



# ANNE MCKEAGE

FORMER ARCHIVIST AND  
HISTORY OF HEALTH AND  
MEDICINE LIBRARIAN

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ANNE MCKEAGE WAS THE FORMER ARCHIVIST AND HISTORY OF HEALTH AND MEDICINE LIBRARIAN OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES LIBRARY. WE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SIT DOWN WITH ANNE AND DISCUSS HER WORK AT MCMASTER. CURIOUS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT GOES ON BEHIND THE SCENES, WE ASKED ANNE TO SHARE WITH US HER VARIOUS EXPERIENCES IN GATHERING AND ORGANIZING MATERIAL FOR THE HISTORY OF HEALTH AND MEDICINE COLLECTION.

■ COULD YOU PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR TIME HERE AT MCMASTER AND ABOUT THE HISTORY OF HEALTH AND MEDICINE COLLECTION?

I was in charge of the historical collections, which include the books in the reading room, the Archives that are tucked away, and the Rare Book Room. The focus of these resources is the history of health sciences in the 19th and 20th centuries – not only pertaining to medicine, but also to nursing and midwifery. We started with a tiny budget, so most of the items were actually donated by retiring faculty.

In addition to biographies and autobiographies, the collection includes pamphlets that were given to young mothers and educational materials that were used to teach midwives, anesthesiologists, radiologists, and military physicians. Out in the reading room, resources cover the history of all the health disciplines, but exclude specialized material. You won't find some ponderous tome on niche equipment because the collection is geared towards supporting undergraduates' interests.

The purpose of the Archives is to preserve history. The



Archives cover all of the Hamilton Health Sciences hospitals, which are governed by one central administration that controls purchasing. This arrangement saves money because smaller hospitals do not need to buy resources individually for their own archives. Hamilton's healthcare system has always benefited from a well-connected network; the hospitals have even shared a common laundry service since the 1950s.

The Archives also cover the history underlying McMaster's Faculty of Health Sciences. Meeting minutes, status reports, and annual reports may seem dry in and of themselves, but they represent the decisions that have been made by the faculty. All of these things are in our collections, waiting for someone to find and study them.

The Rare Book Room uses the same classification system as the rest of the library. Often, the books included are quite old – some are from the 1920s or even earlier, and are thus too ripped or fragile to circulate. On top of that, these items are rare. This could mean that only one or two copies exist, like the manuscript of a book that was never published. As well, some publishing offices do not keep old pamphlets, which are really interesting and informative historical artefacts. An example would be the birth control pamphlets provided by a sex education clinic in 1920. They are completely different from the ones distributed in 2017, but show the understanding of

birth control at the time.

The collection used to rely on hard copies, but fortunately, a lot of it is now digital. There is simply not enough physical room in the library to store everything, and it's very difficult for one person to collect and organize it all. There's never enough space, and there are never enough people! However, I tried to prioritize the most important resources, like the administrative records that include the most important decisions. Everything else trickles down from there. If you have those records, you have the basic history. As for the digital collection, our hard drives include digitized photographs and records. This system makes it a lot easier to collect and find items, which ultimately will be accessible to the public in a few years.

## ■ WHAT WAS A REGULAR DAY LIKE AS THE ARCHIVIST OF THE HISTORY OF HEALTH AND MEDICINE LIBRARY?

On a regular day, I'd go through boxes of records that would come in, file by file. Perhaps the Department of Medicine had opened up an old closet and found that it was full of records. After going through them, I would send them a summary of the contents. Then, I would organize the records, putting them in chronological order before entering them into the database. Photographs, in particular, can be quite useful. For example, if someone wanted to pay tribute to Dr. Smith when he retired, I could quickly pull up all of the photos of him at old events and parties using the keyword search function of the digital database. This year is also the Faculty of Health Sciences' 50th anniversary, so many departments and faculty members have been asking for photographs and fact-checking dates in preparation for retrospectives.

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All of the work was front-loaded. Data entry was very time consuming, but necessary. This process allowed me to find everything needed by a PR person in a quick, five minute search. If I had to go through the collections manually to find a face, I wouldn't have known what Dr. Smith looked like, so someone else would have had to come into the library to identify him for me. A five minute search would have taken five hours instead. Anything that looks easy now has had a lot of work put into it to make it look easy.

I'd also buy books for the historical collections. I would find a title and send a request to Acquisition for them to purchase a copy, or I would get a phone call from a donor saying, "I'm a

retired nurse and I have all these books. Are you interested?" I'd say "Absolutely!" Hopefully, I could then meet the donor at their office or home. Donors receive a tax receipt and a notice of acknowledgement in the library catalogue. You can pull up a list of all the things that somebody's donated. It's a bit of an ego booster! It's also a great way to build the collection with material we can't afford to buy.

### ■ WHAT SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN THE HISTORY OF THE HEALTH SCIENCES? WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST IMPORTANT ABOUT YOUR STUDIES?

My undergraduate degree was in history, so I love history. I love the past. I accepted this post as the Archivist and History of Health and Medicine Librarian and then it was just a question of reading everything. I was very fortunate that I was so fascinated by the subject matter. In fact, it was really difficult to give the books back! I wanted to read everything so I did a lot of reading – it was my weekend and evening reading. I'd also talk to people: researchers writing their PhD in the history of anaesthesiology would come down to talk to me, and I would learn so much. It was never tedious that way.

### ■ IT SEEMS LIKE THERE ARE NEW ADDITIONS TO THE COLLECTION EVERY NOW AND THEN, BUT IF YOU WERE TO CHOOSE YOUR FAVOURITE OR MOST INTERESTING ITEM FROM THE COLLECTION, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

There's a particular collection that I like, a photograph collection from the Chedoke Hospital, which just closed. It had its time – it used to be the Mountain Sanatorium, the tuberculosis sanatorium for Hamilton-Wentworth. About ten years ago, I received a phone call informing me that they'd found photographs in a filing cabinet with the help of a locksmith after the key was lost. When they asked if I wanted the photos, I didn't even need to ask what the subject matter of the collection was because I knew it was from Chedoke. So I went up with boxes and unloaded them very quickly because I wanted to dive right in.

I unloaded the three-drawer filing cabinet full of photographs. They were all negatives, which explains why they were saved; the pictures were small, relatively speaking, and nobody knew what they were. I found out that they were pictures of Chedoke, capturing everything that they had done there between the 1950s and 60s. It was such a great find. One day, they will be used because they show Chedoke Hospital's history - how Mountain Sanatorium evolved into a general hospital. This wonderful find survived by the skin of its teeth. I'm rather proud of that collection because if I had not taken that phone call, it would have been lost.

One issue is that many of the people in these photographs have not been named. I can identify the principal people,

like the superintendent and some of the head nurses, but everybody else remains anonymous. That's kind of a shame, because with names, you get the genealogists who are interested in seeing their mothers as young nurses, their fathers as young doctors, and their parents as patients... That's what labelled photographs are good for.

### ■ FINALLY, WHAT IS THE BEST WAY FOR AN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT TO ENGAGE OR MAKE USE OF THE HISTORY OF HEALTH AND MEDICINE COLLECTION?

Well, if you're studying history, geography, anthropology, English, or anything with historical events, lots of research material can be found here.

For example, I know that Dr. Ann Herring of Anthropology uses the collections extensively because she has a fourth-year class that studies the history of a disease in Hamilton. Students take an aspect of the history of diphtheria in Hamilton-Wentworth, for example, and their aspect becomes a chapter of a book that is read and peer-reviewed by Dr. Herring. Then it's all professionally published and suddenly the students are contributors to a publication. The course pulls students right across campus to use the Health Sciences Library and our historical collections. We become siloed so easily – we should explore what the campus and city each have to offer, like the Planetarium or the greenhouse at McMaster. It's all here if we just explore it! Then, you can grow in so many ways beyond the information that you learn in classrooms. You learn how to think, how to research, how to talk, how to create, and how to defend your position. It's really great training. Anyone can use the collection, you just have to think expansively.

(Post-interview: There are also some really beautiful biographies on some of the big names in medicine. For example, there are two histories on the writing of Gray's Anatomy that talk about who Gray was, who his illustrator was, and more. Reading these would be a great way to get into the history of medicine.)

### ■ HOW CAN STUDENTS ACCESS THESE RESOURCES?

Everything excluding the contents of the Rare Book Room are accessible with your student card. It all has the same times and conditions for borrowing. The materials in the Rare Book Room are listed in the catalogue, and you can make an appointment to use the material within the room. You can even take photographs of it with your phone, or ask to scan it. The material in the catalogue tends to have "Early Works" in the title, like "Diphtheria: Early Works," and then you just have to look at the location of the collection. Undergraduate students are free to use the collection – you just need to make an appointment. There are no weekend or evening hours, though, so you do have to learn to manage your time! ■