

**Government Archives Division/Division des archives gouvernementales.** National Archives of Canada General Guide Series. CYNTHIA LOVERING, comp. Introduction by TERRY COOK. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1991. vii, 154 p. ISBN 0-662-58186-5 Free.

The transition to fonds level description has begun at the National Archives of Canada. With the second edition of its guide to the textual and electronic holdings of the Government Archives Division, the National Archives has taken the first steps towards context and content description. Key features of this edition of the General Guide Series are expanded administrative histories and "arrangement and content" sections for each of the entries for the 142 Record Groups (RG) described. Terry Cook has also provided an enlarged introduction to the development of federal government archives programmes and helpful sections explaining the elements of each RG entry and procedures for access to information under the *Access to Information Act* and the *Privacy Act*.

One significant new feature is the inclusion of electronic records. The *Guide* indicates the existence of nearly 1,100 data files and notes the impacts and challenges of electronic records. But the most astounding, as well as problematic, trend that the *Guide* highlights is the growth in the physical extent of federal archives. The division's holdings have jumped from twenty-seven kilometres to over fifty kilometres in just eight years. Many Record Groups have doubled, while others have tripled or more.

This is even more significant when it is realized that the *Guide* is not a guide to all the archives of the federal government but is a divisional guide—a guide to the holdings of the Government Archives Division. Not included are photographs, paintings and drawings, maps and plans, architectural drawings, film, radio and television records, etc., held by other divisions of the National Archives. Most textual and electronic archives held in regional records centres are not included either, nor are textual records of the federal government held by the Manuscript Division (RG 1, Executive Council, for example).

Researchers and other users may be disappointed with the Record Group entries in that the list of series has been dropped in favour of the "arrangement and content" section. This "more global descriptive of the central subject and themes" of a Record Group is selective in its description of series, and notable information about some of the Record Groups (RG 10 Indian Affairs and RG 55 Finance, for example) has been excluded. Although detailed series information can be found in the inventories (for those Record Groups which have them), the retention of series lists in the *Guides* would have been informative and useful.

Without belabouring the inadequacies of the Record Group concept, I can recommend this *Guide* as a useful model for other governmental archives programmes and as an excellent source of information about federal archives. It is available without charge from Marketing and Distribution, National Archives of Canada, 344 Wellington Street, Room 136, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N3.

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