

The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre, 1897-1956

by JAY ATHERTON

In his presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association in June of 1958, W. Kaye Lamb reported on his first decade as Dominion Archivist. "In the perspective of later years," Dr. Lamb said that he "would expect the transformation of the Archives into a full-fledged public record office to take first place in the history of the department in the past decade."¹ By "public record office" he meant an agency adequately equipped to house historical government records, both those still required from time to time by departments and those of only historical value, operating within a system that encouraged automatic transfer of such records to the Archives.² He was referring specifically to the opening of the Public Archives Records Centre in Ottawa in 1956.

The origins of the "public record office" concept or records centre notion in Canada lie in the period immediately following Confederation. The Government of Canada in 1867 consisted of very few persons—the census of Ottawa taken in 1871 reported 310 as "government employees".³ The records systems were carried forward directly from those in use under the province of Canada: essentially, this meant the British system of central registration, involving control over every single item of correspondence entering or leaving each office. Incoming mail was numbered within each year, folded, filed as docketts, and described in numbered registers. Bound author and subject indexes provided number locations for reference to the registers and, eventually, the docketts themselves. Outgoing correspondence was copied into bound letter books, which also were given alphabetical indexes. Appropriately, the Secretary of State, the direct descendant of the Provincial Secretaries of Canada East and Canada West, was given special responsibility for public records. The Act that created the Department of Secretary of State in 1868 created two offices with special duties in this area. In his capacity as Registrar General, the Secretary of State was to register all official instruments. In addition, he was "to have charge of the State correspondence [and] to keep all State records and papers not specifically transferred to other Departments" Therefore, the bulk of the records carried over from the period before 1867 (and neither required in another department nor transferred to the provinces) were placed under his control.⁴ As one of its first

1 W. Kaye Lamb, "Presidential Address," Canadian Historical Association *Annual Report*, 1958, pp. 1-2.

2 Interview with Dr. W. Kaye Lamb, 14 October 1978.

3 Canada, *Census of Canada, 1871* (Ottawa, 1871), vol. 2, p. 310.

4 S.C. 1868, c. 42; Public Archives of Canada (P.A.C.), R.G.37, Public Archives Records, vol. 303, file "PAC-History", "Memorandum on the Public Archives of Canada", attached to A.G. Doughty to Warren B. Robbins, 24 January 1934.

items of business, the Macdonald Cabinet created a special committee, a "Board of Treasury", to manage the public expenditures and the flow of public business. This central management function was loosely defined at first, yet the gradual evolution of Treasury Board as overall manager of the public service provides an important thread for the development of a central control over records management in the federal government.⁵

In 1871, at the urging of a number of leading scholars, Cabinet sanctioned the creation of a depository where historical archives could be collected, arranged, and made available for research. This led to the creation of an "Archives Branch" in the Department of Agriculture (then responsible for arts and statistics) in 1872. The first archivist was Douglas Brymner, a well-known journalist. He was provided with a budget of \$4,000, "three empty rooms and very vague instructions." Shortly after his appointment, Brymner surveyed British military and other papers stored in Halifax, as well as old manuscripts and records in St. John, Fredericton, Quebec, Montreal, and Toronto. In particular, he located valuable records of Upper and Lower Canada in the vault under the old Government House in Montreal and recommended their transfer to his office in Ottawa.⁶

Officials in the Department of the Secretary of State saw the appointment of Brymner in the Department of Agriculture as a threat to their mandate with regard to historical records. Accordingly, in October 1873 the Secretary of State obtained the agreement of the Cabinet that "the arranging and classifying of those important documents [from Montreal] should be made, together with those of his Department since Confederation, by the same person . . ." ⁷ The person appointed was Henry J. Morgan, who later affected the British-style title of "Keeper of the Public Records", apparently without any authorization to do so.⁸ The result was that, within a decade after Confederation, two agencies existed with responsibilities for archival storage of historical public records. In fact, neither office was very active in this field. Neither Morgan nor his successor after 1883 devoted much attention to the official duties of Keeper. Brymner's interests lay elsewhere, among records of the French and English colonial periods. Virtually no one devoted any attention to current government records. The departments showed no interest in transferring records to either the Keeper or the Archives Branch. Government growth was very slow during the late nineteenth century; revenues and expenditures increased from 20.2 million dollars in 1874 to only 28.4 million dollars in 1896. The resulting administrative consolidation and entrenchment of systems did not encourage alteration of existing records keeping procedures.⁹

5 J.E. Hodgetts, *The Canadian Public Service; a Physiology of Government, 1867-1970* (Toronto, 1973), pp. 242-262.

6 B. Weilbrenner, "The Public Archives of Canada," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 2, no. 1 (April 1960): 101; P.A.C., Records Management Branch registry file 5100-1, "Historical Matters—General" (hereafter cited as RMB 5100-1), Joseph Pope to R. W. Scott, 7 January 1897, p. 2.

7 Privy Council Office Records, R.G.2, series 2, Orders in Council, P.C. 1497, 31 October 1873 (hereafter Orders in Council are indicated by P.C. number and date only, and P.A.C. is omitted from R.G. and M.G. references).

8 RMB, 5100-1, Pope to Scott, 7 January 1897, pp. 2-3.

9 W.L. White and J.C. Strick, *Policy, Politics, and the Treasury Board in Canadian Government* (Don Mills, Ont., 1970), p. 15.

Post Office Department, Canada.

ACCOUNTANT'S BRANCH.

Ottawa, 6th June 1890.

Books and documents which it
is proposed to destroy when of
the age specified below:-

Description	Age
General Post Office Ledgers	50 yrs.
Journal	50 "
Accounts with Foreign Countries and Colonies	} 20
General Ledger Summaries	
Postmasters Ledgers	6 "
Postmasters Cash Accounts	5 "
Monthly abstract of Mails received and sent	} 3 "
Monthly statements of postage collected in cash	
Accounts of postage collected on newspapers &c.	} 3 "
Statement of postage on Letters received from Great Britain	
Statements of amounts collected on Letter Box and Drawer Rents	} 3 "

(1.)

II

The first department to come forward with a specific records management problem was the Post Office. In December 1889, the Postmaster General approached the Cabinet requesting a standard five year retention period for certain routine financial documents. At the request of Cabinet, the Department of Finance sought advice on practices in use in Britain for "the weeding of public documents". As a result the Post Office schedule was amended "so that the more valuable [documents] should be retained for a longer period and those of lesser value should not be kept so long." Cabinet authorized "the destruction of the records mentioned in this amended schedule after their retention for the number of years set opposite each class of documents ...", thus approving the Post Office Department request, the Cabinet asked each department "to report separately as to the state of its records with a view of having those documents destroyed that are useless and merely encumber the vaults ...". Each department's case was to be "examined by the Treasury Board, and a report made to council thereon so that a system may be adopted whereby the papers of each Department may be weeded and what is found of no value destroyed after the lapse of certain periods." While several departments responded to the request, neither the Cabinet nor Treasury Board took any further action.¹⁰

Thirty years after Confederation, very little had been done to preserve historical public records. Some routine records were being destroyed on a regular basis and some older historical documents had been transferred to the Keeper or the Archivist. However, the bulk of records created since 1867 still lay in the attics and basements of government buildings on and around Parliament Hill. In 1895, at the request of the Prime Minister, Mackenzie Bowell, Brymner investigated the systems for dealing with public records in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands. In his report, dated 13 December 1895, he recommended the erection of a suitable building to permit "consolidation ... of the papers before 1867 stored in each of the departments ...". Such consolidation, necessary to remedy the current confusion, was impossible without such a building. While referring to land papers, which he suggested should be transferred to the provinces, Brymner drew attention "to the great danger from fire to which the surveys, titles of land, etc., in the North-west are exposed in the attics of the Eastern Block, which are filled with wooden partitions, dried like tinder, only requiring a single spark to cause a most disastrous conflagration involving an irreparable loss."¹²

Just over a year later, the Under Secretary of State, Joseph Pope, addressed a lengthy memorandum to his minister concerning the unsatisfactory situation of historical public records. After describing in lurid detail the competition between the Keeper and the Archivist, Pope proposed the creation of "a permanent institution for the preservation of the national records ...". In his opinion, "the first

¹⁰ P.C. 2873/89, 5 July 1890.

¹¹ *Loc. cit.*; R.G. 2, 4, Privy Council Office "Dormants," vol. 78, 1890, P.C. 1950 and 1992.

¹² Canada, *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State of Public Records, 1897* (Ottawa, 1898), pp. 64-65.



Fire in the West Block, Parliament Hill, Ottawa, 11 February 1897. (PAC C17502)

essentials . . . are concentration and unity of control.” The records should all be concentrated under one officer, reporting to the Secretary of State. His plan “would involve the erection of a fire-proof building—which will very soon be an absolute necessity in any event.” Pope then echoed the warning expressed a year earlier concerning the danger of fire:

The basements and attics of the Departments are now crammed with documents of various kinds. There is a limit to their capacity however, and that limit must nearly be reached. To take one instance as showing the importance of some of these departmental records I would refer to the rooms overhead, which are filled with the original plans, field notes, etc., of the North West Surveys. A match would set the whole thing in a blaze and the loss would be irreparable.¹³

Pope was referring to the records stored in the attic of the East Block on Parliament Hill—the same records mentioned by Brymner a year earlier. Exactly five weeks later, a fire destroyed the entire top floor of the West Block, together with its contents, described by an Ottawa newspaper as “tons of the most inflammable stuff imaginable—documents, papers, and ordinary office equipment.” Among the records destroyed was technical documentation of the Departments of Rail-

¹³ RMB, 5100-1, Pope to Scott, 7 January 1897, pp. 5-6.

ways and Canals, Public Works, and Marine and Fisheries, as well as the main central correspondence files of the North West Mounted Police.¹⁴

The West Block fire occurred on 11 February 1897. On 19 February Treasury Board reacted. The disaster had reminded the Board that the Government had, in 1890, looked at the question of disposal of routine records ("which were useless and not only encumbered the vaults and record rooms, but formed a danger in case of fire"). On the recommendation of Treasury Board, Cabinet on 4 March 1897 appointed a three man Departmental Commission "to report to the Treasury Board, in accordance with terms of the Order in Council of 5th July, 1890, with a view to the periodical destruction of such papers and vouchers as may be deemed useless, and which are merely encumbering the vaults . . ." ¹⁵ The members of the Commission were the Deputy Minister of Finance, J.M. Courtney, the Auditor General, J.L. McDougall, and the Under Secretary of State, Joseph Pope.

The Commissioners visited all the departments personally, thoroughly inspected the records; and completed descriptive notes on their visits. These notes, supplemented by memoranda from several departments, were printed in the Commission's report. Taken together, they provide a picture of the state of government records in 1897. The Commissioners summarized the situation succinctly in one paragraph of their report:

Throughout their inspection the Commissioners were impressed with the lack of any community of plan among the several departments for the arrangement and preservation of their records. As a rule departmental papers for two or three years back are convenient of access. Those of older date are commonly relegated to the basement (apparently rather as lumber to be got rid of than as records to be preserved) where they are stored, often under conditions eminently unfavourable to their preservation and use. In some departments particular classes of papers are destroyed after periods varying from three to ten years. In the majority of instances, however, they remain indefinitely in underground rooms, growing more and more difficult of access as fresh accumulations are added to the store. This condition of affairs is due to the want of a uniform system throughout the service for the disposal of records, and is aggravated by the crowded state of the departments which are gradually becoming choked with an ever increasing mass of documents.¹⁶

The Commissioners also touched on the uncoordinated situation pertaining to historical records. The Offices of the Dominion Archivist and Keeper of the Records were "not in any sense of the word auxiliary to each other":

On the contrary, they are distinct, and even antagonistic. . . . It is not too much to say that the rivalry existing between these two offices has long been an obstacle to the attainment of that unity of responsibility and control essential to the introduction of a perfect system.

In addition, many individual groups of historical records were scattered here and

¹⁴ *Ottawa Citizen*, 12 February 1897.

¹⁵ P.C. 33/486, 4 March 1897.

¹⁶ Canada, *Report of Commissioners . . . 1897*, pp. 7-8.

there throughout the departments:

Thus, records which united would form a collection of rare interest, are dispersed throughout the departments, where they lie in every stage of insecurity, often unarranged and undescribed, suffering more or less from damp, their value sometimes unrecognized and their very existence, it may be, unknown. Nor is this surprising when it is borne in mind that until the fire of February last the care of records was not considered a matter of immediate concern.¹⁷

Commenting on the danger of fire to which many records were exposed, the Commissioners drew attention to the fact that “owing to the lack of adequate protection, records and documents, valuable and otherwise, are not only constantly exposed to the risk of fire but are in themselves a source of danger.” This situation was due largely to the use of wooden shelving and fittings, plus the frequent utilization of corridors for storage space. The report specifically mentioned the hazardous situation existing in the building occupied by the Geological Survey, which had no protection from fire. The only water in the building came from one small tap “and such as occasionally leaks through the roof.” The unused models relating to patents in the attic of the Langevin Block, original survey records lying unprotected upon the floors of the offices of the Department of the Interior, and a large number of ledgers of the Savings Bank Branch of the Post Office Department were all in peril. In addition, the historical holdings in the custody of the Records Branch of the Department of the Secretary of State were stored in a completely wooden area in the attic of the East Block.¹⁸

The Commission’s recommendations read much as had those of Joseph Pope in his memorandum earlier that year—hardly surprising, since Pope undoubtedly wrote the report:

- 1 A board of inspection should be appointed to recommend records for immediate destruction and periodic disposal in the future, the decision on their recommendations to be taken by the Cabinet;
- 2 A standard ten year retention period should be adopted for routine financial documentation;
- 3 Departments should undertake a review of their filing systems to avoid registering, docketing, and filing correspondence of no value, which the Commissioners felt was probably the majority of the documentation;
- 4 All the older, historical documents should be brought “together in one place and committed to the custody of one person,” that is, the functions of the Dominion Archivist and the Keeper of Public Records should be combined;
- 5 The Government should build a “suitable fire-proof building to be known as the Record Office, which shall serve as a general repository for the archives . . .”;
- 6 Departments should deposit in this building “all departmental papers over a certain age, to be fixed by the inspectors appointed to determine what papers should be destroyed”;

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

- 7 Departments should be allotted space in the general Records Office building where they could keep separate their more recent records, and retrieve them when required.¹⁹

These recommendations would have created a single Public Record Office for storage of both current and historical records, and established a rudimentary form of central control over records disposition. However, the Government chose to see problems with a higher priority than the state of its public records. No action was taken until 1903 when the Governor General, Lord Minto, took up the cause. Minto had encountered difficulties in attempting to locate records for personal research on the history of Quebec. In a frank letter to the Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, in January 1903, Minto criticized the “most lamentable disregard for the historical archives of the Dominion.” The care of official records of the government was “nothing but general chaos” with each department jealously retaining or carelessly destroying its own records. Minto fully endorsed the recommendations of the 1897 Departmental Commission and urged Laurier to take action.²⁰

Following reference to the Minister of Agriculture, the Cabinet on 7 December 1903 passed an Order in Council combining the posts of Archivist and Keeper of the Records. The move was timely since the position of Archivist was vacant at that time, following the death of Brymner in the year 1902. The Government also approved the transfer of older departmental records to the Archives and ordered the new “Dominion Archivist and Keeper of the Records” to collect, preserve, arrange, and make accessible the archives of the Government.²¹ This mandate recognized the records keeping responsibilities of the Dominion Archivist, but still saw him as serving essentially a cultural need. He still reported to the Minister of Agriculture. The Order in Council was based solely on the need to preserve records for their value as historical evidence, with no recognition of the need to retain them for the use of the Government itself, or to protect legal rights. Furthermore, it ignored several key ‘records management’ recommendations of the 1897 Commission, namely a mechanism for immediate destruction and periodic future disposal of useless documents, a standard retention period for routine financial records, a review of filing systems in departments, and a fixed age for transfer of records to the Archives.

III

Transfer to the Archives of the bulk of the older records from the departments had to await provision of adequate space in a separate building. In his first report Arthur Doughty, the newly appointed Dominion Archivist, recommended that space be made available in the new building “for the reception of records which are not at the moment strictly public documents . . . to be under the charge of the proper officer of the department to which the records belong.”²² The new Archives Building, next to the Royal Mint on Sussex Drive, was completed in

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

²⁰ M.G. 26, G, Laurier Papers, pp. 69288-69294, Minto to Laurier, 19 January 1903.

²¹ P.C. 2018, 7 December 1903.

²² Public Archives of Canada, *Annual Report* (Ottawa, 1905), p. xlv. Hereafter, Annual Reports of the Public Archives are referred to as *P.A.C. Report*.



Arthur Doughty, Dominion Archivist, 1905-19. (PAC C-61710)

1906. However, little came of Doughty's elementary records centre proposal or the need (expressed in his 1905 report) for a firmer legislative or regulative basis for the transfer of records to the Archives.²³ In fact, Doughty was not very interested in current records problems. Like his predecessor, Doughty's main historical interest lay in the period before Confederation. His time too was taken up with other problems related to the administration of the Archives and gaining control over its holdings.²⁴

A firmer legislative mandate was achieved in 1912 with the passage of the *Public Archives Act*.²⁵ This statute raised the rank and authority of the Dominion Archivist to that of a Deputy Minister and authorized the Cabinet to "order and direct that any public records, documents or other historical material of any kind, nature or description shall be taken from the custody of any department of the government having control thereof and removed to the Archives building..." This was the first statute creating an archival organization passed anywhere in Canada. To the extent that the legislation created a special agency to care for public records, it may be said to have established a public record office. However, as Lewis Thomas has observed, the Act "did not explicitly ensure the preservation of public records in offices of origin, nor did it provide for their orderly disposal under the supervision of archives staff."²⁶ Nevertheless, the potential for a serious public record office operation had been created. All that was required was adequate space, resources, and interested leadership. Shortly thereafter, the Cabinet transferred the control and management of the Public Archives from the Minister of Agriculture to the Secretary of State, where it has reported ever since (with the exception of the ten years from 1954 to 1964 when, for tactical reasons, it followed J. W. Pickersgill into Citizenship and Immigration).

In June 1912, the Secretary of State was appointed Chairman of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, which had been created in 1907 to advise the Dominion Archivist on the plans and operations of the Archives.²⁷ The Commission also was enlarged to increase its provincial representation. At its first meeting, in October 1912, the enlarged Commission agreed with Doughty's proposal that a royal commission be appointed to explore and make recommendations on the problems of departmental records. The Cabinet reacted immediately by establishing a Royal Commission "to inquire into the state of the records of the different Departments of the Dominion."²⁸ Members of the Commission were the ever present Sir Joseph Pope, by then Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Assistant Deputy Minister and Secretary of the Department of Militia and Defence, E.F. Jarvis, and the Dominion Archivist, Arthur Doughty. The Commission spent the next year (from December 1912 to November 1913) thoroughly investigating the problem, and

23 *P.A.C. Report*, 1905, pp. lxxxvii-lxxxviii.

24 Ian E. Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty: the Cultural Role of the Public Archives of Canada, 1904 to 1935," Unpublished M.A. thesis, Queen's University, 1973, p. 157; Weilbrenner, "Public Archives of Canada," p. 106.

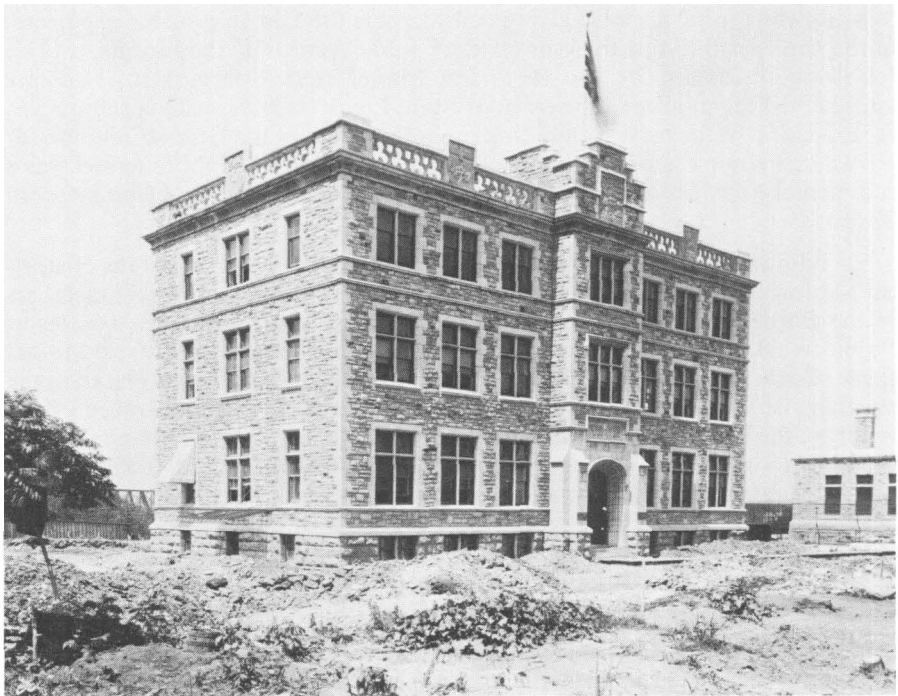
25 S.C. 1912, c. 4.

26 Lewis H. Thomas, "Archival Legislation in Canada," *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report*, 1962, p. 104.

27 P.C. 1582, 6 June 1912.

28 P.C. 3054, 9 November 1912.

presented its report in March 1914. In summary, the Commission reiterated the “policy of drift” mentioned in the 1897 report and for the first time reported on the actual space used for records: 438 rooms containing 1,629,014 cubic feet, plus 92,872 drawers and 127,219 linear feet of shelving.²⁹ Most writers subsequently have interpreted the second figure as indicating actual holdings of records at over a million and a half cubic feet in 1912. However, this interpretation certainly must be incorrect, given that the volume was estimated fifty years later (by the Records Management Survey Committee in 1959) as 2.5 million cubic feet. Examining the figure in its context suggests very strongly that the Commission was referring to the actual cubic volume of space in the 438 rooms. The Records Management Survey Committee interpreted the figure to indicate about 313,000 cubic feet of records in the departments in 1912.³⁰



The new Public Archives building, 1904. (PAC C-6890)

The Commission's recommendations were progressive and straightforward. First, they recommended the creation of a public record office with provision for storage of records no longer in current use in the departments, rooms for the storage of records remaining under the control of the departments, space and

²⁹ Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the State of the Records of the Public Departments* (Ottawa, 1914), p. 10.

³⁰ Canada, *Report of the Records Management Survey Committee, 1959, on Records of the Public Departments and Agencies in the Government of Canada* (Ottawa, 1960), p. 7.

machinery for the destruction of all records “considered by competent authority to be useless”, and natural expansion of the archives for future receipt of records transferred by departments “to the archives proper in the public record office”. Second, the Commission recommended that all records over twenty-five years old be transferred to the public record office, reviewed by a permanent commission, and those of historical value transferred to the archives proper. Third, the Commissioners recommended that the authority of Treasury Board be sought for destruction of all documents considered useless.³¹ On 4 May 1914, just one month after receipt of the report, the Cabinet expressed its approval of the recommendations and urged that they be carried out as soon as possible. A copy of the report was to be sent to every Deputy Minister “with instructions to use every possible precaution to safeguard the valuable public records until such time as a Public Records Office can be established.”³² Unfortunately, the onset of the First World War prevented further progress.

Meanwhile, officials were giving considerable thought to possible expansion of the Archives Building to accommodate public records. In the autumn of 1913, following discussion by the Historical Manuscripts Commission, Doughty approached his minister, Secretary of State Louis Coderre, with specific plans for extension of the existing building for archives use plus a large storehouse for records remaining under the control of departments.³³ Doughty’s model was a rudimentary records centre constructed by the Canadian Bank of Commerce in Toronto.

Sir Edmund Walker, Commerce president, was also a member of the Historical Manuscripts Commission. He and Doughty had convinced several members of the Borden Government, including the Secretary of State, the Minister of Public Works, and the Prime Minister himself, of the necessity for additional space. Coderre asked the Minister of Public Works to have funds placed in the estimates to begin work on construction.³⁴ Following the appearance of the report of the Royal Commission, in March 1914, the Secretary of State reminded the Minister of Public Works of the problem. He in turn had \$50,000 placed in the supplementary estimates, and this sum was approved by Parliament at the next session.³⁵ While sketch plans were prepared, the onset of World War I forced the Cabinet to postpone all building construction. Doughty and Coderre attempted to convince the Cabinet that construction of a central storage and processing facility would in effect save space throughout the other government buildings, but to no avail.³⁶

Doughty suggested in 1917 the creation of a repository in London for the central storage and control of the large volume of official Canadian war records created overseas, plus a survey of government war activities and the records

31 Canada, *Report . . . Records of the Public Departments*, p. 13.

32 P.C. 1163, 4 May 1914.

33 R.G. 37, vol. 303, file “Addition to Archives Building”, A.G. Doughty to Louis Coderre, 7 October 1913.

34 R.G. 37, Louis Coderre to Robert Rogers, 14 October 1913.

35 R.G. 37, Coderre to Rogers, 12 March 1914; Rogers to Coderre, 14 March 1914.

36 R.G. 37, Coderre to J.D. Reid, 27 July 1914; Reid to Coderre, 30 July 1914; Doughty to Coderre, 10 December 1914; Coderre to Rogers, 9 January 1915; Coderre to Doughty, 19 January 1915; Doughty to Coderre, 21 January 1915.

generated by those activities.³⁷ He also proposed, as a suitable project to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Confederation, the construction of “a building in which to deposit all the records of Confederation.” Basing his argument on the findings of the 1912-14 Royal Commission and the fire in the Parliament Buildings in 1916, Doughty indicated that he had in mind storage not just of Confederation records, but of all public records—“a Public Record Office to which the different departments could transfer their documents for safety and still retain the custody of them.”³⁸ While the Cabinet took no action on either of the records storage proposals, it did sanction a War Records Survey,³⁹ through which Doughty and his staff were able to compile several reports on the activities of government departments in Ottawa, overseas organization, and a detailed report on the Quebec Military District. In its first report, in January 1919, the Commission on War Records and Trophies recommended the construction of a building to accommodate 125,000 cubic feet of war records.⁴⁰ Yet, despite a brief flurry of interest on the part of the retired Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, in 1921 and 1921,⁴¹ no further action occurred until the King administration emerged late in 1921. Lobbying by Doughty convinced the new Secretary of State, A.B. Copp, of the need to extend the work and facilities of the Archives. Construction was under way on a new wing in 1924 and the wing was opened in December 1926. By no means a simple records office as Doughty had originally intended, the addition was an elaborate extension of the original building. Considerable space (the entire ground floor) was allocated for a museum, but none for storage of government records.⁴²

Doughty seemed to be losing interest in the problem of public records. He had, in recent years, urged the government to issue an order in council clarifying his mandate with respect to public records, but with no success.⁴³ In addition, he had brought about the creation of a Public Records Commission, somewhat akin to the moribund Historical Manuscripts Commission, with representation from all nine provinces. This new Commission, in theory, was intended “to place the Government in the possession of the best advice available pertaining to the control, custody, preservation, indexing, making accessible and publishing the public records of Canada in the most economical and expeditious manner for the benefit of the Dominion at large.”⁴⁴ In fact, no appointment other than Doughty’s was ever made, although Doughty received the Chairman’s salary of \$3,000 right up until he died in 1936. Ian Wilson stated the situation succinctly:

While the establishment of such a commission was rooted in the need for a federal records programme and while it augured well for the success of such a programme, the commission seemed less a means to control federal records and more a subterfuge to raise Doughty’s salary and to provide him with a pension.⁴⁵

37 Wilson, “Shortt and Doughty,” pp. 162-163.

38 R.G. 37, vol. 303, file “PAC-History”, Doughty to E.L. Patenaude, 26 April 1917.

39 P.C. 980, 10 April 1917.

40 R.G. 37, vol. 304, “First Report of the Commission on War Records and Trophies,” January 1919.

41 Wilson, “Shortt and Doughty,” pp. 164-167.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169; Weilbrenner, “Public Archives of Canada,” p. 110.

43 R.G. 37, Letterbooks, vol. 16, pp. 457-458, Doughty to W.L.M. King, 10 December 1924.

44 P.C. 748, 12 May 1926.

45 Wilson, “Shortt and Doughty,” p. 170.

The Department of Justice was in the process of drafting legislation to convert the Public Archives into a "Department of Historical and Public Records". However, the motivation for this change was not increased authority for the Dominion Archivist, but simply a concern on the part of the Deputy Minister of Justice that the Dominion Archivist was not a legitimate Deputy Minister. The legislation was intended to remedy that situation. A Bill was eventually prepared for the Prime Minister in 1927, but was never introduced.⁴⁶ In his annual report for 1929, in response to a proposal to transfer a million files concerning the First World War from the Department of National Defence and the lack of space to house them, Doughty tentatively suggested a survey of records in Ottawa "with a view to ascertaining what space is required for their proper storage."⁴⁷ Nothing came of this or recommendations in 1930 arising out of a 1928 petition from a number of young historians (including A.L. Burt, Chester Martin, and Duncan McArthur) for creation of a public record office to provide access to government records after 1867.⁴⁸

IV

The period of the Depression and the Second World War were years of retrenchment for the Public Archives, as the Canadian Government gave a clear priority to economic matters and the war effort. While the total number of government employees almost tripled between 1932 and 1940 (from 44,000 to 124,000), the Archives' staff declined by one-third (from 83 in 1931 to 55 in 1949).⁴⁹ The growth of government activities naturally created congestion of office space. In 1933, Treasury Board took some initiative to attempt to deal with the problem by directing all deputy ministers to identify records that might be destroyed after lapses of five and ten years, and those that should be retained permanently.⁵⁰ The Department of Public Works then began planning construction of a records centre for storage of records not in constant use, along the lines of the proposal made by Doughty in 1904, with each department controlling its own records. The major difference, of course, was that this new building would be administered by the Department of Public Works rather than the Public Archives. Instead of an extension to the existing Archives Building, the centre was constructed on the grounds of the Central Experimental Farm. There was to be no central control over scheduling and storage. Doughty and his successors (following his retirement in 1935) protested this apparent intrusion into what they perceived as their area of responsibility, but once again with no effect.⁵¹ Early in 1936, Thomas Vien, the member of Parliament for Outremont-Montreal, prepared a bill designed to provide for deposit of all printed matter published in Canada and removal of public records to a central repository.

46 R.G. 37, vol. 303, file "PAC-History", E.C. Newcombe to Doughty, 16 January 1923, and A.G. Troop to Doughty, 8 February 1927; RMB 5100-1 contains a copy of the bill prepared for first reading in February 1927.

47 *P.A.C. Report*, 1929, p. 5.

48 Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty," p. 172.

49 M.C. Urquhart and K.A.H. Buckley, eds., *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Toronto, 1965), pp. 621, 623.

50 R.G. 37, file "PAC-History," W.C. Ronson to A.G. Doughty, 2 February 1933.

51 Wilson, "Shortt and Doughty," pp. 173-174.

Containing important elements of the mandate of the modern National Library of Canada, as well as the Public Archives, this proposed "Public Record Office Act" was never introduced.⁵²

In June 1936 Treasury Board authorized destruction of records in a number of departments, according to definite schedules and subject to certain restrictions. One such qualification dictated the permanent retention of records documenting the service of public employees. A second called for indefinite retention of "documents of general historical value." Departments were to notify the Dominion Archivist of their intention to destroy any records, and the Dominion Archivist then had six months to respond. If he and the department could not agree on the disposition of any records, Treasury Board itself was to decide.⁵³ This action constituted the first effective records scheduling in the federal government. Treasury Board retained control over destruction of government records but the Dominion Archivist now had been delegated authority to identify those records of historical value, subject to referral to the Board in cases of dispute.

The Experimental Farm storage building opened in 1938 and some departments began transferring older records into it. Each transferring department retained custody of its own records, which it had to retrieve itself. Public Works provided only a caretaker and no delivery service.⁵⁴ Thus, at the outset of the Second World War, the policy of central control over public records appeared to have been forgotten. The decision of 1903 seemed to have been reversed. Two separate agencies now provided facilities for the storage of government records. The Dominion Archivist, Gustave Lanctot, attempted to bring the records storage building under his control through the Public Records Commission, which still theoretically existed. He suggested that each department could be represented on the Commission, which could then administer the building and the records contained in it. Such an arrangement, he contended, would "create a unity of technical control while reserving completely the departments' rights over their records and personnel."⁵⁵ Unfortunately, his suggested order in council to implement the recommendation does not appear to have ever been considered by Cabinet. Within a few years, the records centre experiment had failed. The requisitioning of the space for war purposes led to many of the records being stored in the basement of the building. In addition, because of the inadequate service, many departments simply recalled their records.⁵⁶

World War II created a number of special records management problems. Not only did the total volume of paper greatly increase, but in addition two large departments and a number of boards, commissions, and committees were created simply to conduct war-time activities. They would obviously disappear once the war was over, causing serious problems of custody, transfer, and

52 A copy of the bill is in RMB, 5100-1.

53 T.B. 160481, 2 June 1936.

54 R.G. 37, vol. 303, file "PAC-History," J.B. Hunter to Gustave Lanctot, 11 July 1938; RMB, 5100-1, Hunter to Lanctot, 8 March 1939.

55 R.G. 37, vol. 303, file "PAC-History," "Memorandum Regarding Unity of Technical Control in the Matter of National Records".

56 RMB, 5100-1, "Memorandum on the Public Archives," 3 June 1946.

destruction.⁵⁷ Following discussion by the Cabinet late in 1942, the Cabinet Secretariat surveyed the departments to determine what already had been planned. This work, fortunately, fell to W.E.D. Halliday of the Privy Council Office, who was committed to the new concept of records management. For the next two decades, Halliday was at the centre of events. The success of what followed, especially the work of the Public Records Committee, was very largely due to Halliday's work.⁵⁸

Halliday found that it was not practical to treat war records differently from normal records. Virtually every department and agency was involved in the war effort, but few filed their war records separately. An interdepartmental Advisory Committee on Public Records looked into the problem, then recommended to Cabinet the creation of a permanent committee on public records, reporting to Treasury Board. This and all the other recommendations of the Advisory Committee were reflected in the Order in Council that emerged. P.C. 6175 of 20 September 1945 officially established a Committee on Public Records, or Public Records Committee as it came to be known. The Secretary of State was Chairman, the Dominion Archivist, Vice-Chairman, and membership consisted of representatives of a number of departments, historians from the armed forces, and two representatives of the Canadian Historical Association. The duties and terms of reference of the Committee were described explicitly in the Order:⁵⁹

3. The duties of the Committee shall be to keep under constant review the state of the public records and to consider, advise and concert with departments and agencies of government on the organization, care, housing, and destruction of public records.
4. The Committee shall, as part of their duties, examine and report on the following:
 - (a) The preparation by departments and agencies of Government of suitable accounts of their wartime activities and,
 - (b) The implementing of the approved recommendations of the Royal Commission on Public Records of 1914 regarding establishment of a public records office, with particular reference to the integration of the Public Archives therein, and the type of organization which would facilitate the best use of the public records.
5. When questions specifically affecting the records of a department are being dealt with, a representative from that department shall be present at the meeting.
6. The primary responsibility for the care and maintenance of records and for seeing that the policies of the government in respect to disposition of public records be carried out so as to ensure that material of permanent value be not unwittingly destroyed will rest with departments and agencies of government concerned.
7. Each department shall assign responsibility for superintendence of its records to one or more senior officers, preferably the departmental secretary if such a position exists, or an official of similar rank. The

57 W.E.D. Halliday, "The Public Records of Canada: Recent Developments in Control and Management," *The American Archivist* 13, no. 1 (January 1950): 105.

58 Interview with Dr. Lamb, 14 October 1978.

59 P.C. 6175, 20 September 1945.

duties of these officers will be to review periodically the state of the departmental records and to reclassify them with a view to disposal or transfer of those of permanent value but not currently required to the Public Archives (or Public Records Office, if established) or to other dominion or provincial departments, or by some form of destruction under existing regulations. These officers will also maintain liaison with agencies responsible to the Minister. Recommendations respecting contemplated disposal along the above lines shall be submitted, in all cases, for formal approval of the Committee on Public Records.

This Order in Council was the first evidence that the Government of Canada was entering the modern era of records management. Two vital principles were stated for the first time: that the departments themselves had the primary responsibility for caring for their records, and that departments should designate senior officers with continuing responsibility for records, in the interests of efficiency and continuity. Lanctot described the object of the Committee in his next annual report as "the systematic preservation of government records and the transfer of obsolete files to the Archives from other government departments."⁶⁰ There is no doubt that, to quote Professor Thomas, this Order in Council "enabled the Public Archives to serve more effectively as a public record office than had been possible during the nearly seventy five years since the institution was first organized."⁶¹ Yet, one important factor was missing. The Archives had no space for storage of records to offer departments as an alternative to destruction. This factor soon became crucial in the discussions that eventually led to the establishment of the Public Archives Records Centre.

The main activity of the Public Records Committee for the first few years was to recommend to Treasury Board the destruction of records of no administrative or historical value. In doing so, it gradually developed a spirit of trust and co-operation between the departments and the Archives. The Committee also worked out procedures for a full-scale microfilming program and promoted the writing of narratives of departmental war activities.⁶² Its most important task was an investigation into the feasibility of at last establishing a public record office, as recommended by the 1914 Royal Commission. Late in 1945 the Committee agreed that the mandate of the Dominion Archivist should be broadened to include responsibility for the custody of all federal government records not actually needed in the departments. Obviously influenced by the American example (a National Archives had been established in the U.S. in 1934), the Committee also agreed that a more appropriate name for the Canadian institution, to reflect its full mandate, was "National Archives". The Secretary of State stated his willingness to submit the required proposals to the Cabinet. As a first step, the Committee decided to approach the National Archives in Washington for information on methods used to estimate building requirements. In fact, the National Archives and the Public Record Office in London became the accepted models for plans in Ottawa. The Committee was

60 *P.A.C. Report, 1945*, p. vii.

61 Thomas, "Archival Legislation in Canada," pp. 104-105.

62 Archer, "A Study of Archival Institutions," p. 314.

especially impressed with the two important principles of the National Archives, which it felt should be followed in Canada, namely:

That the Archivist is in charge of all federal records, and that these are to be transferred and held on the basis of certain rules;
That full provision is made for ready consultation of papers either by government officials or private citizens.⁶³

The Public Record Office's system of automatic transfer of records from departments also impressed the Committee considerably.

The Committee recommended to the Secretary of State acceptance of the principle, which it felt was supported by the professional historians of Canada, that *the first function of a national archives should be to preserve the non-active records of the government*. Implementation of this function would ensure, almost automatically, that research interests of the historical community also would be served. The Committee then described what it considered to be the steps required to put the principles into effect, including additional staff, study of the systems used in Washington and London, additional space, acquisition of equipment for cleaning, storing, and microfilming documents, and adequate security conditions to allay departmental concerns about transfer of records out of their custody.⁶⁴

On 18 November 1946, in response to a letter from the Secretary of State (Paul Martin) asking for a report on the present situation concerning the Public Archives, Lanctot reviewed the problem of public records, especially the fact that the work of the Public Records Committee in making a public record office out of the Public Archives was hampered by the lack of sufficient space. He suggested that "the first step out of our difficulties would be to amend the present regulations and transform the Public Archives into a national archives, thus bringing it to the full level and quality of a public record office." Concurrently, the Public Records Committee could be given authority to undertake a survey of non-active records and make appropriate recommendations to Cabinet. First among such recommendations, according to Lanctot, should be "doubling without delay the capacity of the Public Archives . . ."⁶⁵ In a letter to the Under-Secretary of State the same day (18 November) Lanctot indicated that he had prepared a bill for the Secretary of State whose purpose was "to reorganize or rather redefine the functions of the department in order to make it more completely a public record office . . ." In an accompanying memorandum Lanctot explained that the proposed bill would amend the Public Archives Act "with a view to changing its name to National Archives and making it the public record office of Canada, entrusted with the storing of official records, transferred under authority of the Committee on Public Records, and the accessioning of historical documents and material, with power to microfilm bulky material and destroy useless files and papers."⁶⁶ Following the usual negotiations with lawyers

63 RMB, 5100-1, "Memorandum on Public Archives", 3 June 1946.

64 *Loc. cit.*

65 R.G. 37, vol. 52, file 60-3, "Secretary of State", attachment to letter G. Lanctot to Paul Martin, 18 November 1946.

66 R.G. 37, Lanctot to E.H. Coleman, 18 November 1946; see also R.G. 37, vol. 303, file "Public Archives Act".

in the Secretary of State Department and the Department of Justice, the bill was printed for presentation by the Prime Minister in January 1948. However, no action was taken, for Gustave Lanctot retired as Dominion Archivist early that year.

Further progress in solving the public records problem required new leadership. This the Public Archives acquired in 1949 with the appointment of W. Kaye Lamb as Dominion Archivist. He was appointed on 10 September 1948⁶⁷ and assumed his duties in January 1949. The former Provincial Librarian and Archivist of British Columbia, and Editor of the *British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, Lamb came to the Archives from the post of Librarian at the University of British Columbia. He had been to the Archives only once prior to his appointment and had no preconceptions about the solution of the public records problem in Canada.⁶⁸

The brief of the Public Archives to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (the Massey Commission) was prepared by staff at the Archives shortly after Lamb's arrival, early in 1949. It urged once again the creation of a Canadian Public Record Office, with "automatic and, except in very exceptional cases, compulsory" transfer of documents to the Public Record Office after an agreed upon period of time. Modern equipment and quarters would be required, as well as sufficient, competent staff. Departments would be free to place restrictions on access to records in the custody of the Record Office. Both the brief and Lamb himself, in his testimony before the Commission during the summer of 1949, recommended against the idea of a records centre for storage of dormant records, many of which were not of permanent value. "Material transferred to the Record Office," Lamb maintained, "should be restricted to documents of permanent historic interest. Departments must not be permitted to impose upon the Archives by saddling it with files that must be retained for a term of years, but are not of historic interest." Clearly, he had not yet thought the problem through; he was probably a trifle confused, given the complexities of the public records problem. His interview with the Massey Commission, barely six months after his arrival in Ottawa, revealed uncertainty about the relationship between an archives and a public record office, and precisely as to the exact function of the latter. As a first step towards resolving the problem, Lamb pointed out the need for a thorough records survey, department by department.⁶⁹

By the end of 1949, the new Dominion Archivist had changed his mind concerning the nature of the problem and the required solution. In his annual report for that year Lamb suggested that the most important factor was a lack of storage space in the Archives. This lack of space, he wrote,

... has prevented the Archives from taking custody of more than a small fraction of the Government's Records relating to the period

67 P.C. 4007.

68 Interview with Dr. Lamb, 14 October 1978.

69 R.G. 33/28, Records of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, vol. 13, file 129 (Canadian Historical Association), and vol. 28, file 341 (Public Archives of Canada).

since Confederation. . . . The Departments, too, have suffered because of the inadequacy of the Archives Building. Only a properly staffed and equipped record office could assist them with the difficult records problems they have encountered, and, as this was not in existence, they have had to struggle with these problems individually as best they could.

He suggested as a solution "the construction of a large half-way house for departmental files, controlled and staffed by the Public Archives, but not necessarily situated in downtown Ottawa."⁷⁰



W. Kaye Lamb, Dominion Archivist, 1948-1968. (PAC C-15172)

⁷⁰ *P.A.C. Report*, 1949, pp. vii and viii.

The Commissioners devoted considerable attention to the state of federal public records, in a separate chapter on Archives in their report and through an article on the subject by Colonel Charles P. Stacey published separately in the volume of "Royal Commission Studies".⁷¹ While agreeing with the majority of Lamb's proposals, Stacey and the Commission itself both disagreed with him on the question of a separate records centre. The Commission seems to have shared Stacey's concern that such a structure, separated from the main Archives building, would be inconvenient to researchers and might encourage departments to store documents indefinitely in the "half-way house" without committing themselves to firm decisions on actual transfer to the Archives or to destruction.⁷² The Massey Commission recommendations, while conservative and unimaginative, did support several existing policies concerning the care and custody of public records. The Commission recommended that current regulations governing the disposal of public documents be reviewed and clarified, and that provision be made for systematic and continuous transfer of inactive records to the Archives. The Public Records Committee, it felt, should supervise this program and report annually to the Cabinet on progress with it. To assist the Committee with this process, it should be provided with a full time secretary. The Massey Commission agreed that no records could be destroyed without the authority of the Public Records Committee. It also reiterated that every department should appoint a properly qualified records officer to supervise the care of departmental records, as well as the screening of inactive files followed by the transfer to the Archives of those of permanent value. Each department and agency was to review its files and transfer to the Archives those of historical value which had been relatively inactive for ten years, while submitting to the Public Records Committee for authority to destroy those of no value. Finally, each department and agency was to maintain a regular review of its files with a view to a steady process of transfer to the Archives, or to destruction.⁷³

In summary, it was the opinion of the Massey Commission (expressed in its 1951 report) that decisions on the retention or disposal of public records should be made while the records were still in the departments, with records of historical value then being transferred to the Archives. This was very similar to current British practice; initiative for transfer lay with the departments, not the Archives. Lamb, however, espoused the American practice, where decisions concerning disposal or retention of records were made by archivists, rather than departmental officials, in a records centre environment. He believed that provision of storage space for dormant records would permit staff of the Archives to have greater control over the transfer of historical records to the Archives. In other words, initiative would rest with the Archives rather than the departments, thus effecting a greater measure of "automatic" transfer.⁷⁴ To use Schellenberg's colourful terminology, Lamb preferred the American "purgatory" records centre concept, with a central staff ensuring that records are properly administered, to the British "limbo" centre, where the creating departments retained total

71 C.P. Stacey, "Canadian Archives", *Royal Commission Studies; A Selection of essays Prepared for the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences*, (Ottawa, 1951), pp. 231-248.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 244.

73 Canada, *Report, Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences* (Ottawa, 1951), pp. 337-338.

74 Archer, "Study of Archival Institutions," pp. 324-335.

responsibility for that activity.⁷⁵ The Experimental Farm storage building had been an especially revealing example of a “limbo” records centre. Lamb now had to convince both his Minister and the Treasury Board of the need for a dormant records centre. By early 1950 he had done so, largely through direct, convincing discussions with his Minister, F. Gordon Bradley, and the Secretary of the Treasury Board, R. B. Bryce. In fact, Bryce quickly became a strong supporter of the Public Archives and the concept of an “Inactive Records Centre,” separate from the Archives Building.⁷⁶ In May, 1950, he requested the Organization and Methods Division of the Civil Service Commission to undertake a thorough study of dormant and dead records storage in the departments in Ottawa. Undertaken immediately, the study produced detailed statistics on the volume of inactive records then extant: 6,493,020 files, equivalent to the contents of 22,983 file cabinets, taking up 201,862 square feet of floor space. The report of the study also estimated the expense of maintaining those records in government offices.⁷⁷

V

On 6 June 1950, the Cabinet approved the construction of a records centre building at Tunney’s Pasture, a flat area of Crown-owned land two miles west of Parliament Hill, adjacent to the Ottawa River. Approval was subject to the building first being used for the 1951 census. As the Massey Commission was expected to make recommendations concerning the public records problems, the Cabinet suspended further consideration temporarily. In the interim, the proposed building was turned over permanently to the Department of Finance for its Superannuation Branch and Central Pay Office.⁷⁸

The Department of Public Works suggested that a second building be constructed to replace the one now lost. Following initial discussion on 22 November 1951 and a special submission from the Public Records Committee, the Cabinet agreed on 9 January 1952 to the construction of a records building at Tunney’s Pasture, “the administration of the building and the servicing of the records deposited therein to be under the supervision of the Dominion Archivist.”⁷⁹ This last provision was obviously designed to prevent the operation of the records centre being taken over by the Department of Public Works—memories of the Experimental Farm building were still fresh. The emphasis on the Public Archives was due to the influence of several key people: the Minister, Bradley; the Registrar of the Cabinet (and long-time Secretary of the Public Records Committee), W. E. D. Halliday; and J. W. Pickersgill of the Prime Minister’s Office. Pickersgill, a personal friend of R. B. Bryce, was deeply

75 T. R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques* (Chicago, 1965), p. 42.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 338; *P.A.C. Report*, 1950, pp. 6-7; P.A.C., R.G. 37, vol. 324, file 60-3-TB, R. B. Bryce to W. Kaye Lamb, 12 May 1950, and Lamb to Bryce, 8 June 1950.

77 R.G. 32, Civil Service Commission Records, vol. 729, file 172, “Report of a Preliminary Study of the Storing of Inactive and Dead Files in the Various Departments of the Government of Canada located at Ottawa”.

78 *Ibid.*, “The Reduction of Public Records, Notes for the use of the Civil Service Commission,” July 1951.

79 R.G. 37, vol. 48, file 60-3-PCO, W. E. D. Halliday to W. Kaye Lamb, 28 November 1952 and attached memorandum to Cabinet from the Public Records Committee, 28 December 1951.

interested in Canadian history and firmly committed to the work of the Archives in preserving historical public records. He was afforded the opportunity to exert greater influence through his appointment as Secretary to the Cabinet in January 1952, and to the Cabinet itself as Secretary of State in June 1953. Concerned that the records centre project be completed as planned and on schedule, Pickersgill arranged that he would carry over responsibility for the Public Archives with him when, as a result of a Cabinet shuffle, he left Secretary of State to become Minister of Citizenship and Immigration on 1 July 1954.⁸⁰



The Public Archives Records Centre, Tunney's Pasture, Ottawa, June 1956. (Public Archives of Canada)

The site for the new records centre (immediately behind the original location) had been chosen by December 1952, the plans finalized, and staff to operate the building authorized. Completed at the end of 1955, the Public Archives Records Centre was turned over to the Archives on 3 January 1956 and formally opened (by Pickersgill) on 10 April 1956, after installation of shelving and equipment.⁸¹ The building was (and still is) 200 feet square, 5 storeys high, with a floor area of more than 200,000 square feet and a net storage area of over 3½ acres. Twenty miles of shelving were installed immediately; another twenty the following year. It was expected that the total potential capacity of the centre would be 62 miles of shelving. Kaye Lamb described the facilities of the new centre in his report for the period 1955 to 1958: "In addition to file rooms, the Centre has receiving and

⁸⁰ Interview with Dr. Lamb, 14 October 1978; P.C. 1004, 1 July 1954.

⁸¹ R.G. 37, vol. 324, file 60-3-TB, W. Kaye Lamb to R.B. Bryce, 28 November 1952; *P.A.C. Report*, 1952, p. 6; *Ibid.*, 1954, pp. 27-28.

sorting rooms, a fumigating chamber, offices, reference rooms and a research room. It is thus a fully-equipped branch of the Public Archives, with all necessary reference and research facilities."⁸²

In an article written in 1962, Lamb defined two prerequisites for a satisfactory system of disposal for government records:

Experience in Canada suggests that two things must be provided before the disposal of dead and dormant records can be handled satisfactorily from the long-term or archival point of view. The first is an adequate review procedure, which will inform the archivist, and any other officials who may be interested, whenever it is proposed to destroy records, and will give them an opportunity to present their points of view. The second is an adequate storage space, preferably under the control of the archives, to which records can be moved, if need be, until proper consideration can be given to their future. Such storage space helps to prevent too hasty action, and gives time for second thoughts.⁸³

By 1956 both prerequisites had largely been satisfied. A firm review procedure had been established through the Public Records Committee, where the Public Archives had a virtual veto power over the destruction of records.⁸⁴ The new Records Centre provided ample storage space.

The federal records centre system has expanded considerably since 1956, through the opening of a second building at Tunney's Pasture in 1964, as well as regional centres in Toronto (1965), Montreal (1966), Vancouver (1972), Winnipeg (1973), Halifax (1973), and Edmonton (1977). The value of the storage space provided by the records centres may be demonstrated by the statistical record. Since 1956, they have accessioned 2,231,139 feet (680,497 metres) of paper, thereby releasing 1,115,576 square feet (26 acres) of floor space in government buildings. The staff of the records centres have disposed of 1,184,811 feet (361,367 metres) of records. As a result of this activity, approximately 50,000 feet (15,000 metres) have been transferred to the main Archives for permanent retention. The total volume of records stored in all federal records centres at the end of 1978 was 1,197,318 feet (365,182 metres)—roughly three times the volume of the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill.⁸⁵

The opening of the Public Archives Records Centre in 1956 obviously marked a watershed in federal government records management. Events proceeded quickly thereafter. Later in 1956 the Central Microfilm Unit was transferred from the Department of Public Printing and Stationery to the Public Archives and installed on the ground floor of the Records Centre building.⁸⁶ A "Records Management Survey Committee", under the auspices of the Public Records Committee, conducted a thorough survey of records management in the federal

82 *P.A.C. Report, 1955-1958*, p. 7; A.M. Willms, "Canada's New Records Centre," *The American Archivist* 19, no. 4 (October 1956): 321.

83 W. Kaye Lamb, "The Fine Art of Destruction," *Essays in Memory of Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, ed. Albert E.J. Hollaender (London, 1962), p. 54.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

85 These statistics, assembled from documentation in the Public Archives, were current as of 31 December 1978.

86 P.C. 437, 15 March 1956, *P.A.C. Report, 1955-1958*, p. 10.

departments and agencies during the winter of 1959-60. As a result of its recommendations, in 1961 the Cabinet altered the mandate of the Public Records Committee, broadening its scope and increasing its autonomy.⁸⁷ The first month-long records management course occurred in 1961, jointly sponsored by the Civil Service Commission and the Public Archives. The Royal Commission on Government Organization (Glassco Commission) studied the problem in depth during 1961. As a result of the specific recommendations in its report, issued in 1962, the Cabinet in 1966 passed the "Public Records Order", which abolished the Public Records Committee and placed responsibility for coordinating the government records management program with the Dominion Archivist. In particular, it gave him sole authority over disposal of federal public records.⁸⁸ The Government of Canada had now committed itself fully to the principles of "concentration and unity of control" first mentioned by Joseph Pope seventy years earlier. Treasury Board, the Public Archives, and the departments of government had entered the age of modern records management.

87 P.C. 212, 16 February 1961.

88 P.C. 1749, 9 September 1966.

Résumé

Le dépôt central des Archives publiques a été établi en 1956 pour rencontrer deux buts principaux: fournir un entreposage économique des documents inactifs du gouvernement fédéral et s'assurer que les documents ayant une valeur historique soient transmis aux Archives publiques. Cet article retrace les origines du concept d'un centre de gestion de documents au sein du gouvernement fédéral, en notant sa relation avec l'idée d'un bureau d'archives gouvernementales (Public record office). Le tout débute avec la Commission ministérielle sur les documents publics de 1897. Par la suite une Commission royale eut lieu en 1912-1914, et un premier essai de la mise en place d'un centre de gestion de documents fut tentée en 1938-39. L'établissement d'un Comité sur les documents publics suivit en 1945 et donna lieu en 1956 à la mise sur pied du dépôt.