertise and experience which will be of significant benefit to the sustainability of CGDI – in fact, we have roles to play in all types of spatial data infrastructure efforts. From these initial efforts, and through the very able involvement of Sharon Neary at the University of Calgary, we are beginning to see how regional approaches to data access can take shape and help form a national network to benefit our users and Canadian society as a whole. I can tell you that, as Past-president, I intend to keep pursuing these actions in cooperation with your new President and with your input.

On another “front”, there is a need to “revisit” the “English Review”, especially in light of recent administrative changes and announcements from the National Archives. Over the last several years, I have been attempting to find better and more effective ways to carry forth the English Review recommendation that clearly stated a need to collaborate with the National Archives in studying the potential to form a National Map Collection (which would, of course, include ‘virtual components’). I am hopeful that more positive developments will take place on this issue as the dust begins to settle. I would like to add, however, that I also see a strong linkage between possible actions with the National Archives and the efforts being carried out on your behalf through our involvement in GeoConnections. Not only is the Internet a “web”, but so too are the efforts of ACMLA – a web of interconnected actions that add to our strength and effectiveness.

This past year has also be a tremendous one in terms of work, on behalf of users, to increase the access for geospatial information and cartographic materials. During the CARTO 2001 conference, there should be an opportunity to make a more concrete announcement regarding particular developments in the Depository Services Program (DSP) and the Data Liberation Initiative. These developments are exceptional, and they are due to a number of keen members who have been “sowing the seeds” amongst various agency and private sector contacts in order to get much in place for an enhancement of materials being distributed. This is not an end in itself, for we are all hopeful that such positive actions will have a multiplier effect on other agencies and levels of government to make more and more information available for teaching, research and public use. I cannot express enough thanks these ‘Herculean’ efforts!

Libraries Advance Canada? The Association received an interesting invitation to join in a consortium of library associations under a project “Libraries Advance Canada”. Thus far every provincial-level association and CLA have signed on to support this effort to increase the profile of libraries and to act as a stronger, unified voice in lobbying efforts to increase access and prevent erosion of libraries and library services. The view of the Executive is that it may very well be important for “specialized” associations like ACMLA to make their voices heard within this forum. This is not to suggest any conflict between the associations involved. On the contrary, this may be an excellent opportunity to provide mutual support for each other in ways that don’t tax the time and energy of volunteers (and we are almost all voluntary!). Future information on this project will be added to the web site.

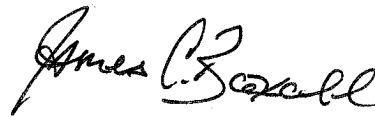
As you will find out at the AGM, during our Awards presentations, this year ACMLA is doing something unique. We are awarding new, special “Citation Awards” to some agencies that have made exceptional contributions to providing cartographic/geospatial information with a national impact (even if from a local level). I am pleased to present to Natural Resources Canada, the City of Ottawa, and the National Capital Commission (NCC) these special citations for developing GeoGratis (NRCAN), distributing Ottawa data via the web, and NCC data offered to universities. These awards are an excellent example of how acting locally and thinking globally really works. ACMLA has established these citations this year to recognize those agencies/companies which have contributed to placing more cartographic materials and geospatial information into the hands of users.

And lastly, I would like to close this report with a heartfelt acknowledgment of the exceptional work of Alberta Auringer Wood who is completing her terms on the Executive. It is a cliché to say “what can one say that hasn’t already been said?”. This aptly fits Alberta and her impact on ACMLA and on map librarianship in Canada, and indeed around the world. Alberta continues to be a Vice-president for the ICA, and her work on Commissions of the ICA needs to be recognized and appreciated.

We all know that Alberta will not stop serving ACMLA in a variety of capacities; at least we hope she will be there, front and centre - "President Emeritus". I will, even in my role as Past-president, continue to seek her advice. Alberta has always been, and will continue to be, an example for all of us. (My personal wish is to continue my career to the point when I know half as much as Alberta; to reach that point would surpass all my expectations.)

An amazing hard worker, extremely organized professional, tireless advocate, and most important to us, kind and dear friend; Alberta, we will miss you at the "table", but we have your phone number on speed dial!

And so, friends and colleagues, this *really is* my last report to you as President. Thank goodness tears cannot be expressed in writing. It has been the greatest honour and privilege to serve you. I hope and pray that I have been somewhat successful in being your President. I know now, more than ever, that there is no greater thing one can do than to "fight the good fight, and run the good race". I wish each of you the very best.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James C. Boxall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

James Boxall

"Of all the assets, archives are the most precious. They are the gift of one generation to another and the extent of our care of them marks the extent of our civilization."

Sir Arthur Doughty
(Second Dominion Archivist of Canada)

"A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy; or, perhaps, both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance; and a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

James Madison
(4th President of the United States of America)