

# Readers Response to the Implementation of User Fees at the National Archives

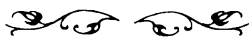
*An article by Ed Rea announcing that the National Archives of Canada soon planned to charge for its services prompted a reaction by our readers. Some, like Mr. Dagneau, followed orders and conveyed their outrage to their federal MP.*

[Letter to Suzanne Duplessis, MP for Louis Hébert, House of Commons]

(...) This is the limit! After taxing books and magazines, the Government you support plans to force people to pay for conducting historical research! It's unthinkable! Unspeakable!

(...) On top of paying personal income tax and tax on everything else, now I'll have to pay even more to research the history of my country! It's Ludicrous!

C.-H. Dagneau



As reported in the Fall 1992 issue of the CHA *Bulletin*, Treasury Board has ordered the National Archives of Canada to implement user fees by Spring 1993. Since the writing of Dr. Rea's article, the NAC made a detailed presentation of just what is under consideration before the National Archives Researchers' Forum, an organization which acts to channel information and opinion between the NAC and its clientele. The NAC, after receiving a report from an external consultant retained to explore the implementation of user fees, has issued a list of 23 key services earmarked for potential levies. Recommendations

include an annual charge for registration (the issuance of a researchers' pass), published finding-aids, general publications, continued photocopy fees (at "market costing"), and perhaps most deplorable, fees for consulting an archivist. These charges, coupled with delays in major capital projects such as the construction of the new Gatineau holding facility, and the conversion of the West Memorial Building for expanded archives use, may result in considerable frustration for those intending to avail themselves of NAC resources. More than a governmental exercise in "belt-tightening" during the midst of a recession, these proposed user fees represent a dramatic philosophical shift in attitudes relating to the delivery of public services. These decisions will cause notable hardship among the Canadian historical community, especially independent researchers working outside of academic institutions, those marginally affiliated to such institutions, and students. It should be noted that neither National Archivist, Dr. Jean-Pierre Wallot, nor his staff, are pleased with this degradation in services. For historians, the message should be obvious, failure to respond will, in all probability, ensure that user fees become a way of life at the NAC. And it won't stop at these initial schedules! While visions of researchers entering the NAC's reading room clutching packets of cash, needed to retrieve their requests for microfilm reels or archival boxes, or desperately typing that last reference while simultaneously dropping quarters into a electrical meter powering their laptops, may be (for now) exaggerated, there is certainly no cause for complacency. While it is

unlikely that the decision to introduce user fees will be rescinded, the extent of such fees is still subject to debate... Those who have recently ventured to the British Public Records Office will understand only too well the consequences of a government determined to pare back its support for the humanities and social sciences — extremely limited operating hours, a paucity of qualified staff, and user fees for everything other than the wan smile of the commissionaire at the reception desk. This should not be allowed to happen here!

Peter McInnis, Queen's University



I think we all agree that the time has come when government expenditures have grown well beyond what Canadians are willing and able to pay in taxes.....If good scholars, graduate or under-graduate, want to use the archives, surely they can then make out a strong case to approach sponsors for grants which would cover these expenditures. ...The government has either eliminated or reduced payments to many other organizations and their activities. I think that we, in the membership, should realise this and give them some support rather than take the opposite approach of deploring such charges which are contemplated at the archives. We will all be better off if we try to co-operate together rather than lobby for exemptions.

J.G. Crean