

## **Dr. Shelley Sweeney Retires from the University of Manitoba**

Congratulations to archivist Dr. [Shelley Sweeney](#) who retired on 20 December as head of [Archives & Special Collections at the University of Manitoba](#). Not wanting a traditional retirement party, Shelley preferred instead to make a farewell public presentation to “reveal” what goes on behind the scenes in the archives. An estimated 250 colleagues, friends and students crammed into the archives reading room on 6 December to hear Shelley’s witty and engaging talk and to bid her farewell. Her staff colleagues Brian Hubner and Nicole Courier also paid tribute to her as did Les Moor, Acting Associate Librarian for the University of Manitoba. The turnout and tributes, including a standing ovation, attest to Shelley’s popularity and success as university archivist. A video of her presentation is at:

[https://media1.cc.umanitoba.ca/legacy/bann/events/2019\\_12\\_06\\_The\\_Grand\\_Reveal.mp4?fbclid=IwAR2IG2Qxf9t8TySOEn\\_-nKd1Zvv79\\_wpkYkiV5O4\\_TBvoNKHxntFdHuWOWo](https://media1.cc.umanitoba.ca/legacy/bann/events/2019_12_06_The_Grand_Reveal.mp4?fbclid=IwAR2IG2Qxf9t8TySOEn_-nKd1Zvv79_wpkYkiV5O4_TBvoNKHxntFdHuWOWo) For another look at Shelley in action, see

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=69&v=IY-vP9unYpk&feature=emb\\_title](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=69&v=IY-vP9unYpk&feature=emb_title)

Shelley was in the first class of students in the then new (1981) Master of Archival Studies program at the University of British Columbia. She went on to complete her PhD in archival enterprise at the University of Texas in 2002. She is also a member of the Academy of Certified Archivists in the United States. Before coming to Manitoba in 1998, she had been University Archivist at the University of Regina Archives for the previous 15 years. At the University of Manitoba, Shelley was also Coordinator for the application of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (1998-2008). Throughout her career, she has been one of the most prominent Canadian advocates for archives, including through many media interviews and leadership roles in the Association of Canadian Archivists (as its president, 1998-2000) and in other archival organizations, several of which she helped found. Shelley has made numerous presentations at national and international conferences and published in leading academic archival journals such as *Archivaria*, *Libraries and the Cultural Record*, and *Comma*. There is little wonder then that in 2011 the Association of Canadian Archivists honoured her by making her a Fellow and she received the UBC School of Library, Archival and Information Studies Distinguished Alumni and Leadership Award. And whether for work or on vacation, Shelley has travelled the world -- from Brisbane to Abu Dhabi and from Patagonia to Iceland (see photo).

Shelley has served on countless professional and university committees, including the committee that prepared the University of Manitoba’s invitation to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to place its archives on the university campus where it is now in the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Shelley also provided valuable support to the University of Manitoba’s Archival Studies MA program in the history department. She taught

seminars on descriptive standards, examined theses, and supervised interns. Among her many contributions to the University of Manitoba Archives is the extraordinary fundraising she spearheaded (raising approximately \$9 million overall). This includes about \$800,000 for the major renovation of the archives that she oversaw in 2008-09. The University of Manitoba now has one of the finest university archives facilities in the country. And due in no small measure to Shelley's efforts, it has also become one of the largest, best known, and most widely used archives in the province.

Of particular note, Shelley worked tirelessly to expand, make accessible and promote the collections that document Spiritualism and psychical research in Canada. There are now [50 Spiritualism and psychical research collections](#), making the University of Manitoba a world leader in the preservation of parapsychology research. Here, she followed the lead of her predecessor Dr. Richard E. Bennett who had taken the first step by acquiring the unique photographic collection of the psychical research experiments of Dr. T. Glen Hamilton and family that is now a centrepiece of the increasing international research in this subject. Among related activities, Shelley and her staff collaborated in 2018 with the [Survival Research Institute of Canada](#) to cohost the second [Preserving the Historical Collections of Parapsychology \(PHCP\) conference](#) at the University of Manitoba. Launched to coincide with the opening of the PHCP meeting, Shelley Sweeney and her colleague Walter Meyer zu Erpen curated an exhibit titled "Investigation of the Human Psyche: Spiritualist & Parapsychology Collections at the University of Manitoba Archives." The exhibit drew extensively upon the archives collections and was well received by the many visitors.

All who know Shelley or have worked with her know that she has been an unfailingly professional, principled, dedicated, and compassionate member of the archival profession and University of Manitoba community. Her friends and admirers are legion. We have asked but a few of them to draw on their experiences to add to our celebration of Shelley's distinguished career (see below).

Tom Nesmith  
 Professor (retired)  
 Senior Scholar  
 Archival Studies MA Program  
 Department of History  
 University of Manitoba

Walter Meyer zu Erpen, MAS (UBC, 1985)  
 Archives & Records Consultant  
 Meyer zu Erpen & Associates, Inc.  
 Victoria, BC

Universities are wonderful communities of scholars, with a continual ebb and flow as colleagues come and others go – to other such communities or to other pursuits. Some leave legacies in the community, and Shelley is one of those. Her enthusiasm for the diverse values that particularly treasured archival parts of library collections bring to our institutions is justified and infectious. She has infected many at UM with this enthusiasm, to our great benefit.

*David T. Barnard, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Manitoba*

It has been my sincere pleasure to work with Shelley Sweeney at the University of Manitoba. Shelley is a powerhouse, and is tireless in her pursuit of excellence in acquiring and preserving archival collections. Her amazing ability to make and maintain relationships and to promote the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections has contributed to the reputation of the Archives, the Libraries and the University during her tenure here. We will miss her, but wish her well in retirement!

*Lisa O'Hara*

*Vice-Provost (Libraries) and University Librarian, University of Manitoba*

Shelley Sweeney is truly a role model for all archivists. She has demonstrated the importance of volunteering with professional associations and of fostering a strong sense of community at the local, provincial, national, and international levels. She is also an indispensable, tireless, and witty professional colleague. We archivists could all live by her outstanding example and contributions on behalf of the archival community and archives!

*Loryl MacDonald, President, Association of Canadian Archivists*

The Association for Manitoba Archives remains deeply indebted to Shelley for her efforts and service over many years as a board member, committee member, volunteer, and supporter of the AMA. Her tireless dedication and contagious enthusiasm for all forms of archival endeavour in our province will serve as an inspiration for many more years to come. Many thanks, Shelley!

*David Cuthbert, Chair, Association for Manitoba Archives*

We first met Shelley in 1983 as she arrived in Regina animated by the archives fervor of UBC studies. We recognized a creative and dynamic spirit, deeply committed to the archival endeavour. With a lively manner as fresh and undaunted as a prairie breeze and with her infectious enthusiasm she has made significant contributions to archival development in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba and then nationally.

Early on, she had the courage to invite colleagues, one with the title of 'Provincial Archivist', for dinner at her apartment. She had only recently moved in, still with furniture from student days and no form of dining table. Always resourceful, we found she had taken the kitchen door from its hinges and placed it, carefully balanced, on a low filing cabinet. The door had some paneling and the hole where the knob had been meant that glasses had to be placed carefully but her hospitality made for a lively evening.

In the spring of 1986, she joined us for the drive to the ACA meeting in Winnipeg, talking about the program and current archival issues across the miles, helping Ian develop ideas for his closing plenary speech. Little known to her, in the age before cell phones became ubiquitous, Ian was mysteriously stopping at various gas stations along the highway: looking for pay phones to negotiate his appointment to the Archives of Ontario. It was a lively trip.

Two years ago, she and Cheryl Avery visited us in our temporary home in the United Arab Emirates, taking time to explore the region by car. She has been dining out since on stories of interactions with wild animals at her door, highways that end abruptly and armed men guarding desert roads.

We send our best wishes to Shelley as she makes the transition from one phase of her archival career to the next. She has made a major contribution and will, undoubtedly, continue to do so. It has been a pleasure working and dining with her.

*Ian E. Wilson and Ruth Dyck Wilson  
Colleagues and Friends  
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates*

Shelley was in the first class of MAS students at UBC. She was always cheerful and energetically devoted herself to her chosen field. The only time I remember her complaining is when I learned second-hand that she felt I judged her work too severely. Happily, that never stopped her from rising to every challenge in a career so remarkably full of accomplishment that it deserves our hearty congratulations and best wishes in the years to come.

*Prof. Terry Eastwood (retired)  
University of British Columbia, School of Library, Archival and Information Studies*

For two decades Shelley has made invaluable contributions to the Archival Studies master's program at the University of Manitoba, as a guest lecturer, thesis examiner and internship supervisor. She generously mentored both students and graduates. Way back in 1984 Shelley reflected on her experience in the first cohort of the UBC MAS program, and noted that the profession must "forge ahead by continuing to support advanced education for the archivist." At the University of Manitoba she lived this philosophy. I wish her all the best for her retirement, but we will miss her in Archival Studies!

*Greg Bak, Associate Professor, Archival Studies MA Program, Department of History,  
University of Manitoba*

Having worked closely with Shelley for many years as a colleague at the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections, I have never failed to find her enthusiasm for the archival profession impressive and infectious. On many occasions, upon striking up even a casual conversation, she invariably and proudly informed the stranger where she worked, which allowed her to mention some of our most interesting holdings (often the Hamilton family fonds) and things developed from there. In many cases, these situations resulted in visits or donations to

the archives, but at the very least in someone who was much more informed about archivists and the role of archives.

*Brian Hubner, Acquisition and Access Archivist, University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections*

It is a difficult thing to encapsulate over 30 years in a few words, especially for Shelley. That quicksilver mind, always engaging her full attention to all aspects of the archival enterprise and her humour. She has been imaginative with outreach, always an advocate, and able to appraise both collections and people with sound judgement and empathy. As I write, Shelley and I are in Texas to visit another friend and colleague. That alone is rare, to consider her fully both "friend" and "colleague," and that may be enough. Indeed, it may be everything.

*Cheryl Avery, Archivist, University of Saskatchewan Archives and Special Collections*

Having worked with Shelley in the acquisition of several important collections for the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections and as a researcher for the Manitoba Historical Society, it is clear to me that she has developed the archives into a world-class archival facility, both for institutional and private records. Through her enthusiasm and initiative, she has played a key role in protecting important historical documents that might otherwise have been lost.

*Prof. Gordon Goldsborough, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Manitoba, and President of the Manitoba Historical Society*

Since 1981, when we all met at UBC in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the Masters of Archival Studies Programme, we have been inspired by Shelley's endless curiosity, positive and unquenchable thirst for life, great intelligence, zest for learning, and drive to explore and understand the world around her at home and further afield. Her interest in, support of, and participation in all aspects of our profession (including ACA's East/West baseball games) led her to serious research in pursuit of a Ph.D. Shelley's leadership as institutional head at the University of Manitoba Archives attracted and encouraged donors resulting in an increased depth of archival holdings engaging the interests of a diverse research community.

Shelley has climbed mountains (literally) demonstrating physical strength and determination to match her mental abilities. Shelley is also very artistic, creative and empathetic, all the while maintaining a healthy sense of humour. We love our "whiz kid" colleague who has constantly surprised us with her many achievements and we wish her a retirement filled with good health and more happy adventures.

*Margaret Hutchison, Wilma MacDonald, Mary-Anne Nicholls.  
Fellow classmates of the first year of the UBC MAS Program*

Shelley is an archivist's archivist. Relishing archival enterprise in all its forms, from processing to management to professional association leadership, and vigorously cheerful, she approached study of topics in her doctoral program with her innate dogged intensity. Resolute and tenacious not just in completing the user study that capped her degree work, she endeared herself to locals by exploring the historical treasures that distinguish Austin. What an archivist!

*David B. Gracy II, C.A.  
Governor Bill Daniel Professor Emeritus in Archival Enterprise  
Editor Emeritus, Libraries & the Cultural Record  
School of Information, University of Texas at Austin*

I met Shelley while a student in the Archival Studies MA Program (History) at the University of Manitoba. Shelley generously shares and explains ideas about archives with students. When I presented a student-paper at an Association of Canadian Archivists' conference, she was there to show support to a very nervous student. She was instrumental in my being featured in an article in the University of Manitoba Newsletter. Despite her outstanding accomplishments, she is down-to-earth, which makes her a perfect role model. Her friendship has given me confidence and inspired me to do well. Most of all Shelley has a heart. She tirelessly helps anyone at every opportunity. I will be forever grateful for knowing her and proud to be her friend.

I attach a link to a video I made about my experiences at the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uVcVGOYci8k>

*Mary Grace P. Golfo-Barcelona  
Archival Studies MA Program (History) graduate; Ph.D. candidate (Anthropology) at the  
University of Manitoba; and Assistant Professor, School of Library and Information Studies,  
University of the Philippines.*