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June 13, 2017  
Ms. Carol Cooley  
CEO, Saskatoon Public Library  
via email: [j.hiebert@saskatoonlibrary.ca](mailto:j.hiebert@saskatoonlibrary.ca)

Dear Ms. Cooley:

I am writing concerning reports that the Library Board intends to downgrade the Local History Room (LHR) at the main library, including elimination of a specialist librarian as the person in charge of the LHR. First, let me say that I understand and sympathize with the difficult challenge that you and the Board face, as you have to adjust priorities in light of reduced funding.

But I also must say that I think that downgrading the Local History Room is a serious mistake, one that the Board and library administration should avoid for the good of the community. I say that as someone who was a member of the Department of History at the University of Saskatchewan for forty-four years, and who during that time published ten books of Canadian history with publishers ranging from the University of Toronto Press to McClelland & Stewart. Most of those works were in the category of the history of Native-newcomer relations, which has been my specialty now for over thirty-five years.

From my own research experience, as well as from that of my students, I know that the Local History Room is a valuable – indeed, indispensable – resource for many topics in western Canadian history. For example, one of my M.A. students was doing a thesis on the local Dakota community in which the wonderfully rich Charmbury collection of photographs was an essential source of knowledge. She practically ‘lived’ in the LHR for weeks at a time as she conducted her research. She also mentioned frequently how valuable the LHR and its staff were for her research. Such examples, I am sure, could be multiplied many times if you were to consult other faculty members and advanced students in Canadian history.

Advanced research, especially into the history of relations between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians, can be a complex and challenging matter. Both students and faculty need the advice and assistance of a specialist librarian who has thorough knowledge of the Collection to ensure that the researcher does not miss anything important to the topic at hand. A generalist librarian, no matter how well qualified otherwise, and no matter how dedicated and willing to help, cannot do that job as well.

For these reasons, I urge you and the Board not to remove the specialist librarian who supervises the Local History Room as you make your budget adjustments. Especially at this time, when the pursuit of reconciliation between Indigenous people and others is such a high

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priority for Canadians, researchers need the very best help and advice that is available. Having published books on the history of residential schools, on treaty-making, and now (or at least this August) on the emergence of the reconciliation movement, I know the importance to researchers in the field of highly qualified, knowledgeable library staff and appreciate what a well-staffed Local History Room can do to make research in the field feasible.

Thank you for considering this plea.

Yours truly

J.R. Miller, Ph.D., O.C., S.O.M., F.R.S.C.

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