

Documenting Canada's Early White History

by DAVID QUINN

Every archivist knows that the place to look for historical records is in an archive and that an archive is primarily (as I was taught by Sir Hilary Jenkinson a very long time ago) a collection of documents which has grown organically out of the development of an institution or group of institutions and has been built up by the amalgamation of such organic units of documentary material into a modern repository whose categories reflect as accurately as possible those institutions, still living or long dead, to which they owed their origin. To go "out of custody" or to be deprived of that continuity and that association with other documents of the same origin was, for any single document, the equivalent of excommunication in the universal church of the Middle Ages. That document might still be used by and be useful to the historian, but it was no longer part of an archive strictly defined. This purism would totally deny Canada, and indeed North America, any claim to have uncontaminated archival materials for its history until a late date, with perhaps one exception — the archivally more or less "pure" contents of the Archivo de Indias in Seville, though even they, having been somewhat rudely torn less than two centuries ago from their parent archive at Simancas, are slightly less whiter than white. Indeed, the earliest surviving archives in North America are those of certain New England colonies and a few counties in Virginia and Maryland. So far as Canada is concerned, the ecclesiastical archives at Québec are the oldest of which I am aware. But of course this exercise in definition is wholly inappropriate, for this period, to understanding the Public Archives of Canada (PAC), and indeed for governmental archives in any part of what makes up, since 1949, the modern Confederation.

I recently published a somewhat light-hearted sketch of what confronts the historical searcher for materials of the early period of North America as a whole which the publishers called "A chance rag-bag of survivals: the archives of early American history".¹ This piece describes some of my experiences and problems in assembling a documentary history of North America to 1612² which aimed at a substantial, though not comprehensive, coverage of that period. My experiences demonstrated that, even though the majority of them were reprinted from already-published sources, there was nowhere anything like a pure archive for the early period.

¹ *Library Journal* (15 November 1978) 2305-2309.

² D.B. Quinn, *New American World*, 5 vols. (New York and London, 1979).

What then have we got? First of all, it is fair to say that the history of what is now Canada could not have been written without the heaviest reliance on literary sources, contemporary or near contemporary. The starting point for Canada might well be Cartier's *Brief recit* (1545) followed not so long after by the third volume of G.-B. Ramusio's *Navigazioni et viaggi* (1556). The pamphlet literature of Frobisher's voyages, so usefully collected by Vilhjamur Stefannson in 1938, comes next in significance.³ Thereafter we have to wait for Hakluyt's *Principall navigations* (1589)⁴ and his elaboration of this in his *Principall navigations*.⁵ It is only with *Les sauvages* (1603) that Champlain begins to open up the Canadian field on the grand scale from direct observation, with *Les voyages* (1613) and its successors down to 1632,⁶ and is paralleled by the more literary (and partly secondhand) *Histoire de la Nouvelle France* (1609) of Marc Lescarbot, with his subsequent editions and minor works, which cumulatively illuminate the early period of French occupation.⁷ Samuel Purchas, Hakluyt's heir, included a good deal about Newfoundland, though nothing substantial that was new, on the rest of Canada in his *Hukluytus Postumous, or Purchas his Pilgrimes*.⁸ For the period from 1620 onward there are a number of pamphlets published in London (and one in Dublin) which advocate English colonization in Newfoundland and/or the Maritimes, which have not been collected, and in some cases have to be sought in libraries far afield one from another. Though occasional pamphlets also appeared in France, the most significant being that of Pierre Biard, s.j., *Relation de la Nouvelle France* (1616), the systematic reports of the Jesuit mission, the "Relations", begin their forty-year documentation of missionary effort in Canada with Paul Le Jeune s.j.'s *Brieve relation du voyage de la Nouvelle France* (1632), and thereafter produce what is in effect an annual report from the archives of the Canadian mission of the Society of Jesus, beginning one might say the archival history (even if selected and at second-hand) of European activities in Canada, albeit restricted to the missionary work of a single society. Most, if not all of this, will be understood by conscientious beginners working in the archives of the federal or provincial governments. But it is nonetheless important to stress that, whereas in most surveys of historical sources, archival material forms the core of our historical knowledge, in the case of Canada at this period, material from archives is largely (though by no means wholly) concerned with filling in the interstices in the literary materials.

The British government did little to provide evidence of what was or was not in its primary archive, assembled as the Public Record Office, until the publication in 1960 of *Calendar of state papers, colonial, 1574-1660*, edited by

- 3 Vilhjálmur-Stefannson, ed., *The Three Voyages of Martin Frobisher*, 2 vols. (London, 1938).
- 4 Facsimile edition in two volumes, with introduction by D.B. Quinn and R.A. Skelton and modern index by A.M. Quinn (Cambridge, 1965).
- 5 *Principall navigations*, 3 vols., (London, 1600) published between 1598 and 1600. Not every librarian or historian has noted that the short way to distinguish the editions is by the doubled '1' of 1589. The standard edition is in twelve volumes, published by J. MacLehose and Sons in Glasgow, 1903-5. Most of the Canadian material is to be found in volume 3.
- 6 Published by the Champlain Society (Toronto, 1922-36) in six volumes with portfolio; reprinted by the Society in seven volumes (Toronto, 1971).
- 7 *Histoire Nouvelle France*, 3 vols., the Champlain Society (Toronto, 1908-11). It has not yet been reprinted but deserves to be replaced by a more comprehensive edition of his writings.
- 8 Published in London in 1625 covering four volumes but available in a standard twenty volume edition (Glasgow, 1905-7).

W.N. Sainsbury. This work has remained a starting point for the study of this period from the British angle ever since. The class Colonial Office 1, Colonial Papers, General Series, when it was sorted out in the late 1850s, was an artificially created category. Only when more systematic arrangements began to be made for the conduct of colonial affairs can it be said to have originated in any degree from a department or departments largely or wholly concerned with colonial affairs. But if it was ever thought that this exhausted the materials for North American colonial history, this view was soon dispelled by the persistent searcher after materials. Since there was no Colonial Office responsible for all the affairs of the North American colonies, materials concerning early voyages and trading activities were to be sought for and are still coming to light in the administrative records of the financial departments in the records of common law and equity courts, in supplementary collections of state papers, and in the diplomatic correspondence of England with foreign powers.⁹

Good examples exist of what can happen. Evidence of the earliest English expedition to search effectively for the "Isle of Brasil" in 1481 was found and published only in the 1930s.¹⁰ The documents which establish that the first certain catches of fish were brought from Newfoundland to Bristol in 1502 and that Sebastian Cabot made an exploring voyage to America in 1504 emerged as recently as 1974,¹¹ while a letter of Sebastian Cabot dated 20 May 1509 which may throw some indirect light on his disputed 1508-1509 voyage was found by myself in 1975.¹² Such discoveries, often little scraps in volume, but sometimes weighty in evidential value, emerged from documentary collections of the exchequer, concerned in one way or another with the administration of the customs. Who then is to reckon what collections may be put together from scrutiny of its crabbed latinity for periods when voyaging was being replaced by settlement? Perhaps little or nothing for long weeks of effort; perhaps finds of some significance. The records of the High Court of Admiralty (HCA) have only been tapped systematically in recent years. Though a substantial beginning has been made in preparing guides to them, this has not gone far chronologically and there is still a vast amount of work to do to make certain that every case containing relevant material has been covered. A number of depositions for the 1580s and 1590s in *New American World*, mainly on Newfoundland, provide some indications of the materials still to be found, even if they do not explore the ramifications of the proceedings but concentrate on those documents which are most easily accessible in English. A few archivists and historians can read HCA proceedings in Latin, but more than one has given up in despair. Since there was no systematic English concern with any part of modern Canada except Newfoundland and, intermittently, Nova Scotia, the chances of finding new materials on the French in Canada down to 1660 (say) are very slight, though it must be stressed that the Public Archives of Canada (PAC) paid little or no attention to Newfoundland before 1949 and that the searches of the historians, librarians, and archivists of Newfoundland itself have only relatively recently led to the accumulation of materials which might

9 The state papers, foreign, in a number of different categories, have been calendared only to 1591.

10 See my *England and the Discovery of the Americas* (New York, 1974) 5-46.

11 Alwyn A. Ruddock, "The reputation of Sebastian Cabot", *Bulletin of the Institute for Historical Research* 47, (1974) 95-99.

12 It appears in translation in *New American World*, I.

very well have been represented in some form much earlier in Ottawa had Newfoundland not remained separate for so long after Confederation. The catalogues of the British Museum have long given joy to searchers for what they reveal, intermingled with sorrow at what they conceal by their heterogeneous character. They have also produced in their time many important individual documents on what is now Canada. In *Nouveaux documents sur Champlain et son époque* there was produced as a new *fond* as recently as 1967, Charles Leigh's "A Brieffe plateforme" from Additional MS 12505, ff.477-477v., the editors not being aware that it had already been published in J.D. Rogers, *Historical geography of Newfoundland* (1911)—another example of how slowly Canada has come to recognise archivally the existence of Newfoundland. Or again, how an important document in the hand of Richard Hakluyt relating to the Maritimes, "The relation of Master Stephen Belanger", from Additional MS 14027, ff.289-290v, emerged only in 1962.¹³

Since the take-over of the manuscript collections in the British Museum by the newly constituted British Library Board, a card catalogue of most of the earlier manuscripts is now available and this, together with newer catalogues, will produce one may hope at least further discoveries on early Canada. The rise of the county record offices since 1928 (and their reorganisation with the recent changes in local government) has enormously supplemented the activities of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, which for the past century has been concerned mainly with archives in private hands, and the links established between local and private archives through the Commission in the National Register of Archives make a great deal accessible that was to be found only with difficulty, if at all, until very recently. But many private archives remain to be searched for detailed evidence. No record was to be found in point of Maurice Browne's letters on the preparations of Sir Humphrey Gilbert's voyage of 1582-3, in the Thynne Papers at Longleat, until Alison Quinn came across them in 1965.¹⁴ Searching, and re-searching, can repay archival gleaners, even if the returns in England at least for this period, are likely to be diminishing ones.

France, of course, has had the enormous advantage that the Third Republic paid great attention to cataloguing manuscripts in libraries and to creating and making available indications of the contents of the Archives départementales. The archives of the state (since the Archives nationales did not absorb anything like so much material from individual branches of the central government in its early stages as did the Public Record Office across the Channel) and the ministries which retained their records have been somewhat reluctant to list them or at times even to allow access. But vigorous and well accredited archivists and historians working for the PAC have probably dug out a good proportion of what is to be found there, though perhaps, once again, at times before Newfoundland was part of Canada and was therefore ignored, and so possibly passing over material of value. So far as the departmental archives are concerned, the position has been very much the same as in relation to the

13 D.B. Quinn, "The Voyage of Étienne Bellenger to the Maritimes in 1583, a new document", *Canadian Historical Review* 43, no. 4 (1962) 329-343; reprinted in *New American World*, IV.

14 See D.B. Quinn and N.M. Cheshire, *The New Found Land of Stephen Parmenius* (Toronto, 1972) 189-208.

Public Record Office materials. Major series, such as proceedings of parlements and collections of royal orders and the like, have been closely examined. Yet very many documents remain to be extracted from legal and contractual classes or records, some only comparatively recently assembled, some almost impenetrable owing to the difficulty in reading them. And here again especially, the ignoring for so long of most of those relating to Newfoundland means that a great deal has to be done over again before they can be considered to be exhausted. It is especially unfortunate that the records of the French admiralty jurisdiction have disappeared, having been destroyed or scattered, and only surface as fragments in out-of-the-way places (a few were found in Lisbon). It may be worth saying here that the English county vice-admiralty records have also disappeared except for some volumes of depositions in archives of towns and cities which themselves held vice-admiralty powers. Archives in private hands in France emerge only after prolonged probing and there may indeed be more to be found on early French Canada than has yet come to light. A single example, which found its way on to the market from a private source and was both judiciously bought and published by McGill University Library, was the manuscript containing *Plans of the first French settlements on the St. Lawrence, 1635-1642* by Jehan Bourdon (1958).

The Spanish archives, between those at Simancas and Seville, together with the collections at the Biblioteca Nacional, the Museo Naval, and the Palacio Real, are amongst the most extensive for this period in any country in Europe, but to find any documents which relate to English or French activities in Canada is largely a matter of luck, even though bringing Newfoundland into view may alter the earlier impression that there was very little to be found. A chance find at Seville produced a translated version of the English passport issued to a Portuguese fisherman at St. John's, Newfoundland, on 7 August 1583 by Sir Humphrey Gilbert, and shows that there may be more than has hitherto been supposed.¹⁵ For Portugal, however, no one has yet turned up material that goes beyond the early exploration charters in the Chancery records of the Torre do Tombo, and these do not go beyond the Corte Reals. Nevertheless, Portugal had a considerable stake in the fisheries, and potentially in the Maritimes and Labrador, and more evidence will almost certainly trickle out to give the lie to the usual story that everything of value was destroyed in the 1755 Lisbon earthquake.¹⁶ Perhaps the major additions still to be made will come from Rome, from the Jesuit and Vatican Archives, a foretaste of which is given in Lucien Campeau, S.J.'s most impressive *La première mission d'Acadie, 1602-1616* (1967),¹⁷ though not every archivist or historian is equipped to make way through endless volumes in ecclesiastical Latin. The potential additions to our knowledge of the missions and of the whole connection of the Roman Catholic Church with Canada are very great, and in the end these associations can be documented from such sources on a wholly new level of completeness.

Most recently, and in keeping with a newer perception of Newfoundland by the PAC, a striking beginning has been made to invade notarial records in

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 209-210, in English translation.

¹⁶ A striking example is an article by L.A. Vigneras, "The Voyages of Diogo and Manoel Barcelos to Canada in the Sixteenth Century", *Terra Incognitae* 5 (1973) 61-64.

¹⁷ For Rome and Quebec, see page 47.

local custody in Spain. Selma Barkham discovered in her work for the Public Archives that the voluminous business contracts in the Guipúscoa archive at Oñate include a great number of papers on Basque cod-fishing, but, more significantly, a completely new perspective on the Basque commitment to whaling in the Strait of Belle Isle, which adds a new dimension to early Canadian history, and which she, and archaeologists in her footsteps, are beginning to exploit. She is also in the process of recording much similar material in other local Spanish archives. The comparable riches of the collections of notarial records in a number of French departmental archives will clearly require many years' labour to extract. Bordeaux records alone are full of Newfoundland material—a sample of the very earliest documents is given in Charles Bernard, *Navires et gens de mer de Bordeaux*.¹⁸ A former student of mine, after making a cursory survey of comparable materials in the archives of the Département du Seine-Inférieur concluded that it would take her about five years to draw out the sixteenth-century materials on the Newfoundland fishery alone. It is clear, too, that Dutch notarial archives also have something of value to contribute. The disadvantage of such collections (and one might recall the English Exchequer and High Court of Admiralty records here, though they are in some respects less formidable) is that the necessary time and skill to exploit the records is very great. The rewards are potentially also great, not only on the business methods employed, but on the changing topography of the fishery too. Most often perhaps, they have the potential to be treated quantitatively and may even be susceptible to the type of statistical analysis which was done for a later period by Jean Delumeau in *Le mouvement du port de Saint Malo, 1681-1720* (1966). Nor should we forget, the forays made into French notarial records by Ch. de la Morandière, *Histoire de la pêche de la morue dans l'Amérique septentrionale* though the bias in the first two volumes is toward the eighteenth century and the third deals with the period after 1789.¹⁹

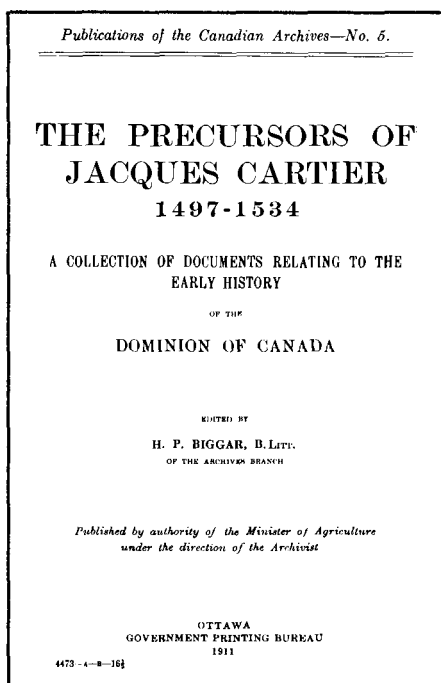
The collecting activities of the PAC have been in progress for an extended period through they have varied considerably in their intensity while the publications which emerged from them have been even more intermittent. Over the whole span this institution has done a remarkable job of probing, listing, assembling and publishing some of the results of its searches in Europe. If the result is not an archive in the purely technical sense for the early period, it is certainly one of the most remarkable and possibly the outstanding collection of materials for this early period in North America. It was never more happily employed when, for more than a quarter century, H.P. Biggar served as its chief and often only representative in Europe. Biggar's *Precursors of Jacques Cartier* (1911)²⁰ showed more accurately than any other volume published by the PAC what a researcher, who was prepared to look in England, France, Spain, and Portugal for the very earliest traces of European activity in westward voyages and to track down the voyages themselves, could do with such material. Moreover, Biggar believed that if documents were to be made accessible he could assume a knowledge in the average scholar of only English and French, so that he willingly had Spanish, Portuguese, and even French dialect-

18 Three volumes (Paris, 1968) II, 805-826.

19 Three volumes (Paris, 1962-66).

20 Only reprinted as recently as 1978.

tal documents translated. The generosity of the PAC toward publications at this time, as it struggled to lay the base of Canadian historiography, led it to entrust Biggar also with the fine edition and translation of *The voyages of Jacques Cartier* in 1924, which normally one might have expected the Champlain Society to undertake. Why it has not been reprinted is something of a mystery. This was followed, on the pattern of *Precursors*, but in a narrower field, by his *A collection of documents relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur de Roberval* (1930), which was the last volume to appear before the economic blizzard contracted the resources of the Archives. Biggar concentrated on completing his great edition of Champlain, the final volume of which appeared in 1936. When I saw him, and knew him slightly, in the Public Record



PREFACE

In this volume an attempt has been made to bring together for the first time and to render accessible in English form the chief manuscript sources of the earliest history of Canada. The majority of these documents have appeared in print already, but the texts here given have, wherever possible, been either copied from or collated with the original manuscripts. In some few cases facsimiles have been used.

The translations are in every case new, and in view of the publication of the original Latin, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, a somewhat free rendering has been adopted. It has not been considered necessary to translate the French documents.

From these sources and from the printed volumes and atlases listed in the appendix has been compiled the introduction. Owing to the fragmentary nature of the material available this is necessarily an incomplete story. Many of the statements in the same are purely conjectural and must be considered as nothing more than working hypotheses. As such it is hoped that they may stimulate the interests or arouse the curiosity of fresh investigators. Should such a result follow, and the narrow bounds of our knowledge of early Canadian history be in consequence extended, one of the main objects of this volume will have been achieved.

It is with gratitude and with pleasure that the editor acknowledges the valuable assistance of many friends and scholars. To Mr. Hubert Hall, F.S.A., author of the standard work on the English archives, and to Dr. S. E. Dawson, C.M.G., whose labours have contributed so materially to the elucidation


Henry Percival Biggar was born in 1872, the year the Public Archives of Canada began. After studying in Toronto, Oxford, Berlin and Paris, he subsequently became Chief Archivist for Canada in Europe, heading the PAC London Office from 1905 and being responsible for French operations in Paris until his death in 1938. His published works include The Early Trading Companies of New France (1901), The Precursors of Jacques Cartier (1911), The Works of Samuel de Champlain (1922-36, in 6 volumes), The Voyages of Jacques Cartier (1924) and A Collection of Documents Relating to Jacques Cartier and the Sieur de Roberval (1930). Biggar's farsightedness is represented in good measure by these editions and commemorated by the Dominion Archivist, Gustave Lanctot, as "A recognized scholar and noted historian, in thirty-two years he contributed more than any other person towards enriching the Archives with documentary material". (Report of the Public Archives for the Year 1938, 1939, v.). Unfortunately, no photograph of Henry Biggar yet resides in the holdings of his employer.

Office in the early 1930s he was still beavering away, but I never saw the results of his later researches in the London repositories. For more than a generation there were no such further publications. It was a great relief to see *Nouveaux documents sur Champlain et son époque* in 1967 and especially to notice it was to be the first of a series of new publications, though the failure of further volumes to appear in the interim is a little disappointing. Where possible, the collecting activities of the PAC might be complemented by publication of selected documents, for in this particular period, with its sparse and scattered documentation, the publication of well-edited collections of documents from diverse sources can act as a very great stimulus both to research and to historical understanding. The Biggar volumes stand on the shelves of major American libraries as the sole official advance guards of Canadian history, while *Calendars of State Papers* stand in serried ranks, and the innumerable American documentary publications occupy so much space relative to those of Public Archives publications even with the Champlain Society's offerings thrown in. This suggests that Canada might project its early history a little more firmly into the lower reaches of the North American continent by a vigorous policy of publication of early materials.

Having been teaching for several years in the United States and lecturing to various bodies there, I have discovered a genuine movement away from the study of the Thirteen Colonies (foreordained, as it were, to become the United States) toward a new approach to North American History treated as a whole. The early period, especially with the development of ethnohistory and its incorporation to some degree in histories of early America, lends itself especially to this. The publication of some of the still unpublished materials on the early period by the PAC (as well as sponsoring reprints of all the Biggar volumes) could help this process along. So too could the somewhat unpopular practice of giving translations in English of all non-English documents. Few American undergraduates now appear to learn French (many more learn Spanish); many graduate students have to start French from scratch and may not get very far with it. I am not proposing that the PAC converts itself into an agency for inducing universities in the United States to take still more notice of contemporary Canada, but it is not outside the scope of an organisation with such a progressive record to consider the value in North America of stressing the early common roots of all the European settlements there, and of exposing their common and comparable methods of exploring the far from empty land of the new continent. Local history has many virtues; national history is a necessity, but it can too easily become an instrument of chauvinism. The history of a geographical area such as North America, with its similar and overlapping pre-contact and post-contact experiences, is surely the appropriate path for students in an ecologically-conscious generation. Perhaps some of those who plan research in Canada, and do it so well, so generously and so intelligently, might be induced to bear this in mind. With the initiative and backing of the PAC, it might transform ways of looking at the early history of white activity in North America as a whole.

Résumé

L'auteur est un savant et expert réputé de la période des explorations et découvertes en Amérique du Nord sous le règne des Tudors (jusqu'en 1612). Il présente la documentation pouvant servir à l'histoire des premiers contacts et établissements blancs au Canada. Il souligne particulièrement le travail d'acquisition et de publication des Archives publiques du Canada notamment sous Horace Percival Biggar, archiviste en Europe de 1905 à 1938. Loin d'accepter l'idée que les possibilités de recherche et d'acquisition en Europe soient épuisées, l'auteur insiste au contraire sur la nécessité de dépouiller les archives locales européennes et d'exploiter des sources documentaires qui semblaient si bien connues.



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Information
Contact:*

Peter Bower and André Martineau,
Bureau of Canadian Archivists,
Room 351, c/o Public Archives of Canada
395 Wellington Street, Ottawa Canada, K1A 0N3