The Mackenzie King Papers: An Archival Odyssey

by JEAN E. DRYDEN*

Scholars studying almost any aspect of Canadian history during the first half of the twentieth century will likely consult the papers of William Lyon Mackenzie King. This rich collection occupies more than two hundred metres of shelf space at the Public Archives of Canada, and includes material dating from 1840 to 1950. Of course, not all of this deals with Canadian public events. A significant portion concerns King's personal life, and includes such diverse items as his annual dental X-rays, his Christmas cards, and his dogs' tags. In the past few years, King's personal life has enthralled the public, and his private activities have been a matter of much sensational speculation. However, this fascination with his private life is relatively new. For years scholars investigating less titillating topics have been busily sifting through the King Papers, and will continue to do so long after interest in the dogs, the women, and the seances has waned.

The first installment of the King Papers came to the Archives more than thirty years ago; archivists are still working on the collection. Only in June 1977 did King's Literary Executors complete the access restrictions and transfer ownership of the entire collection to the Archives. Thirty years is a rather long time to work on any collection, even one so large as this. The explanations of the rather unusual arrangement of the papers and the decisions of the Literary Executors regarding access have never been fully recorded. Instead, a body of archival folklore has grown up around the collection. This paper's purpose is to disperse these half-truths and speculation, with particular reference to the organization of the papers and access to them. Although hindsight encourages the passing of judgement on the decisions of the archivists and Literary Executors, the purpose of this paper is not to judge, but to explain. An examination of the background of the King Papers—the most revealing collection of any Canadian Prime Minister—is long overdue.

Mackenzie King was not a man who threw things out. His accumulative instinct was based partly on an intense awareness of his place in Canadian his-

* The author gratefully acknowledges the co-operation and assistance of Frederick W. Gibson and Jacqueline Côté Neatby, who graciously granted interviews; W. Kaye Lamb who consented to be interviewed and granted access to his files; and J.W. Pickersgill who very kindly permitted free access to his most up-to-date files. Without their contributions, this paper could not have been written.

tory and a conscious desire to have as full a record as possible for the memoirs he planned to write one day. More important, however, was his preoccupation with the demands of office which left little time to consider the growing mass of papers accumulating in the basement of Laurier House and in the vaults of the East Block. As long as his staff could find files when he needed them (and an extensive system of card indexes and lists ensured that they could), he gave only fleeting thought to the disposition of the material. Not until after the war in 1946 did thoughts of retirement lead King to give considerable thought to the organization of his papers so that he could write his memoirs.[1] Even then, he was not really concerned about the ultimate disposition of his papers; his interest did not extend beyond their organization for use in his memoirs.

In September 1946 King took the first step toward writing the memoirs when he hired an assistant to organize the papers. The Prime Minister had been discussing the choice of an assistant with various people since July 1945,[2] and word was circulating that he was looking for a suitable person to help with his papers. That person appeared in King's office in September 1946. He was Frederick W. Gibson of Kingston, Ontario, who had just completed the first year of his doctoral studies at Harvard. Gibson had learned of the position from W.A. Mackintosh, who had recently resumed his duties at Queen's University in Kingston, after serving as Director of Economic Research in the Department of Reconstruction and Supply. Gibson considered the matter carefully and concluded that this unique opportunity to be the first to examine and organize the King Papers and learn first-hand of the events of twentieth-century Canadian history and politics was well worth an interruption in his doctoral work. He contacted J.W. Pickersgill, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, and preliminary discussions were held in August 1946.

Pickersgill was already aware that Mackintosh and Professor W.Y. Elliott of Harvard had recommended Gibson.[3] Gibson, who had organized J.W. Dafoe's papers, seemed to be just the man King was looking for—an historian with experience in organizing the papers of a political figure.[4] However, the final choice depended on a successful interview with King. As Gibson recalls, the interview of 10 September 1946 proceeded comfortably except for one dreadful moment. In response to King's question about his political leanings, he admitted that his family had traditionally been followers of Sir John A.

1 J.W. Pickersgill and D.F. Forster, *The Mackenzie King Record, 1945-1946* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 133, 257-58.

2 King Papers, MG 26 J1, vol. 406, H.L. Keenleyside to King, 4 April 1946, p. 366804; MG 26 J4, vol. 293, file F3036, Memos for file 19 and 28 July 1945, pp. C203076, C203078.

3 King Papers, MG 26 J12, vol. 8, Pickersgill to N.A. Robertson, 8 August 1946.

4 In the course of research for his master's thesis in 1943, Gibson had consulted Sir Clifford Sifton's papers (at that time in the custody of the Sifton family) and had developed a friendship with Clifford Sifton Junior. When J.W. Dafoe, editor of the *Winnipeg Free Press*, was looking for someone to organize his papers in preparation for the writing of his memoirs, Sifton suggested Gibson as a suitable candidate once he had finished his M.A. work, and Dafoe agreed. Gibson spent the summers of 1944 and 1945 organizing the Dafoe Papers in Winnipeg, and thereafter also worked on the arrangement of the Sifton Papers. Information from interview with Frederick W. Gibson, conducted by Jean Dryden, 4 April 1977, hereafter cited as Gibson interview.

Macdonald, although he himself had no particular political affiliation. Tactful intervention by Pickersgill broke the ensuing silence, and discussion moved to other topics. Of more importance to King than the candidate's politics was Gibson's understanding that he was to do no more than classify documents—the writing of the memoirs was to be undertaken by King personally or his appointee. Gibson agreed to this condition, and won the job, for King was impressed with his enthusiasm and experience in "classifying documents."[5]

Gibson was to be appointed a temporary Special Officer attached to the Public Archives of Canada for six months, subject to review and renewal in April 1947. As well as paying his salary, the Archives was to hire a mutually satisfactory assistant, and to provide working space and clerical and stenographic assistance.[6] Gibson wasted no time in arranging to have the Archives hire Jacqueline Côté, an Honours Graduate in history from Queen's and a former student.[7] The wheels of bureaucracy can turn quickly when a Prime Minister wants something. Prompt discussions with C.H. Bland (Chairman of the Public Service Commission), Secretary of State Paul Martin (minister responsible for the Public Archives of Canada), and Dominion Archivist Gustave Lanctot, ensured that everything was ready for Gibson and Côté to start by 1 October.[8] Five cabinets of Prime Minister's Office files from King's first administrations (1921-30) were sent to the Archives from Laurier House, and selection and arrangement began.

If the Dominion Archivist was irritated because he had not been consulted in the hiring of an assistant to arrange the papers, he kept his objections to himself. Criticizing King's choice would have been injudicious at a point when Lanctot had no assurance that the papers would be placed permanently in the Archives. More to the point, Lanctot hoped one day to write a biography of King.[9] In any case, he did his utmost to arrange accommodation at the Archives after visits from King and Gibson.[10]

With the hiring of an assistant, King concentrated on providing some overall guidance for the work on his papers, which at that time were in two principal locations. Most public material was housed in various vaults and storage areas in the East Block of the Parliament Buildings; family and personal material, and files from the early administrations were in Laurier House, the Prime Minister's residence. However no one, least of all King himself, had a clear idea of the extent, nature, or location of his papers.

Early in October 1946, King attempted to develop a clearer impression of the material at Laurier House. He examined the files in the basement and in-

5 Gibson interview.
6 King Papers, MG 26 J1, vol. 404, Pickersgill to Gibson, 17 September 1946, p. 364739.
7 King Papers, MG 26 J1, vol. 404, Pickersgill to Gibson, 17 September 1946, pp. 364740-41; MG 26 J1, vol. 401, correspondence between R.G. Robertson and Jacqueline Côté, 28 September and 1 October 1946, pp. 362614-15; MG 26 J4, vol. 290, file F3011, Memo for file by Pickersgill 9 October 1946, p. C200116.
8 King Papers, MG 26 J1, vol. 407, correspondence between Lanctot and R.G. Robertson, 26-30 September 1946, pp. 367477-79, 367483-87; King Diaries, 10 September 1946.
9 King Papers, MG 26 J1, vol. 425, Lanctot to King, 6 October 1947, p. 386558.
10 King Papers, MG 26 J1, vol. 407, Lanctot to King, 13 September 1946, p. 367461; King Diaries, 10 September 1946.

structed his staff regarding the order in which material should be sent to the Archives for Gibson's attention. While he was "amazed at the amount of material already indexed" by his office staff, he was discouraged at the lack of chronological arrangement in the basement files.[11] During the next month, he took steps to reduce the quantity of material to get a better idea of what was left. Printed material (mostly annual reports) was sent to appropriate government departments;[12] and other printed material and files were sent to the East Block.[13] He also assigned two staff members the task of preparing a master index to the papers in the basement, except for External Affairs material which he assigned to James A. Gibson, the Department's representative at Laurier House in charge of the war records there. James Gibson was also given the specific task of the classification and arrangement of the External Affairs papers once the master index was prepared.[14]

This index not only reveals the extent of the material kept there but also suggests appalling storage conditions. The King Papers were stored in an astonishing array of containers in rooms all over the house. Binders, boxes, folders, tubs, cabinets, a cedar chest and a "large flat leather trunk. . .'neath tank" had all been used, and could be found in the Dark Room, the Sun Room, the Cold Room, the Warm Room, the Valet Room, and the Office.[15] If these rooms lived up to their names, the storage conditions definitely did not meet archival standards. Nevertheless, the index worked, and documents relating to a particular subject could soon be retrieved for King's use, and eventually for Gibson when he began work on the Laurier House material.

King's diary entry for 4 October suggests that he would have preferred to spend more time going through his papers personally, but he realized that he would never have enough time to do it to his satisfaction. He did, however, wish to see any file before dispatch to the Archives from Laurier House.[16] It is doubtful whether King ever had the time to examine each file, but his instruction indicates a concern about what the files would reveal, since he had clearly forgotten their contents. The Prime Minister continued to rummage about in the basement, reacquainting himself with the material accumulated during his long career. He was immensely pleased one day to find under some of his father's old accounts and papers a set of silver which for years had been lost.[17] Clearly some systematic organization of the basement was long overdue.

Surprisingly, throughout these preparations, King never committed himself to depositing his papers permanently in the Public Archives of Canada. Even after arranging for the organization of his papers, King was not sure about exactly where his papers would go after his death. He wrote in his diary on 10 September 1946:

---

11 King Diaries, 4 October 1946.
12 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Reports Sent to Government Departments.
13 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Papers Sent to East Block 1946-49.
14 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Papers Sorted at Laurier House, King to James A. Gibson, 23 October 1946.
15 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Laurier House Files—Master Index.
16 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Papers Transferred to Archives from Laurier House, F.W. Gibson to James A. Gibson, 3 October 1946.
17 King Diaries, 1 November 1946.

> What I am anxious to do is to have papers so arranged that I could give the majority of them to the Archives or External Affairs or to the P.M.'s office; that I have no descendants to whom I wish to leave any of this material and that, therefore, it was really in the public interest that the papers should be gone through.

This uncertainty about which federal department should receive the papers is somewhat surprising. King knew that the Archives had a bindery where he could have scrapbooks of clippings and mementoes bound at government expense; yet beyond this, he seems to have harboured only the haziest notion of the main functions of the Archives.

Informed or not, King soon made up his mind. Lanctot's co-operation may have influenced King's decision to place his papers in the Archives eventually. A more significant factor was probably King's surprise at the extent of his papers and a fear of public criticism if his papers were arranged at public expense without some commitment that they would ultimately belong to the nation. He justified his action partly on the precedent set when he had arranged for Sir Robert Borden to be given rooms at the Archives and also assistants while the papers were being organized for Borden to write his memoirs.[18] King noted in his diary of 1 October 1946:

> I 'phoned Lanctot. I secured his undertaking to give additional space if necessary and told him I was prepared to have the material, as sorted, kept on in the Archives, to be placed in vaults in other parts of the building. This ought to avoid any question about the services being performed at present being wholly for the state.

Three days later he wrote to Lanctot confirming the eventual donation to the Public Archives of Canada of his official correspondence "and such additional correspondence as . . . I may feel it desirable." King explained that the papers would be held in trust by the Archives while they were being arranged, but that eventually ownership would be vested in the Archives. He also stipulated that only he or his agents should have access to the papers until ownership was transferred to the Archives. Lanctot was pleased to confirm this agreement.[19]

Gibson and Côté naturally encountered problems. Some became immediately obvious; others emerged only as the project continued. The first task was to sort the PMO files and to select historically valuable material. Very quickly a decision had to be made about the disposition of material deemed unimportant. After three months on the project, Gibson reported that he and Côté had examined the contents of five cabinets, and found the quality uneven. Much he recommended for destruction as being of no historical importance whatsoever. A smaller quantity was to be retained; when doubt existed, an item was usually kept. Nonetheless, Gibson sought guidance on material considered to be of marginal value, including letters setting up appointments (appointment books recorded the same information), representations urging appointments to the Cabinet, requests for financial or other assistance, and External Affairs papers

18 King Diaries, 10 September 1946.

19 Public Archives of Canada Records, RG 37, vol. 48, File: Prime Minister's Office, King to Lanctot, Lanctot to King 8 October 1946.

including correspondence and printed material.[20] Although no detailed written reply exists, a letter of a year later suggests the general guideline arranged with King was the retention of "all papers which throw light on Mr. King as a man and as a leader, and on significant issues of public policy." Also, "generous samples [of] papers of an official or routine nature [were] retained and incorporated into the permanent collection."[21] Gibson and Côté followed these guidelines for as long as they worked on the papers.

While King had qualms whenever the cataloguers encountered sensitive items, particularly in the more personal material at Laurier House, there never was any suggestion that such items be destroyed. On the contrary, he wanted as much as possible saved to justify his actions and decisions, and Gibson and Côté were scrupulously concerned that nothing of possible significance be destroyed.[22] After more than two years on the project, Prime Minister's Office (PMO) material destroyed consisted mainly of crank letters and routine requests. At that point, nothing from the Laurier House files had been destroyed, partly because King was more directly involved with this material, and partly because it was less well organized and the relationships between individual letters were less clear.[23] It is obvious today from the collection that every effort was made to preserve material, or at least a sample, if there was any possibility it would be of historical significance.

The next task was the arrangement and description of material deemed worthy of permanent preservation. As discussed with King and Pickersgill at the time of his appointment, Gibson proposed using the same indexing method he had employed for the Dafoe and Sifton Papers. It was a system devised in conjunction with Professor Trotter at Queen's whose advice Gibson had sought before he began work on the Dafoe Papers. Trotter had pointed out that often the simplest systems worked best and suggested that the material be arranged chronologically, then alphabetically within each year by the name of the correspondent.[24] Gibson explained the details to King:

> Letters of lasting value have been arranged chronologically by years. Within each year they have been arranged alphabetically according to the name of the writer of the letter. Within this arrangement, in cases where a correspondent wrote more than one letter in a particular year, these letters have again been arranged alphabetically according to the names of the addressees. Finally, in cases where a correspondent wrote more than one letter in a year to a particular addressee, these letters have been arranged chronologically by months and days.
>
> A precis has then been made for each letter of permanent importance, and the precis has been typed on a calendar card. These cards have been filed in the order described above for the filing of letters.

---

20 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Transfer of Papers to Archives, Gibson to Pickersgill, 21 December 1946.

21 King Papers, MG 26 J8, Gibson to Pickersgill, 22 December 1947.

22 Gibson interview. Thereafter reports gave more detail about what was being discarded, either because it lacked historical significance or was available elsewhere.

23 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Transfer of Papers to Archives, Gibson to King, 9 February 1949, p. 14.

24 Gibson interview.

> To provide a final check on every letter, and to make the collection easily accessible by subjects, subject-sheets have been compiled containing lists of the permanently valuable letters on every subject.[25]

This description of the system hardly sounds simple; in fact, it proved to be tremendously cumbersome and time-consuming.

Gibson undoubtedly would have considered a less refined system had he been aware when he started of the extent of the King Papers. The truth was that no one knew. Although Gibson had spent part of an afternoon being shown around the file rooms of Laurier House,[26] he did not see and could not have imagined all the East Block vaults and storage rooms where files eventually surfaced. Nor did he see the voluminous active files in the PMO itself. Gibson's system worked well for the initial batches of material tackled, but he and Côté were ignorant of the real magnitude of the task facing them, and once the project was underway they had little opportunity to stand back to estimate the volume of papers to be sifted. As Côté dryly remarked, "there was always plenty at hand" to keep them busy,[27] and they did not have to go looking for more files to go through.

Unaware of the extent of the papers, they also did not discover until it was too late that a detailed card index to the PMO files for the period 1935-48 already existed. This was an index prepared by the PMO staff as letters came into the office. Until 1938 there was only a nominal index filed alphabetically by the name of the writer of a letter, giving the date and a brief summary of the letter, and referring to the appropriate PMO file. Both a subject and nominal index existed from 1939 onward. The existence of this index did not come to light until after many files had been pulled apart and the papers reorganized according to Gibson's system. The old index survives today, but its usefulness is greatly diminished since all significant material has been removed from the files to which the cards refer, and placed elsewhere. There are references to a similar index for the 1921-30 PMO material,[28] but this index has not survived; certainly neither Gibson nor Côté was aware of it.

Gibson and Côté were well aware that their system was cumbersome, even without knowing the precise extent of the collection, but two considerations guided them. Such an elaborate processing system was designed first to facilitate the Prime Minister's use of the papers for his memoirs. It was also to ease the task of scholars who, in the days before the ubiquitous photocopy machine and Canada Council grants, were usually able to spend only the summer months researching in Ottawa. It was felt that the elaborate precis cards and subject lists would save time once the papers were available for general research.[29]

---

25 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Transfer of Papers to Archives, Gibson to King, 2 March 1949.

26 King Papers, MG 26 J4, vol. 290, file F3011, James A. Gibson to King, 10 September 1946, p. C200114.

27 Interview with Jacqueline Côté Neatby, conducted by Jean Dryden, 6 April 1977, hereafter cited as Côté interview.

28 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Papers Transferred to Archives from Laurier House, M.J. Deacey to Gibson, 11 October 1946; Edouard Handy to King, 12 February 1949, p. 3.

29 Côté interview.

Although the present arrangement differs somewhat from that envisaged by Gibson, the evidence of his work remains and deserves an explanation. In going through the PMO material (now the J2 Series), today's researcher will usually find notations on the file cover such as "not for dictation" or "of secondary importance." The former meant that no precis cards were to be prepared; the second that it would be of no interest to King for his memoirs. The notation "see collateral" often appears on the subject lists. Gibson's system worked only for correspondence and memoranda—items which had a sender and a recipient—but not for the other, often bulky items in a Prime Minister's files, including pamphlets, study papers and published material. Such material was called "collateral," and was filed by subject.[30] In the upper right corner of most letters in the Primary Correspondence (J1) Series, researchers will find the subjects discussed in the letter marked in pencil. Had the original files been kept intact, the subjects would have been clear. However, because significant correspondence was pulled off the files and processed item by item, the topics discussed in each letter are often less clear. The pencilled subject notations are therefore invaluable.

The subject headings themselves reflect the style of history of the time. The standard list of subjects was developed as the cataloguers went along.[31] Awareness of the importance of consistency is evident in the cataloguing; for example, the subject "railways" was always listed as such and not under "railroads," "trains," or "transportation." Now that political history is less fashionable, the headings are often inadequate for the social historian, but Côté and Gibson can hardly be faulted for this. The headings served very well the papers of a politician at a time when political history and biography were of great importance. In fact, an expanded vocabulary based on the original headings is still being used today for indexing the papers.

It took Gibson and Côté until July 1947 to finish the sorting and selection of the 1921-30 PMO files. Although much cataloguing remained to be done Pickersgill then suggested that they continue with material from the same period stored at Laurier House.[32] However, a letter from Gibson in December suggests that little material was sent from Laurier House, because he wrote that "for some months we have been obliged to concentrate our energies on . . . secondary correspondence for want of material of primary importance."[33] This letter elicited a rapid response. Not only did King visit the Archives, he also arranged for the transfer from Laurier House of two cabinets of highly significant material containing correspondence from Privy Councillors and Members of Parliament as well as documents relating to Liberal Party organization and the elections of 1930 and 1935.[34] From this evolved the system of dealing with the material transferred to the Archives from Laurier House, as described by Gibson to King:

> A precis will be made of whatever letters are of primary importance, the precis

30 Ibid.
31 Côté interview; Gibson interview.
32 King Papers, MG 26 J12, vol. 8, Pickersgill to King, 22 July 1947.
33 King Papers, MG 26 J12, vol. 8, Gibson to Pickersgill, 22 December 1947.
34 Ibid., Gibson to King, 24 January 1948.

> card will be attached to the letter, and all letters of this kind will be returned to you in a separate lot. Letters of secondary importance will be grouped together in a second lot, with the interesting passages checked for your attention. Letters of no importance will be arranged in a third lot marked 'unimportant'. The letters of all three categories will be returned to Laurier House as they are completed.[35]

This elaborate system meant that the catalogued correspondence was split between two locations with no complete record in either place. The system was on the verge of becoming quite confused, with the major portion of the papers yet to be sorted and catalogued.

Even though the work on the King Papers was always under the control of the Prime Minister, and received no direction from the senior staff of the Archives, it was of some interest to the Dominion Archivist since he supplied salaries, equipment, and space from his budget. Just before King retired, he appointed in September 1948 a new Dominion Archivist. Dr. W. Kaye Lamb, formerly Provincial Archivist of British Columbia, began his duties 1 January 1949. Within three weeks Lamb was discussing the arrangements concerning the King Papers with the Secretary of State. The Dominion Archivist could find no record of the October 1946 correspondence setting out the conditions under which the Papers came to the Archives. The Secretary of State discussed the matter with King, who provided copies of the correspondence. King's filing system was evidently superior to that of the Archives. Shortly after this, King discussed his papers with Lamb "in a very friendly and satisfactory manner."[36]

After his retirement in November 1948, King took much more interest in his memoirs and the work on his papers, but his failing health meant that little was accomplished on the actual writing of his memoirs. Within two weeks of his retirement he was at the Archives talking to Gibson, who offered assistance and ideas for the actual writing of the memoirs.[37] When King decided to begin his memoirs with his wartime leadership rather than to follow chronological treatment,[38] there was a sudden switch to sorting the 1935-45 PMO files which had come to the Archives shortly after King's retirement.[39] However, he later changed his mind and reverted to an earlier plan of a chronological memoir. The cataloguers switched back to earlier material.[40]

Cataloguers were also asked to prepare memoranda on particular topics, in particular King's leadership in opposition 1919-21.[41] Côté remembered one of

---

35 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Transfer of Papers to Archives, Gibson to King, 20 September 1949.

36 Public Archives of Canada, Manuscript Division, W.L.M. King SNAP file, Colin Gibson to Lamb, 25 January 1949; Lamb to Colin Gibson, 26 January 1949.

37 King Diaries, 26 November 1948.

38 W.K. Lamb Papers, Côté to Lamb, August 1959 (not sent until 11 December 1959).

39 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Transfer of Papers to Archives, F.A. McGregor to King, 17 January 1950.

40 Lamb Papers, Côté to Lamb, August 1959.

41 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Transfer of Papers to Archives, Gibson to King, 8 December 1949.

King's visits to the Archives when he looked at some of the files she had been working on. He commented that just reading them brought back all the strains of leadership.[42] King was simply too weary to go through files himself and would need considerable assistance in digesting the material for use in his writing.

Work on the pre-administration years required Gibson and Côté to concentrate largely on the more private documents stored at Laurier House. As King pottered about looking at more material himself, he became increasingly nervous about the cataloguers' activities. Although he had experienced doubts from time to time whenever the cataloguers came across particularly sensitive documents, he never withheld anything.[43] Nevertheless, his periodic concerns were occasionally conveyed to the cataloguers. In January 1949 he sent a list of detailed questions to Gibson at the Archives inquiring how much material had been indexed, what was at the Archives, and what had been taken from Laurier House. Gibson's reply revealed discrepancies, and King was quite concerned. In fact, the system of accounting for what had been sorted and indexed was very informal. Despite King's instructions that he see every file before it left Laurier House, material had been transferred without his knowledge, the lists of files examined were incomplete, and no record had been kept of the extent of material destroyed. It was not difficult to suggest reasons for the discrepancies.[44] It would have been impossible for King to supervise the project to the extent he might have wished, but his nature was such that he felt compelled to intervene periodically to try to exert control. King was also disturbed to learn that Gibson had photostated certain letters from the papers. Gibson was chastised and King stipulated that no further copies were to be made without his permission.[45]

With the research on the memoirs apparently about to begin, documents would soon be needed; efforts were therefore undertaken to accelerate the work on the papers by simplifying the time-consuming cataloguing process. Probably at this time the decision was made to discontinue preparation of the precis cards summarizing each item. It seemed sufficient to store the letters in filing cabinets by chronological/alphabetical order and to continue entering each item on a subject list under the appropriate headings.[46]

Even with this change, the system remained ponderous. Dr. Lamb in particular was unhappy with the system, but felt unable to intervene.[47] Although the papers were physically at the Archives, they were under King's control, and interference from the Dominion Archivist would probably not have been re-

42 Côté interview.
43 Côté interview; Gibson interview.
44 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Transfer of Papers to Archives, Gibson to King, 9 February 1949; Handy to King, 12 February 1949.
45 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Transfer of Papers to Archives, King to Gibson, 30 August 1949.
46 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Memorandum—King Papers—J. Neatby, Jacqueline Neatby to Dr. Lamb, 13 June 1961, hereafter cited as Neatby Memorandum.
47 Interview with Dr. W. Kaye Lamb, conducted by Jean Dryden, 21 May 1977, hereafter cited as Lamb interview.

garded favourably. More to the point, it was already too late to change the system since at least some PMO files from all but the 1945-48 administration had been pulled apart. Had someone been aware of the existence of the card index for 1935-48, those files could have been kept virtually intact. Ironically, most of the material not yet incorporated into the catalogue was that still at Laurier House which was the least systematically organized of all, and would have required letter-by-letter examination in any case.

King was keen to work on his memoirs but it was clear that he was going to need assistance other than the staff at the Archives. Although he still had the assistance of J. Edouard Handy, his personal secretary for the past fifteen years, King decided that he needed more help, particularly with personal matters, so he could devote more time to the writing of his memoirs. In early 1949, he hired Lillian Breen as his secretary-stenographer, and along with a myriad of miscellaneous responsibilities, she was given the task of sorting out the family letters.[48] Her competence impressed King and she was slated for a greater share of duties in connection with the memoirs, especially the more personal parts.[49] Her initial appointment was for one year; her association with the King Papers lasted until 1957.

King's worries about finances after his retirement,[50] though ill-founded considering the fortune revealed after his death, carried over to a concern about expenses the preparation of memoirs was likely to incur. His fears were allayed when the Rockefeller Foundation provided on 6 June 1949 a grant of $100,000 "toward the production of studies in the public and private life of W.L. Mackenzie King, under his personal direction, during the period ending December 31, 1952."[51] Part of this money went to assist the work at the Archives, specifically the hiring of two additional stenographers and the purchase of dictaphone equipment and typewriters.[52] King's former private secretary (1914-25), Fred A. McGregor, had recently resigned from the Combines Commission and offered his assistance with the memoirs.[53] He was employed 1 January 1950 with money from the grant to help prepare the memoirs. Soon after he started, McGregor commented on the ponderous indexing system being used at the Archives:

> I am greatly impressed by the quality of the work that has been done thus far in classifying and indexing the material. But I have been concerned about the time this takes under present methods. Methods less meticulous would, I think, be more appropriate. Much of the correspondence which is being selected for reten-

48 King Papers, MG 26 J12, vol. 8, King to Lillian Breen, 16 March 1949; Breen to King, 15 June 1949.

49 King Diaries, 28 October 1949.

50 J.W. Pickersgill and D.F. Forster, *The Mackenzie King Record, 1947-1948* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 65, 295 375, 390.

51 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rockefeller Foundation Correspondence 1950-55, Memorandum from Chairman, Board of Literary Executors to Dr. F. Cyril James, 22 December 1950, p. 1.

52 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rockefeller Foundation Correspondence 1949-50, Lamb to James, 16 June 1949.

53 King Diaries, 27 October 1948.

> tion does not require such detailed treatment, at this stage anyway, and we are arranging at once to have this part of the work speeded up.[54]

Despite these not inconsiderable resources, King made little headway toward his memoirs. A proposed outline of the book and a list of possible sources were prepared.[55] Some progress was made in typing extracts from newspapers, books, and correspondence pertaining to particular sections of the book.[56] King himself managed to complete one memorandum on his personal finances.[57] Other than that he did little more than rummage through boxes and files in Laurier House which no one had looked at for years.[58] In fact, he had to get a locksmith to open some boxes.[59] During the last summer of his life he had material brought out to Kingsmere where he continued to dabble in various files.

A particular concern at this time was to destroy certain letters. He never specified which ones, but probably would have included those which were very private and not to be used in the memoirs which were to focus on his political career. He wrote in his diary of 18 March 1950:

> With H. [Handy], also sorted out or discovered the whereabouts of some letters and papers which I wish now to get brought together to be destroyed if time does not permit of their reading before the end. I feel that this is [?] assortment of documents and papers is quite as important, if not more important than the diary, and that with the work of the diary this assortment should now begin to take up major time and attention.

He may have destroyed some, but we will never know. We do know, however, that he did not destroy all he intended, for the cataloguers occasionally found letters marked in King's hand "to be burned later."[60] It seems he could not bear to destroy them on the spot. King also intended to go through his diaries indicating which portions should be kept for use in his memoirs and those he wanted destroyed.[61] He made no progress on this either. Less than a month before his death he noted in his diary of 25 June 1950 that his prime task was to get "papers and letters up to date. Those destroyed that should be destroyed." We will never know how far he got in this mission.

Another major concern to him and his staff was to bring his will up to date. He worked at this through late 1949 and early 1950, seeking the advice of various people, but had difficulty arriving at a version which fully satisfied him. As his health became more precarious, and after repeated urging from McGregor, King signed his will on 28 February 1950. Still not entirely happy with it, he added a codicil on 24 June 1950. He died 22 July 1950, leaving his Literary Executors to cope with the disposition of an estimated two million

---

54 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rock. Fdn. Corr. 1950-55, McGregor to James, 11 January 1950 (extract only).
55 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Memoirs—Personal Papers and Letters.
56 King Papers, MG 26 J4, vol. 290, File F3011; MG 26 J17, various files.
57 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: W.L.M. King—Personal Memoirs—Finances.
58 King Diaries, March, April, July 1950, passim.
59 King Diaries, 21 December 1948.
60 Neatby Memorandum.
61 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Disposition of Diaries and Correspondence, Memo by E. Handy, 17 August 1950.

pages of documents under the terms of a will which remains controversial to this day.

With one exception, the clauses in the will dealing with the disposition of King's papers are straightforward. Four men were named as King's Literary Executors: his former secretary and present assistant Fred A. McGregor, Dominion Archivist W. Kaye Lamb, PMO Secretary J.W. Pickersgill, and Norman A. Robertson, a diplomat who had recently been appointed Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet. Subject to certain instructions in the will, they were responsible for the preservation, publication, or destruction of King's "books, papers, correspondence, memoranda, state papers, diaries and unpublished material" as they saw fit. The most troublesome area, of course, was King's instruction to "destroy all of my diaries except those parts which I have indicated are and shall be available for publication or use."[62] It was to take the Literary Executors another quarter-century to discharge their responsibilities toward the King Papers.

The question of the diaries was the first concern of the Literary Executors. Although King had discussed drafts of his will with many people, including the Executors, he had never clearly indicated to any of them which parts of the diaries were to be preserved. Certainly Lamb had tried to impress upon him their historical value,[63] and King had often said to McGregor that the memoirs were as good as written, making it clear that he intended to use the diaries extensively in his memoirs.[64] But these recollections were of little help in deciding how to carry out the enigmatic clause in the will.

They sought the opinion of Ed Handy, to whom King had dictated the diaries during his last fifteen years. Handy was convinced that King had intended to go through the diaries selecting extensive passages to be used in the memoirs. The sort of material King wished to preserve was public and biographical, illustrative of his reasons for making a particular decision or that which would be useful to refresh his memory about details of events. He did not intend to use confidential material divulged to him on the condition that it remain undisclosed, or material "which might injure the feelings of any persons living or their descendants." Handy recommended that the extracts relating to King's public career be prepared for examination by the Executors and then be made available to the biographer.[65]

The Executors then sought the opinion of the Deputy Minister of Justice, asking whether "it is in order for the Literary Executors to preserve, to be made available for publication or use, parts of the diaries in accordance with verbal indications given by Mr. King before his death." The Deputy Minister, F.P. Varcoe, responded that this would be quite in order.[66] The first of many decisions regarding the diaries had been made: the biographer would be per-

62 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Will, Copy of the Last Will and Testament of the Right Honourable W.L. Mackenzie King, Clauses 6-11.

63 Lamb interview.

64 F.A. McGregor, *The Fall and Rise of Mackenzie King, 1911-1919* (Toronto, 1962), p. 15.

65 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Disposition of Diaries and Correspondence, Memo by E. Handy, 17 August 1950.

66 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Literary Executors Correspondence, F.P. Varcoe to Pickersgill, 14 December 1950.

mitted to consult extracts from them in his research. McGregor was to be responsible for "the selection of extracts which are of the type which Mr. King had indicated orally might be retained," and Handy was to prepare extracts from the diaries for those years when he was King's private secretary.[67]

Another major concern of the Executors in the months immediately following King's death was the selection of a biographer. After much consideration, the choice fell on R. MacGregor Dawson, Professor of Political Economy at the University of Toronto. The terms of the initial Rockefeller Foundation grant were amended to cover the preparation of a biography, and Dr. Dawson was hired for an initial three-year period starting 1 June 1951. The Foundation agreed to pay the salaries of Dawson and his research assistants. The Public Archives of Canada was to continue to pay the salaries of those doing the actual arrangement and indexing of the papers, and for certain clerical support staff, supplies and equipment.[68]

The Executors also had to give some thought to the purely personal and private correspondence kept at Laurier House, as distinct from the official and semi-official material, most of which had already been included with the papers at the Archives. As with the diaries, King had planned to indicate parts for use in the memoirs, but again, he never had the time. He had often told Handy that should he be unable to go through the material himself, the letters were to be returned to the writers or their descendants, or be destroyed.[69] The Executors were content to let any decisions wait for the moment. The task of going through so much material was simply overwhelming. In the meantime, the personal papers were to be made available to the biographer, and decisions on the sensitivity of any material he proposed to use would be made after the manuscript was submitted.

After the urgent decisions regarding the biographer and the use of the diaries were out of the way, the Executors moved to less pressing aspects of their responsibilities. The actual transfer of the "books, papers, correspondence, memoranda, state papers, diaries, unpublished material of any kind whatsoever and also the copyrights in any of the deceased's published works" from the trustees of the entire estate to the Literary Executors was formally effected 31 January 1951.[70]

McGregor estimated in December 1950 that the indexing of documents likely to be used in the first volume of the biography would be completed by September 1951.[71] For a number of reasons, this prediction turned out to be optimistic. For one thing there were staff changes meaning that new people had to become familar with the system. After Dawson started his work in June 1951, Gibson became less involved in the indexing and began to work with

67 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rock. Fdn. Corr. 1950-55, Memo from Chairman, Board of Literary Executors to James, 22 December 1950, p. 4.

68 Ibid., pp. 2-3.

69 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Disposition of Diaries and Correspondence, Memo by E. Handy re Personal and Private Correspondence, 17 August 1950.

70 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Literary Executors.

71 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rock. Fdn. Corr. 1950-55, Chairman to James, 22 December 1950, p. 3.

Dawson in the planning of the biography and later in the preparation of memoranda. He left the employ of the Archives in September 1952 to take up a teaching post at Queen's, but continued to work as a part-time employee of the Foundation, spending his summers and spare time during the university term working on memoranda to be used in the biography.[72] The direction of the indexing project became the responsibility of Jacqueline Côté with the assistance of Laura Williams, Jean Ballantyne, and support staff employed by the Foundation. The King Project remained an entirely separate unit in the Archives with no other responsibilities beyond the arrangement of the King Papers. As the project continued, there was considerable overlap in the functions of certain individuals with some of the Foundation employees carrying out much of their work at the Archives, and some of the Archives employees spending a good deal of time at Laurier House.

Although Gibson's departure undoubtedly left a gap, there were more important reasons why the indexing for the first volume was not finished in 1951. Time had been spent integrating into the Archives catalogue public material from Laurier House. The Laurier House material had never been filed in any systematic order with the result that every piece of paper had to be read since the most precious documents were found cheek-by-jowl with the most routine material. For example, the letter inviting C.A. Dunning to enter the cabinet in 1925 was found in the spiritualism material.[73] Routine material such as birthday wishes could be set aside to be dealt with later, but the cataloguers were continually discovering more letters which had to be fitted into their system and added to their lists.

Another impediment to the indexing was the demand for material from the biographer and researchers hired to prepare monographs on particular subjects. In addition to Dawson, there were four people working on various monographs who were asking for all material relating to a particular topic. In response, the archivist had to consult the subject lists, pull individual letters from filing cabinet drawers, and have them sent to Laurier House for the use of the biographer. It is not difficult to imagine the time spent simply retrieving and refiling documents. Although a routine task, it could be entrusted only to someone very familiar with the arrangement of the papers. In fact, this aspect of the work took so much more time than expected that more funds were requested from the Foundation to extend the appointments of certain staff members whose knowledge of the papers was indispensable at that time.[74]

As well as assembling and refiling processed material, the archivists also had to meet researchers' demands for material not yet processed. While many of the researchers worked on the project only during the summer, their requirements put pressure on the archivists all year. For example, James Eayrs wrote one spring to say he would be coming to Ottawa that summer to study particu-

72 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rock. Fdn. Corr. 1950-55, McGregor to James, 17 November 1952.
73 Neatby Memorandum.
74 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rock. Fdn. Corr. 1950-55, McGregor to James, 8 December 1953.

lar aspects of Canada's external relations. Côté had to complete the processing of that material in time for his arrival.[75]

By November 1953 there remained twenty-eight filing drawers of material of primary importance to be processed at the Archives, and forty-two drawers of similar material at Laurier House. As well, there were eighty-six drawers of secondary material (thirty at the Archives, fifty-six at Laurier House) and fifty-six drawers of material of negligible importance to the biographer. Even by concentrating on the most significant material, there was still an immense amount of work to be done.[76]

As work on the biography progressed, the Literary Executors were called upon to make certain key decisions. The Literary Executors functioned very informally. As long as all four were in Ottawa, they could discuss problems and make decisions by phone. Meetings were held as required, but no formal minutes of the discussions were kept, although McGregor usually kept a record of major decisions taken. The work of the Executors was impeded somewhat by Norman Robertson's appointment in 1952 to the post of High Commissioner in London which of course meant that consultation on major decisions became more difficult.

The transcription of the diaries occupied most of McGregor's time. It was a monumental task, carried out in two parts. He first dictated portions of the handwritten diaries deemed suitable for the biographer onto dictation belts to be typed by two trusted stenographers. McGregor's dictation up to 1935 took him four years (until November 1954) and the typing of the transcripts was not completed until March 1955.[77] Even for one familiar with King's difficult handwriting, the job of deciphering every word of more than forty years of handwritten entries was trying, and often required a magnifying glass. Many sinister motives have been unfairly attributed to the man responsible for the ellipses in the typed transcripts of the King diaries. Many have assumed that each ellipsis represents extensive accounts of the most intimate details of King's life. In fact, relatively little was left out of the early diaries, and what was omitted is for the most part insignificant. Individuals critical because references to King's interest in spiritualism were omitted are forgetting that the purpose of the transcripts was to make significant information in the diaries accessible to the biographer who had neither the time nor the desire to wade painfully through King's crabbed script, and whose focus was King's political life. In cases where he wished to check the accuracy of McGregor's transcription, Dawson was free to consult the originals.[78] Had McGregor or the other Literary Executors any desire to hide certain details, they could simply have destroyed the diaries altogether, but McGregor was far too conscientious to be motivated by any desire to slant the record. In fact, the administrators of the Rockefeller grant criticized McGregor for the expense incurred because of "the practice we have followed of being rather punctilious about making as

75 Lamb Papers, Côté to Lamb, August 1959, pp. 2-3.

76 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Archives Progress Reports, Côté to McGregor, 27 November 1953.

77 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rock. Fdn. Corr. 1950-55, McGregor to James, 7 December 1954.

78 Lamb interview.

exact a reproduction as possible of the entries in the diaries.''[79] Those who worked with McGregor unanimously considered him to be an honourable and responsible man who would not stoop to a deliberate distortion of the diaries to portray King in a more favorable light.

Ed Handy took responsibility for the diaries for the years he had been King's secretary, that is, 1936 to 1950. Most of the diaries for these years were already typed, and it was suggested, to save time, that the voluminous typewritten diaries be photostated for the biographer's use.[80] Since there was "very little . . . to be deleted from any of the typewritten diaries, which run from 1935 to the end,"[81] the photostating was begun early in 1953. After the Archives had made two copies of the diaries for 1938, 1939, 1940 and 1944, it was decided in December 1953 to make only one photostat copy and to permit Dawson to use the originals of the diaries still to be photostated.[82] (Although Dawson's first volume ended in 1924, he expected to complete the biography and was at that time working on the 1944 conscription crisis.) The photostating of the typewritten diaries was completed early in 1955. During this process it was noticed for the first time that the last volume of the 1945 diary was missing. It has never been found.

During the early fifties the Literary Executors began inching their way toward the decision to retain all the regular diaries. In late 1953, it was decided to allow Dawson's research assistants limited access at McGregor's discretion to those portions of the extracts relevant to their topics.[83] This access was for the preparation of their monographs and could not be used for their private research. Unfortunately, this condition was not followed by all the researchers and subsequent books and articles used materials from the diaries, much to the annoyance of the Literary Executors.

The question of direct quotations in the biography arose after Dawson submitted three draft chapters which included extracts from the diaries. The problem was not the publication of these quotations, but rather the demands from other historians who would then naturally want access to the same material for their own research. At a meeting with Dawson the Literary Executors decided that quotations would appear in the biography only with their permission. But this did not solve the real question of preserving and making the diary extracts available to other historians. The Executors decided to wait until Dawson had written more before making a final decision. Although it was suggested that the Executors could comply with the letter of King's will by microfilming the diaries and destroying the originals, this was rejected in favour of the possibility of retaining only those extracts dealing with the public issues discussed by

79 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rock. Fdn. Corr. 1950-55, James to McGregor, 21 February 1953; McGregor to James, 26 February 1953.

80 J.W. Pickersgill Papers, File: King, Rt. Hon. W.L. Mackenzie—Correspondence re Biography, Handy to Pickersgill, 5 November 1951.

81 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Literary Executors, McGregor to N.A. Robertson, 23 October 1952.

82 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rock. Fdn. Corr. 1950-55, McGregor to Robertson, Pickersgill, Lamb, 4 December 1953, p. 1.

83 Ibid., p. 3; McGregor to Gibson, 9 May 1952.

Dawson in his book, allowing other historians to make their own judgements.[84]

The Literary Executors continued to worry about the disposition of the original diaries. As McGregor went through them, he found entries which seemed to indicate that King wanted the diaries preserved.[85] More important, he realized what a priceless historical resource they were, containing information available nowhere else that shed light on King's motives and achievements in public affairs. By early 1953, the possibility of keeping the originals but having them sealed for a number of years was being considered as an alternative solution.[86] Two years later, the decision to retain the original diaries was virtually certain. Although it had taken some time for the Literary Executors to reach this point, the decision was inevitable from the moment they agreed not to destroy the diaries before anyone had used them. There could be no half measures—once the diaries had been used by one historian, they could not then be destroyed without leaving the Executors open to justified accusations of distorting and crippling the history of the King era.

Although several reasons led the Executors to retain the diaries, a significant discovery in 1955 substantially influenced their decision. That year it was found that an employee of the photographic section of the Archives had microfilmed the King diaries and sold these copies. The extent of the microfilming and the number of copies made is still not known, nor is the whereabouts of the original negative. Destroying the original diary now would solve nothing since at least some of the information was in the hands of persons unknown. To protect Mr. King, the original diaries had to be preserved in their entirety.[87] Largely as a formality, the opinion of the Deputy Minister of Justice was sought. Not surprisingly, he concurred.[88]

The disposition of the regular diaries troubled the Literary Executors, but the resultant mental turmoil was nothing compared to that caused by the so-called spiritualism diaries kept by King to describe his experiences in psychical research. McGregor had already encountered frequent references in the regular diaries to King's seances with Joan Patteson over the "little table," but the spiritualism diaries were a separate detailed record of conversations held with mediums in Ottawa, Brockville, Detroit, New York, Toronto and London. The journals began in 1932 when King had his first seance with Mrs. Wreidt in Brockville, and continued to 1948, the year of King's last visit to London. McGregor had to go through the spiritualism diaries in some detail because he found, particularly in 1933, that King used one book for both his regular diary and his spiritualism diary; hence, McGregor had to extract and transcribe the appropriate entries for Dawson's use.

---

84 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Literary Executors, Memorandum re Use of Diaries by McGregor, 8 May 1952.

85 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Literary Executors, Diary reference for 30 March 1938 sent to other Executors by McGregor, 1 October 1952.

86 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Literary Executors, McGregor to Col. C.B. Lindsey, 19 January 1953 (not sent).

87 Lamb interview; King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Correspondence with R. MacGregor Dawson 1955-58, McGregor to Lamb, 17 June 1955.

88 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Estate Correspondence, reference in McGregor to G.O. Lynch, 31 May 1955.

At a November 1953 meeting of the Literary Executors, there was considerable discussion about what to do with these special diaries. It was agreed that McGregor should examine them before deciding which, if any, were to be destroyed. He divided them into two categories: the pencilled notes of various sittings 1932-37; and the detailed accounts written in pen on loose-leaf binders of sittings 1932-33 and 1940-48. The pencilled notebooks were to be burned as soon as possible; the binders were to be retained while the Executors examined extracts from them.[89] Yet nothing was burned at that time. Possibly they had second thoughts because the notebooks for October 1936-June 1937 contained records of sittings not recounted in fuller form in any of the binders. Or, the Executors may have decided to deal with the spiritualism diaries as a whole once they had examined the extracts. It was difficult to deal with the matter by correspondence since Robertson was now living in London. The "copious samples" prepared by McGregor were examined by Lamb and Pickersgill; Lamb then took them to London so that Robertson could examine them and they could discuss the matter.[90] Later evidence suggests that Robertson felt strongly that the diaries should be destroyed. Nothing was destroyed, however, and the question remained to be settled many years later.

Another obligation of the Literary Executors was the transfer of the material to the Archives. This did not take place until 1954 although there was no doubt in the minds of the Executors that the papers would be placed there. Aware of the possible criticism about seven years of public expenditure on a collection of papers not in the full custody of the Dominion Archivist, an agreement was drawn up to transfer custody "of all papers, correspondence, memoranda, state papers and unpublished material specified in [King's] will" to the Dominion Archivist. The books and diaries were specifically excluded from this agreement, remaining the property of the Executors. The papers too were to remain the property of the Executors until twenty-five years after King's death, at which time they would become the property of the nation. Access was to be controlled by the Literary Executors as well. Until 1 January 1964, no one other than Archives staff and the Executors or their nominees was to have access to the documents without the permission of at least two Executors and subject to any conditions specified by them. From 1 January 1964 to 22 July 1975, access was to be controlled by the Archives subject to general conditions laid down by the Literary Executors. The Executors retained the right to withdraw any document deemed not of historical significance or in accordance with the terms of the will, but nothing was to be destroyed without the consent of the Dominion Archivist.[91]

This opened the way for the transfer of material from Laurier House, subject of course to the needs of the biographer. Lamb had always worried about the safety of the papers there. Although the coal furnace had been converted to oil and the house was rewired, the papers were still stored in the same variety of conditions as in 1946. McGregor wrote one February: "The basement

89 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Rock. Fdn. Corr. 1950-55, McGregor to Robertson, Pickersgill, Lamb, 2 December 1953, p. 2; File: Psychical Research Diaries, McGregor to Robertson, Pickersgill, Lamb, [?] December 1953.

90 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Literary Executors, Lamb to Robertson, 15 April 1954.

91 P.C. 1954-803, 27 May 1954.

rooms where the files are kept are not heated, so I have been unable to spend a great deal of time down there during the present cold spell.''[92] Lamb arranged to have material moved to the Archives whenever he could, but it was not until 1967 that all the material was finally at the Dominion Archives.[93]

The complete transfer was so delayed because of the volume of material required by the biographer and his staff at Laurier House. As Dawson's first volume neared completion, it seemed as if more time was spent retrieving and filing back documents than processing them. Inevitably there came a point when the demand for particular documents combined with pressure to get the book published made it necessary for the biographer to use material which had not yet been processed. In fact, Côté spent almost five months in late 1956 at Laurier House reading the remainder of the material urgently needed for the first volume. As she went through it for Dawson, she divided it into significant and insignificant material. The significant material was used by the researchers writing various memoranda; Côté herself prepared some brief memoranda for Dawson's use. When she returned to the Archives, she brought back some of the material (both processed and unprocessed) and was faced with the problem of distinguishing between the two so that unprocessed material would not be put back by mistake and lost forever. This was a time-consuming task which took months of tedious checking of every item.[94]

Dawson's first volume was finished in 1957 and was published posthumously the next year. His death necessitated the appointment of a new biographer. Professor H. Blair Neatby began work in the spring of 1958. Côté and the staff at the Archives were now placed under tremendous pressure. The papers used by Dawson and his assistants were returned to the Archives along with material which had always been at Laurier House and had never been processed. Not only did the processed material have to be refiled, but also an experienced person had to separate unclassified material for processing. While this tedious task was underway, Neatby and his assistant began work on the second volume (originally to cover 1924-39) creating a demand for documents from that period. Their demands were made more urgent by a time limit imposed for the completion of the volume; furthermore, Côté was anxious to avoid the concurrent use of processed and unprocessed material.[95] The needs for the second volume took priority and much of the early material had to remain at Laurier House because no one was available to work on it.

Progress on the book was matched by the development of the relationship between the biographer and the archivist; Jacqueline Côté left the Archives in 1961 to become Blair Neatby's wife. Her successors faced a monumental task. Not only did they have to complete the processing of the material of primary value for inclusion in the main catalogue, they also had to impose some sort of order on the vast quantity of material not designated of primary value for use in the biography yet still an important element of the King Papers. Before leav-

92 King Papers, MG 26 J17, File: Literary Executors, McGregor to Col. C.B. Lindsey, 4 February 1953.
93 Lamb interview.
94 Lamb Papers, Côté to Lamb, August 1959.
95 Ibid.

ing, Côté summarized in a comprehensive report the work completed on the papers to this point, and what remained to be done. The material which had been processed was in two sections: the correspondence catalogue filed alphabetically within each year, and collateral material filed by subject. Each letter in the correspondence catalogue was listed under the appropriate subject on some thirty-five hundred subject lists. While much of the material of primary importance had been processed, there remained a significant amount of untouched material right from 1900 through the 1940s, both at Laurier House and the Archives. In addition, there were documents of secondary importance, many of which would not go into the main catalogue but which still had to be carefully examined to retrieve all significant letters. A third class of material was to be sampled to demonstrate how King dealt with routine requests for interviews, photographs, and so forth. Generous samples had already been kept and a quick examination was all that was required. Handling these classes of material was fairly straightforward, if time-consuming. But there remained the material which had never been the primary concern of the cataloguers: family correspondence, spiritualism material, personal and social correspondence (some very private, some routine), King's university lecture notes, financial records, clippings, speeches, health records, printed material, records of Laurier House and Kingsmere, photographs, and memorabilia.[96]

Côté's successors decided first to divide the collection into three broad categories: public and political papers, personal papers, and papers of the King Family. The first two were further subdivided either by subject or type of material. To make the task more manageable, they concentrated on material dated to the end of 1921, slotting it into the appropriate categories, including papers still to be refiled from Dawson's days, and that used by the biographer but not yet processed.[97] Côté's practiced eye in separating what had and had not been processed must have been sorely missed.

As the slotting continued, the sub-categories of the three major sections were changed slightly from the original plan. The result was the present arrangement in numbered series within Manuscript Group 26. The series do not always reflect a logical arrangement, or the one ultimately envisaged by Gibson; rather they reflect the arrangement of the material still unprocessed when Côté left the Archives. The Primary Correspondence Series (MG 26 J1) contains the letters catalogued by Gibson and Côté; what remained on the PMO files after the primary correspondence was stripped, was placed in the Prime Minister's Office Series (J2). The J3 Series has been called the Laurier House correspondence in the mistaken belief that it had been an identifiable unit kept there. While much of it may indeed have been kept at Laurier House, since it consists largely of congratulatory greetings and messages, it is really an artificial series created for papers which did not fit into the first two series. The Memoranda and Notes Series (J4) encompasses much of the material from the former collateral files, but it may also include enclosures referred to in J1, as well as items which are identifiable by author or recipient. This series, along

96 Neatby Memorandum.

97 Lamb Papers, Memorandum on the W.L.M. King Papers to Lamb from Bernard Weilbrenner, W.I. Smith, W.G. Ormsby, n.d.

with the J1, forms the most important part of the papers. The J5 Series consists of Speeches, including drafts and notes as well as printed copies and newspaper reports of speeches. The last series in the public papers, Pamphlets and Clippings (J6), was also derived largely from the collateral files. This series includes all the clippings kept by King, annotated printed material, pamphlets and brochures not readily available and relevant to King's career.

At the time the series were designated, those in the personal section of the papers had received much less attention than the political series. The Family Papers (J7) consist of correspondence between King and members of his family, as well as subject files about particular members of the family. The Personal Correspondence Series (J8) contains letters kept separately by King; many are from close friends and some are very intimate. Much of the general personal correspondence originally destined for this series was added to J3. The Spiritualism Series (J9) includes correspondence, pamphlets, and publications, and is the only series arranged in King's original order, largely because it makes little sense otherwise. The Kingsmere and Laurier House files (J10) provide information about the furnishings and upkeep of King's homes; the Finances Series (J11) includes bank statements, bankbooks and records of investments. The Personal Miscellaneous Series (J12) is a hodgepodge of various subject files relating to cars, church, clothing, health, insurance, and other personal matters. Much of this material should have been added to the other series; for example, the insurance files could have been integrated with the Laurier House and Kingsmere Series. Such a task, however, would have consumed far more time than the material warranted. The third section (Papers of the King Family) is but a small portion of the whole and forms a series on its own (J14). Material discarded during the arrangement process included cheque stubs, bills, receipts, invitations, and greeting cards—similar material had already been destroyed by Côté and Gibson. Where appropriate, a sample was kept.[98]

Once the material had been placed in appropriate categories, finding aids had to be prepared. It was decided that the only series requiring a detailed document by document finding aid at that time was the primary correspondence catalogue. The arrangement was checked to ensure strict alphabetical/chronological order and pages were numbered. An author index was then prepared giving the dates and page numbers of the letters by each particular author. A chronological listing of letters pertaining to each subject, giving author and page number was proposed at one time,[99] but was not produced, leaving researchers to rely on the original subject lists prepared by the first cataloguers. The value of these lists is limited for several reasons: the documents noted are not listed in alphabetical or chronological order, so a researcher must study the entire list for each subject, and there is no indication of where a specific letter might be found. While it should be in the Primary Correspondence Series, it might well be in such other likely locations as J4 (under the appropriate subject), J3, or J2. Yet these other series do not always yield results, and the researcher may be left knowing only that the item is

98 Lamb Papers, Memo to Lamb from B. Weilbrenner, n.d.
99 Lamb Papers, Memo to Lamb from Weilbrenner, Smith, Ormsby, n.d.

somewhere in the King Papers. The finding aids for the other series were to consist of file lists, but very little progress was made.

The material was processed in chronological units: up to 1921, 1922-32, 1933-39, 1940-50, partly to make the task more manageable, partly for arbitrary reasons. For example, the decision to end one section at 1932 was probably made because Neatby's first volume ended there. As the task of sorting, arranging, numbering, and listing went on during the sixties, the series arrangement was further modified. Some items destined for one series were placed in another, and more series were added as needed. The diaries became the J13 Series. Two additional series, Souvenirs (J15) and Election Posters (J16), were added to accommodate certain oversize material.

The work on the King Papers is still underway and many more years will pass before finding aids will be available for all series in the collection. At present there is a complete list for only the J2, J4, J5 and J15 Series, and an author/subject card index for the Primary Series to 1921. An author/subject index for the remainder of the Primary Series is being prepared for sorting by computer, and eventually will include the information on the card index. A list of the contents of J3 is also in preparation, and that for J6 runs only to 1921. There are only rough lists for the series in the Personal section, which first requires more organizing and weeding. Such work has of course been hampered since parts of the papers have been made available to researchers, who often need the assistance of the archivists. The lack of comprehensive finding aids has meant that archivists spend much time assisting researchers instead of working on the papers.

While processing continued at the Archives through the sixties and seventies, the Literary Executors gradually liberalized access to the papers. After Dawson's volume was published, they seriously considered opening the papers to 1920. Côté strongly opposed this because so much work remained before the main catalogue material would be accessible to researchers, and because the Executors had yet to decide the fate of many parts of the collection, including correspondence from family and friends which Dawson had used extensively, and the vast quantities of printed material. Moreover, the Executors were at that time committed to completing the biography to 1939 as well as Pickersgill's volume on the war years, which eventually expanded into four volumes. Simply keeping pace with the demands of the official biographers would tax the Archives staff, who would have little time left for preparing pre-1920 material for general research.[100] The Executors heeded this advice and retained the access conditions for the 1954 transfer agreement which closed the papers to all but Archives staff and the Executors or their appointees, or those having the consent of at least two of the Executors.

On 1 January 1964, the first easing of the access restrictions took effect under the terms of the 1954 agreement. The general rule applied to the Political Papers was that papers less than twenty-five years old would not be released except to the Literary Executors and for the official biography. This

100 Lamb Papers, Côté to Lamb, August 1959.

was subject to one important exception—no papers were to be released for general use before publication of the relevant volume of the official biography without the biographer's permission. In effect this opened the papers to 1932 for general research since Neatby's first volume covered the years 1924-32, but researchers wishing to consult documents up to 1939 required his permission. In addition, no document written by any living person could be published or quoted without the writer's consent, and the Personal Papers as well as those of the King Family were to be available only with the consent of one of the Executors. The diaries were not included in this agreement; they remained the property of the Executors who retained full control over access.[101]

The procedures for screening access requests were decidedly informal. Lamb appears to have been the Literary Executor with responsibility for dealing with access requests, although presumably he consulted his colleagues in difficult cases. Upon retirement in 1968 he returned to British Columbia. Although remaining one of the Executors, he handed the prime responsibility for requests over to Pickersgill,[102] who was to be the principal arbiter of access to the King Papers for almost ten years. At first Pickersgill attempted to consult his colleagues on every case, but this procedure soon became too time-consuming, and he began to make decisions unilaterally in all but the most difficult cases.[103] By this time an agreement had been reached with Neatby to open the political papers for general research up to the end of 1939 even though Neatby's second volume published in 1976, was still far from complete. Another change was made late in 1968 when R.G. Robertson, Clerk of the Privy Council, was elected by the other Executors to replace Norman Robertson who had died earlier that year.[104]

The decision to open the political papers up to 1939 created an anomaly in the general access conditions pertaining to Canadian public records. A student of almost any aspect of mid-twentieth century Canadian public affairs cannot avoid consulting the King Papers as well as the records of government departments. Yet departmental records are generally subject to a thirty-year rule; therefore researchers could consult more of the King Papers than they could most government records for the same period. This discrepancy was partly eliminated in 1970 when the new Dominion Archivist, Dr. W.I. Smith, suggested to Pickersgill that the thirty-year rule be applied to the Primary Correspondence and Speeches Series. Each succeeding year of papers would automatically be opened annually. Pickersgill agreed since it effectively removed from him the burden of certain decisions, and placed the responsibility for enforcing the automatic restrictions on the Archives staff.[105] The thirty-year rule was soon extended to other series in the political section: the PMO files, the Laurier House correspondence, and the Memoranda and Notes. The Pamphlets and Clippings Series was to be completely open as it consisted entirely of

101 Lamb Papers, Draft access restrictions, 1 January 1964.
102 Pickersgill Papers, Lamb to Pickersgill, 20 November 1968.
103 Pickersgill Papers, Pickersgill to McGregor, 22 January 1969.
104 Pickersgill Papers, Pickersgill to Manager, Royal Trust, 25 November 1968.
105 Pickersgill Papers, Smith to Pickersgill, 9 December 1970; Pickersgill to Smith, 11 December 1970.

published material.[106] Nevertheless, various practical considerations effectively limited the access to these other series. The Pamphlets and Clippings, for example, were organized only to the end of 1921; after that they were in effect unavailable. No lists existed for the PMO and Laurier House Series. Even the Memoranda and Notes Series was not arranged for easy access under the thirty-year rule because the files were arranged in chronological units. The last unit covers the period 1940-50 and any one file could contain documents spanning the entire period. The result has been that the Archives staff must first remove restricted documents before a researcher can see material from a particular file. While the researcher can consult what is open, the process is extremely time-consuming.

While the thirty-year rule established access guidelines for the political papers, it did nothing to stop the increasing number of requests to consult the private papers and the diaries. The disposition of the diaries continued to trouble Pickersgill in particular. In response to Blair Neatby's urging that the diaries be kept, Pickersgill replied:

> I personally feel some scruples about the retention of anything I feel reasonably confident he himself would have destroyed if he had lived long enough to use the Diary. This moral problem is one with which we as Literary Executors will have to wrestle.[107]

The Executors continued to wrestle with the problem, despite the knowledge of the existence of the microfilmed copies. Eventually, however, they reaffirmed their intention to retain the diaries; at a meeting late in December 1971, they decided to open the diaries to the end of 1931.[108]

Nevertheless, the tide of requests for access to the diaries and political papers which were still closed continued to rise as scholars began working on topics related to the Depression and the early war years. A decision on the matter was becoming imperative, since more and more often the Archives staff or Pickersgill's secretary were undertaking limited searches of the diaries on behalf of researchers with specific requests. Pickersgill soon concluded that the diaries should open concurrently with the political papers. He explained his reasons in a letter to the other Executors: most of the people mentioned in the diaries were either dead or retired and the issues were no longer sensitive. Furthermore, the biographer had no objection. But the most pressing reason was the time Pickersgill was having to spend screening requests and arranging searches of the diaries.[109] In October 1974, he authorized the Archives to open the diaries from 1932-43. The 1944 diary would come open 1 January 1975, and on 1 January of each year thereafter another year of diaries would be opened. Not included in this agreement were the diaries written from King's retirement on 15 November 1948 to his death; these were to undergo further scrutiny by the Executors before any final decision. The spiritualism diaries, none of which had yet been destroyed, were also excluded.

---

106 The author could find no evidence of when this occurred or who made the decision.

107 Pickersgill Papers, Pickersgill to Neatby, 8 April 1968; see also Pickersgill to Charles P. Stacey, 14 January 1969.

108 Pickersgill Papers, Pickersgill to Smith, 29 December 1971.

109 Pickersgill Papers, Pickersgill to Smith, 10 October 1974, Pickersgill to the other Literary Executors, 17 October 1974.

An attempt to settle the question of access to the personal papers took place in early 1973. By this time W.I. Smith, the Dominion Archivist, had been appointed one of the Literary Executors, replacing Fred McGregor who had died in 1972.[110] The list of the series still requiring decisions was submitted to each of the Executors. Only Pickersgill gave written opinions and suggestions regarding each series,[111] although discussions may have taken place by telephone. In any case, Pickersgill's suggestions became the access restrictions. Yet this solved nothing because several of the suggestions were by no means clearcut. For example, the Family Correspondence and the Laurier House and Kingsmere files were to be open except for sensitive material. Although Pickersgill made a beginning at examining the potentially sensitive material so that a decision could be made, he never had time to do more than start the task. The only effective decision was to open the J14 Series (Papers of Members of the King Family) completely since it contained very little recent material, and none of it was sensitive. As far as the rest was concerned, nothing really changed since requests for access still went to Pickersgill.

By early 1975, the disposition of much of the King Papers had been settled, including decisions on what would be retained and what some of the access conditions would be. However, several important decisions remained to be made before 22 July 1975 when complete ownership of the papers was to be transferred to the Crown under the terms of the 1954 agreement. The original Executors had assumed that access and destruction decisions would have been made by this date, but in fact two more years were to pass before the duties of the Literary Executors were discharged.

Before a final transfer could be made, two matters remained to be settled. A verbal commitment to destroy the spiritualism diaries was made in 1954 after all the Executors had examined the McGregor extracts. The only reason these diaries were not immediately destroyed was to allow the official biographer to use them.[112] Neatby consulted them and even referred to them in his volume published in 1963. On behalf of the Executors, W. Kaye Lamb asked Neatby to remove, not the footnote, but an elaborating reference that the notes were preserved with King's papers, saying:

> My three fellow Literary Executors are firm in their resolve that these notes are to be destroyed; a sampling that Mr. McGregor put together *may* survive, but I am not certain. But no future researcher will find the notes to which you refer, and in view of this I think the sentence indicated should come out.[113]

When the access restrictions on the regular diaries and other parts of the papers were being discussed, the spiritualism diary issue came up again. By this time, of course, two of the original Literary Executors had died and had been replaced by individuals who had not been involved from the beginning as had Lamb and Pickersgill. Lamb was adamant that these diaries had been kept to be seen only by Neatby, and that the three original Literary Executors had promised Norman Robertson that they would be destroyed.[114] Under the terms

110 Pickersgill Papers, Pickersgill to Manager, Royal Trust, 23 June 1972.
111 Pickersgill Papers, Pickersgill to Smith, 20 March 1973.
112 Pickersgill Papers, Lamb to Smith, 7 January 1975.
113 Lamb Papers, Lamb to Neatby, 2 July 1963.
114 Pickersgill Papers, Lamb to Pickersgill, 2 December 1973.

of the 1954 agreement, the Literary Executors retained the right to dispose of particular documents if they deemed such action appropriate. In his request to have the agreement concluding the transfer of all the papers drawn up, Pickersgill wrote that the spiritualism diaries were to be excluded:

> A number of notebooks dealing with spiritualism and dreams which we were satisfied Mackenzie King would not have wished to have preserved or published . . . we decided to have destroyed. . . . I should emphasize that this decision was made by the original four Literary Executors.[115]

The destruction was at last carried out in early 1977 when Robertson and Pickersgill burned the notebooks.[116] Other than duplicates and items such as greeting cards, invitations, cancelled cheques, and the like, these notebooks were the only items destroyed—a decision not taken lightly.

Access restrictions on the personal papers, including the post-retirement diaries, remained to be decided. After much discussion and several drafts, an agreement was reached. Near the end of these discussions, Smith resigned as a Literary Executor feeling that his position as both Literary Executor and Dominion Archivist placed him in a conflict of interest position.[117] The final transfer agreement, which also established the access restrictions, was signed 30 June 1977. Although complete details are available from the Public Archives of Canada, it is useful to review the general restrictions. The J10, J11, and J12 series are open with the exception of various staff and financial files which are restricted until 1 January 2001. The Spiritualism Series also is closed until that time. The Family Correspondence will open in January 1990 and the Personal Correspondence thirty years after the last date of writing except the letters from Julia Grant and L.S. Amery, which will be open thirty years after their deaths. The post-retirement diaries will be subject to the same thirty-year rule as the other diaries; therefore, all will be open by 1 January 1981. A last series, consisting of administrative records of the estate (mainly those of Fred McGregor) rather than papers created by King himself, will be open in 1980.[118] There is no mechanism for exceptions or review; the Literary Executors felt their responsibilities had gone on long enough. With the signing of the agreement twenty-seven years after King's death, the function of the Literary Executors finally ceased.

Certain conclusions may be drawn from this examination of the history of the King Papers, with particular reference to their arrangement and access restrictions. Gibson and Côté probably never dreamed that so much would remain to be done after more than three decades of work on the papers. With the benefit of hindsight, it is obvious that the indexing system chosen was quite wrong for a collection of the magnitude of the King Papers. Granted, when Gibson started, he had no knowledge of the size of the collection, but he can quite justifiedly be criticized for not having taken time to determine this, and more important, to discover what indexes were already available. He might

115 Pickersgill Papers, Pickersgill to Smith, 8 January 1977.
116 Pickersgill Papers, Pickersgill to Smith, 15 February 1977.
117 Pickersgill Papers, Smith to Pickersgill, 11 May 1977; Pickersgill to Smith, 23 May 1977.
118 Memorandum of Agreement between the King Literary Executors and The Queen in the Right of Canada, 30 June 1977.

also usefully have sought advice from the staff of the Archives. While there were no archival training courses in Canada at that time, and techniques for handling large amounts of material were not as widely known as they are now, someone even then could have acquainted him with such basic principles as original order and suggested less cumbersome ways of handling the papers.

The indexing system had a number of faults. The time spent pulling apart files, for which there was a perfectly good index, and processing the documents item by item could have been devoted to the less organized parts of the collection. Moreover, because of the system, a vast amount of time was lost to retrieving and refiling material used by the biographers. This is not to suggest that with a different system the collection could have been brought under control in six months, but given the same resources and a better system, work could have been completed in less than the thirty years it has taken thus far.

While there is no excuse for choosing a system of arrangement before ascertaining the extent of the papers, there are certain explanations why the project developed as it did. The archival aspect was incidental to the main focus of the project. King might be criticized for not seeking the assistance of the Archives in finding an assistant to work on his papers, but it must be realized that King's main concern was sorting the papers so he could write his memoirs. He gave little thought to preservation, and he had such a hazy notion of the function of the Archives that it probably never occurred to him to seek the Archives' advice. Why did the Dominion Archivist not offer assistance and advice to the Prime Minister? For one thing, he did not learn of the project until after Gibson was hired and had sold King on his system, and was ready to start. Also, Lanctot was probably reluctant to challenge in any way the Prime Minister's right to control the work on his papers, especially as he hoped to write his own biography of King. Furthermore, the project suffered from the cataloguers having many other demands on their time; frequently, they had to act as research assistants in addition to their archival duties. In short, the project was rarely perceived as having any function other than the preparation of a memoir or later, a biography.

The cataloguers can be criticized on several grounds, but there are also a number of good points which can be made about how they handled the collection. It is difficult to quarrel with their selection criteria. Nothing of any possible historical significance was destroyed; generous samples of marginal material were retained. Responsible historical judgement was exercised. A consistent and comprehensive set of subject headings was also established and is still being used, in an expanded form, not just for the King Papers but for other Prime Ministers' papers as well. Although researchers may find the headings inadequate for some of today's historical approaches, the headings serve admirably the needs of political historians. Finally, while the system had serious flaws, it had the merit of consistency largely because Jacqueline Côté worked on the project for fifteen years. Without her memory, intelligence, and detective instinct, many of the pieces in the King Papers jigsaw puzzle would still be missing.

The question of access inevitably focusses upon the role of the Literary

Executors. They have often been portrayed as a cabal secretly shredding reams of incriminating documents from the King Papers to eradicate any evidence of King's faults and peculiarities. Such an impression is quite inappropriate. The Executors had a difficult job to do. Armed only with the vague instructions of the will and imprecise recollections of conversations with King, they sought to carry out their responsibilities, mindful not only of the desire to preserve as much as possible for the biographer and future historians, but also of the need to carry out King's wishes so far as these could be known. Virtually all of the collection has been retained, probably more than King himself intended.

Ironically, the survival of so much of the collection is partly attributable to the biographical focus of the project which had such an unfortunate effect on the arrangement of the papers. The biography begun in 1950 went through many changes, and was not completed until 1976. The Literary Executors could not disband until this work was completed. Had it been finished earlier, more material might have been destroyed. However, after a quarter-century had passed, many of the principals were gone, and time had dulled the significance of many events, leaving the Executors more willing to preserve the entire collection. The demands of scholars to see everything the biographers used created an additional pressure for preservation.

The parts most likely to be destroyed—the diaries and the spiritualism material—were saved for particular reasons. The early decision to permit the biographer to consult diary extracts, and the illegal microfilming of certain diaries left the Executors little choice but to preserve the originals. In one sense, today's researcher may be thankful that serious consideration was given to destroying the regular diaries; otherwise the transcripts would not have been prepared. Excising every reference to King's interest in spiritualism without making obvious gaps in all portions of the collection was impossible. Moreover, the Executors certainly did not have the time required to undertake such a purge. The decision to destroy certain spiritualism diaries was taken only after serious deliberation. Most of the notebooks burned were virtually illegible in any case, and extracts dealing with King's public life had been transcribed and preserved with the transcripts of the regular diaries. It seems clear, given the terms of the will and their knowledge of King's wishes, that the Literary Executors eliminated only what they felt had to be destroyed.

It is ironic that on the one hand the Executors are suspected of destroying masses of material, while on the other they are frequently criticized for not making all the papers immediately available. The final access restrictions might have been much more liberal but for the reaction of the press and public to the annual opening of the diaries. The focus is almost exclusively on King's eccentricities. King had strange hobbies, but he was also one of Canada's most successful politicians. By keeping the sensitive parts of the personal series closed for some time yet, the Executors sought to keep the emphasis on the political side of King's career. The important point is that the entire collection will be available on 1 January 2001, and there will be time for the psycho-historians to do their work long after everyone involved is dead.

The informality of the functioning of the Literary Executors is regrettable. In some instances there is no record of their decisions; in many more cases the decision is recorded but the relevant discussion and underlying reasons are not. Despite this weakness, tangible results attest to the achievements of the Literary Executors. A three-volume biography and Pickersgill's four-volume *Mackenzie King Record* have been published, and virtually all the papers accumulated by King are preserved. It is easy now to suggest better and faster means of achieving these results, but this does not diminish the fact that the Literary Executors undertook a serious responsibility and fulfilled their obligations admirably.