



## CARL@50: REFLECTIONS FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

As part of CARL's 50th anniversary celebrations and social media campaign, we invited past and present Executive Directors to reflect on the evolving priorities of Canada's research libraries and the challenges and opportunities ahead. We asked them to consider two questions:

- What was one issue or priority that was particularly important for research libraries during your time as Executive Director?
- What do you think will be particularly important for research libraries in the years ahead?

The following reflections offer a glimpse into CARL's history and the changing landscape of research libraries, as well as perspectives on the future.

### **TIM MARK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, 1995–2008**

*What was one issue or priority that was particularly important for research libraries during your time as Executive Director?*

When I became Executive Director the CARL staff consisted of two people, the Executive Director and the Office Assistant. Both worked a four-day week. There were no benefits. The total annual budget was about \$120,000. Out of that we had \$7,000 a year to spend on projects and initiatives. Bonnie Jehu worked part-time from 1984 as the first CARL Executive Director. She was followed by David McCallum (1986 to 1995). In addition to his professional capabilities, David was a wicked and accomplished mimic.

I served as CARL Executive Director from September 1995 until April 2008. It was my privilege to work with seven CARL Presidents: Jean-Pierre Coté, Carolynne Presser, Marnie Swanson, Frances Groen, Bill Maes, Joyce Garnett, John Teskey and Leslie Weir. I was also fortunate to work with some very fine staff, notably Katherine McColgan and Katherine Shearer (who freelanced for CARL).

The most memorable issue was the development of the successful application to the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) that resulted in the Canadian National Site



Licensing Project now the Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN). The grant was \$20 million. With matching funds that came to \$50m. It was CARL's achievement to convince the CFI that libraries are legitimately part of university research infrastructure. What is more, we said – if you will provide initial capital funding as an incentive, we will revolutionize the way in which researchers in sciences engineering and medicine undertake research by enabling the move from print journal subscriptions in these fields in all university libraries across Canada to digital licensing in one sweep.

It was an extraordinarily audacious, not to say brash claim to make; but it was true and CARL delivered and CFI said that such an application would be eligible. All credit to Deb deBruijn, assisted by Bill Birdsall, who CARL hired to develop the submission to the competition – where it was ultimately successful. It is a tribute to the tenacity of our then President Marnie Swanson, that CARL concentrated on this one project for over a year.

A second priority was the launch of AlouetteCanada in Nov 2005 described by Ernie Ingles as “one of CARL's best initiatives ever.” The vision was for online access for all Canadians to Canada's documentary heritage.”

One more priority was the establishment of the federal government program for the reimbursement of the indirect costs of research. CARL joined forces with AUCC for the campaign but was able to focus on libraries as deserving beneficiaries, and the result was success.

Copyright was a preoccupation and probably always will be. Bill C-32 in 1996 did not address digital copyright so there was lots of work to define the position of research libraries; and there were continual skirmishes with Access Copyright. Much of the hard work was led first by Graham Hill and then by Mark Haslett, as Brent will tell you.

International contacts and working relationships with overseas research library associations were developed during this time. These included SCONUL and CURL in the UK, CAUL in Australia, and LIBER (Ligue des bibliothèques européennes de recherche). Study tours were initiated to the UK and to Australia. Lasting professional contacts and friendships were made.

*What do you think will be particularly important for research libraries in the years ahead?*

Rather than specific predictions, here are two advantages that CARL enjoys and should build upon in the future.

- Collegiality: this has always been a hallmark and a strength of CARL, cherished by many of its members. It is the opportunities that CARL affords, not only for conviviality but for members to ‘talk shop’, compare notes and ask colleagues for advice.
- “Collective heft:” when CARL has a vision, such as CRKN or AlouetteCanada - and everyone faces the same direction, pools expertise and resources, then CARL is a very powerful force indeed for forging national policies and national initiatives. This has been demonstrated time and again in the past and can well do so in the future

Brent and Susan have each done a wonderful job as CARL Executive Director, helping define and implement the CARL agenda over the past eighteen years. I offer Michael very best wishes as our successor.

*Floreat CARL!*

## **BRENT ROE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, 2008-2014**

*What was one issue or priority that was particularly important for research libraries during your time as Executive Director?*

I was privileged to have served as CARL Executive Director for six years, 2008-2014. The major CARL concern during that period was, of course, copyright legislation—continuing, in fact, from Tim Mark’s time as ED. The government wanted to update the *Copyright Act* for the digital era and specifically to bring it into compliance with the WIPO copyright treaties of the 1990s, which, among other provisions, required strong legal protections for digital locks. In 2008, a Conservative minority government introduced Bill C-61, giving CARL and the Canadian library and post-secondary communities much grist for criticism and advocacy. When the government fell later in the year and the bill died on the order paper with the likelihood of reappearing in under the next minority government, CARL worked closely with Universities Canada (AUCC at the time, with Steve Wills as our contact) and with copyright lawyer Wanda Noel to craft a strong set of positions for a better copyright bill.

In 2009, Leslie Weir, CARL President, was even invited to meet with the Minister of Canadian Heritage about them. When Bill C-32 was introduced in 2010, there were clear signs of CARL’s advocacy in the text. While CARL was as surprised as the rest of

the library and education community that “education” appeared as a ground for fair dealing, it quickly saw the importance of this addition and supported the bill, although some parts of the library community were more ambivalent because of its reproposed strong protection of digital locks. While C-32 died with its minority government, C-11, little different from C-32, was soon introduced by the Harper majority government in 2011.



These were exciting times: I recall receiving a phone call from the head of the Minister’s political staff urging CARL to continue its advocacy in support of the bill, as educational fair dealing could only survive politically, he hinted, if digital locks protection also remained. Ernie Ingles, as CARL President, was later invited to address the parliamentary committee examining the bill, as were other sectoral leaders with their varying views. In the end, Bill C-11 passed into law in 2012; this, along with that year’s Supreme Court judgements around fair dealing, have dramatically changed the copyright landscape in which Canadian research libraries operate.

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*What do you think will be particularly important for research libraries in the years ahead?*

While I left the larger-university research library world when I left CARL, I did serve as a smaller-university library director for a decade (at Sudbury’s Laurentian University) before retiring a couple of years ago. I continued to see the great importance of university libraries working together in consortia and associations to preserve and make ever more available primary and secondary materials to their scholars and students—copyright management, open access, and research data management have all played their role in this broad quest. Since I was CARL ED, however, the advent of artificial intelligence has presented both new opportunities and new challenges to universities and their libraries. I would be very surprised if CARL, perhaps again working with ARL or Universities Canada, were not studying how to harness AI to advance its traditional interests or how to protect the integrity of the scholarly enterprise from AI “slop” production, AI short-circuiting of learning, or misaligned AI agents.

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*A few additional reminiscences of my time as ED...*

In my last two years as CARL ED, the association moved on to put much more of its energy into the promotion and support of open access and into the preservation and management of research data, the latter work resulting in a set of initiatives that came to fruition while Suran Haigh was ED. More internally, CARL also did the hard work of reconstituting itself into compliance with the 2009 *Canada Not-for profit Corporations Act*, and the CARL office moved twice: once from its corner in the Morisset Library at University of Ottawa to a cohabited space with Universities Canada and then to its own downtown Ottawa office suite. While CARL lost the Library of Parliament as a member, it gained as members the libraries of Toronto Metropolitan and Brock Universities.

Of course, CARL is not just nose-to-the-grindstone policy and project work; from the ED's perspective, it was also great fun that CARL was working closely with ARL and was becoming more involved with IFLA (partly with Ingrid Parent's IFLA presidency). The 2011 study tour to China and the 2014 study tour to Brazil were other highlights of my time with CARL. Through all this, it was ever a pleasure to work with Kate McColgan and the rest of the CARL staff in supporting CARL Presidents Leslie Weir, Ernie Ingles, Tom Hickerson, and Gerald Beasley, their boards, and all the CARL member libraries. May CARL flourish throughout its next 50 years!

## **SUSAN HAIGH, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, 2014–2025**

*What was one issue or priority that was particularly important for research libraries during your time as Executive Director?*

There were so many issues and priorities over my eleven years (2014-2025) at CARL!

One important strategic aim was to strengthen libraries' role within the academic research mission. To that end, CARL fostered national collaborations on open access to scholarship, open infrastructure, standards and best practices, and data management. A prime example was the Portage Network, a successful national initiative that positioned libraries as experts in, and essential to, Research Data Management at both local and national scale. This seized a moment: the federal government was realizing the need for investment in national research infrastructure. With initial financial support from CARL members, Compute Canada, and CANARIE, we built Portage into a 15 FTE operation (plus a vast volunteer network of experts) providing tools, guidance, and a network of data repositories. This outstanding team was handed off in 2019 to the newly created Digital Research Alliance of Canada. A few years later, we followed a similar collaborative model to develop Scholaris, a shared national institutional repository service hosted by Scholars Portal.



There were, of course, other things going on. Copyright policy remained important as we defended user rights including fair dealing, and supported universities' choice to manage copyright on an institutional basis. A major court case, *York University v. Access Copyright*, reached the Supreme Court of Canada. CARL was an intervenor in the case, represented by Howard Knopf. We were proud when the 2021 SCC ruling aligned with the library/university legal position that tariff payment was not mandatory.

Also importantly, CARL supported libraries' work to foster Indigenous services and reconciliation; to advance equity, diversity and inclusion; and to respond effectively to arising challenges such as

COVID-19, student protests, and budget constraints.

In all these efforts, CARL served as a convenor for information sharing and a catalyst for collaboration -- as has been the case with CARL since its inception.

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*What do you think will be particularly important for research libraries in the years ahead?*

It will be important to integrate AI appropriately, understanding its significant impacts on learning, research, and society. I also believe there remains much collaborative work to do to broaden research libraries' reach and impact through publishing, repository, and data services; and to inculcate best RDM and IM practices, including persistent identifiers, across the research enterprise.

Adapting to the changing needs of research and learning is essential. There can be no standing still, no resting on traditions, no assuming that success is a given, and our value indisputable. Libraries must strive continually to be vital to the research and educational mission they exist to serve – especially when higher education is under pressure. They will need to hone their services, foster strong campus and government relationships, and sharpen their storytelling if they are to thrive in the years ahead.

Finally, given that issues shift over time, it is of paramount importance that Canadian research libraries stay connected and collaborative with each other. The many successes of CARL's first fifty years attest to the value and impact of pan-Canadian collective approaches.

## MICHAEL VANDENBURG, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, 2026–

*What was one issue or priority that was particularly important for research libraries during your time as Executive Director?*

Having only been Executive Director of CARL since February 2026, I hesitate to reflect on my tenure as long enough to have had a single defining issue. But having worked with CARL in various capacities for many years (as a member library director, committee chair, board member, and participant in a number of national initiatives) the consistent priority I have seen in CARL's work is ensuring that research libraries are recognized as essential partners in the research enterprise, and that they have the collective capacity to respond to changes in that enterprise.

That priority is particularly evident in CARL's work on open science. Questions about open access, research data, repositories, persistent identifiers, scholarly communication, and research infrastructure can easily appear to be technical or operational issues. From my perspective they go to the heart of how research is created, shared, preserved, and discovered. CARL's role has been to bring libraries together with other parts of the research ecosystem to develop collective approaches and to ensure that the library perspective is present when national research policy and infrastructure are being shaped.

I have also been struck by the continuity in CARL's advocacy. Copyright remains important; the policy environment around access to knowledge continues to evolve; and new issues such as research security and artificial intelligence are creating questions that require both policy expertise and a strong understanding of the research lifecycle. CARL is most effective when it combines a clear national voice with practical collaboration among member libraries.

One of the great privileges of beginning this role has been seeing CARL from the other side of the table. The association is at its best not simply when it speaks on behalf of research libraries, but when it creates the conditions for its members to learn from one another, build common infrastructure, and act collectively. That has been a constant throughout CARL's history.

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*What do you think will be particularly important for research libraries in the years ahead?*

The years ahead will require research libraries to be both adaptable and intentional about their role in the research enterprise. Artificial intelligence will be central to this, with profound implications for research, scholarly communication, teaching and

learning, copyright, information integrity, and the ways in which knowledge is produced and discovered. Research libraries make an important contribution not only in helping researchers and students use these technologies effectively, but also in playing a leadership role helping institutions to understand their implications for scholarship and knowledge and to forge strategic paths forward.

At the same time, I would not want AI to overshadow several longer-term priorities. Open and sustainable scholarly communication, research data management, digital preservation, persistent identifiers, and shared infrastructure will continue to require national and international collaboration. We need to keep asking how libraries can move beyond providing access to information toward actively supporting the research lifecycle and making their contributions to research more visible.



I also think the next few years will require research libraries to continue strengthening their relationships beyond the library sector: with researchers, research offices, universities, governments, funders, and national research organizations. Many of the challenges facing the research enterprise—whether around open science, research security, AI, or the sustainability of scholarly infrastructure—cannot be solved by libraries alone.

Finally, I believe CARL's most enduring asset is the willingness of Canadian research libraries to work together. My experience over many years has convinced me that the scale of the Canadian research library community makes collaboration not just valuable but essential. The issues will change, as they always have, but the need for a strong collective voice, shared capacity, and a willingness to experiment together will remain.

As CARL celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, I am excited by the prospects of helping carry forward a remarkably strong tradition of collaboration while ensuring that CARL continues to be useful and relevant to the research libraries for the next fifty years.