

Public History Internship Profile:
Archives Assistant at the Sun Life Financial Corporate Archives

Sarah Kristen Nagy



This summer the internship at the Sun Life Financial Corporate Archives was a 16-week, paid position. The Corporate Archives are located at Sun Life's Canadian headquarters in Waterloo, Ontario. Established in Canada in 1865, Sun Life is an international financial services and life insurance company. The collection showcases the Company's roots in Canada and its international expansion and development over the last 140-plus years. The collection also contains a number of artifacts from this extensive history. Sun Life's Corporate Archivist, my supervisor, not only guided me through on-the-job training but also provided me with independence in completing projects and allowing me to step into their role in their absence.

2012 marks the 100th anniversary of the Canadian head office; a landmark Renaissance Revival building that was completed in 1912. In subsequent years multiple additions were made to the building, however its historical grandeur is remarkably preserved, merging with the modern to provide a unique work environment. Accordingly, my major projects for the summer focused on the 100th anniversary celebrations. I researched and created exhibits using archival materials and artifacts for events hosted on site. The main displays I assisted with putting together were divided into eras and showed employees at both work and play in the building. In preparation for event set up, I created mock displays and photographed them so that volunteers would be able to better assist me in setting up. I packed the

artifacts and the archival materials to ensure their integrity when they were moved. I also kept a detailed inventory of the items on display – which was necessary as at times I was keeping track of more than 50 pieces in different places at once! The focal point of the summer was the Ontario Heritage Trust provincial plaque unveiling event. I assisted with researching and editing the background paper on the building, as well as editing and fact checking the plaque text. As well, working with Sun Life's marketing and communication department throughout the summer provided me with a different perspective and understanding of the large amount of work that goes into planning for events.

On a day-to-day basis, I assisted with both internal research requests from inside the Company and external research requests from outside the Company. I completed archival research, including reviewing archived film footage, compiling information and photographs, for both academic and amateur researchers, and former employees. Requests usually consisted of me scanning documents and photographs and providing high quality digital copies. I carried out collections management through sorting and filing paper and electronic records. Other archival duties were assigned to me on an as needed basis.