

'The Real Nucleus of the Map Collection': Charting Its Provenance

In her article on the National Map Collection, Betty Kidd quotes from the reminiscences of the first map archivist at the federal level, Hensley R. Holmden, concerning the origins of "the real nucleus of the map collection."¹ While Holmden may have been a good archival administrator, he was not a particularly exacting historian. The history of the nucleus of the National Map Collection² is an interesting tale of provenance involving the first two chief archivists of the Public Archives of Canada, a governor general, lost or missing documents, the early advancement of an archival responsibility and an anniversary that could have happened earlier.

To understand subsequent events, some background concerning government organization and departmental responsibilities is needed. With Confederation, control and administration of Ordnance Lands was placed with the Department of the Secretary of State,³ having formerly been vested with the Crown Lands Department of the old Province of Canada and before that with the Imperial Government.⁴ In 1873, the Department of the Interior was established and administrative responsibility for Crown Lands including Ordnance and Admiralty Lands—except certain land under the control of the Departments of Public Works, Militia and Defence, and Marine—were transferred from the Secretary of State to Interior.⁵ As frequently happens with departmental reorganizations and the transfer of government responsibilities, the Department of the Interior found that many of the original records relating to its new responsibilities were located elsewhere. In the case of Ordnance Lands the records were still held by the Imperial Government. The situation came to a head in 1890 when a litigation involving the question of ownership of some land acquired from Nicholas Sparks for the Rideau Canal forced the Department of Justice to recommend to the Secretary of State for the Colonies through the Governor in Council the transfer to Ottawa of "all records, documents, plans&c. relating to Ordnance property in Canada which have not yet been transferred. . . ."⁶ By September 1891 the Department of Justice had received "a number of plans, maps and other documents relating to Ordnance Lands in Canada"⁷ from the War Office in London. The

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- 1 H.R. Holmden, "The Map Room," as quoted in Betty Kidd, "A Brief History of the National Map Collection at the Public Archives of Canada," *Archivaria* 13 (Winter 1981/82): 5.
 - 2 Also known as the Map Division. Kidd seems to use the names interchangeably and never establishes if the Map Division ever *officially* became the National Map Collection nor does she discuss the significance of the appellation. As early as 1949 there was a proposal to establish within the Geographical Bureau, Department of Mines and Resources, a National Map Library as "a central depository and reference library of maps. . . with a comprehensive policy of map collecting and cataloguing and an integrated system of services to all interested agencies." (Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), Records of the Geographical Branch, RG 92, vol. 1, file 1-2, J. Wreford Watson, Chief, Geographical Bureau, to G.S. Hume, 8 October 1949.) Yet, by 1967, the Association of Canadian Map Libraries passed a resolution calling upon the Prime Minister to change the name of the Map Division to the National Map Library of Canada. (*Proceedings of the First National Conference on Canadian Map Libraries* (Ottawa, 1967), p. 52). Surely, what happened in those intervening eighteen years is part of the context into which the history of the National Map Collection should have been placed.
 - 3 31 Vict., c. 42.
 - 4 J.E. Hodgetts, *Pioneer Public Service* (Toronto, 1955), p. 169.
 - 5 36 Vict., c.4.
 - 6 PAC, P.C. 2492, 4 November 1890.
 - 7 PAC, National Map Collection, Ordnance Lands Branch file 2151, Deputy Minister of Justice to Deputy Minister of the Interior, 8 September 1891. This citation requires some explanation. The original Ordnance Lands Branch file 2151 does not appear to be extant. However, due to questions which arose in 1934 about the transfer of Ordnance records to the Public Archives, the Department of the Interior loaned the file to the Archives. Before returning the file to Interior, the Archives transcribed the file and had it bound with the title "Ordnance Office—Archives and War Office Plans—Canada." The transcribed file was subsequently placed in the National Map Collection where it has sat on the shelf little known, used or appreciated. Hereafter, the file will be cited as NMC, OL 2151.

records, in turn, were transferred by Justice to the responsible government department, Interior, with the admonition that “the documents in question be carefully preserved as they are more or less our muniments of title relating to all the Ordnance Lands in Canada”.⁸

The historical, administrative and legal value of the collection of maps and plans was recognized by the Department of the Interior, including the Surveyor General, Edouard Deville, who became responsible for its classification.⁹ Within six months of their arrival in Canada, the half-a-ton of records had been catalogued.¹⁰ The collection, with documents dating from 1723 to 1868, consisted of both printed and manuscript items including general maps of Canada, plans of military properties in New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario, and numerous reports on such matters as inland navigation, naval defences and the description of parishes in Canada.¹¹

Because of a large number of the documents were of no use to the Department of the Interior either because they related to Militia and Defence, Railway and Canals or Public Works, or “because their only value (was) as historical papers,” each department, including the Department of Agriculture in which the Archives Branch was situated, was requested to send a representative “to make a selection of the particular documents relating to the business of each Department.”¹² Where the same document was required by more than one department, copies were to be made.¹³ Only the Department of Militia and Defence and the Archives Branch responded; Militia and Defence wanted to examine the catalogue of items¹⁴ whereas Douglas Brymner, Archivist, objected to the proposed arrangement apparently wanting “the first right of selection.”¹⁵

In wanting the right of first selection, was Brymner advancing an archival responsibility which is now accepted within the federal government, namely, that the archivist is responsible for the assessment of the archival value of records and not the creating or receiving department? We will probably never know for certain. For Brymner, like many good archivists of today, took work home. His response to the Interior request was written from home because he was ill and was never inserted in the official correspondence of the Archives Branch nor is a copy to be found in the appropriate Interior file.¹⁶

Officials at the Department of the Interior did not appreciate Brymner’s position,¹⁷ but he was successful in scuttling the plan to divide the map collection, “although he did not avail himself

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*, W. Mills to J.R. Hall, 26 October 1891; E. Deville to A.M. Burgess, 27 January 1892; E. Deville to A.M. Burgess, 18 March 1892.

10 *Ibid.*, W. Mills to J.R. Hall, 26 October 1891; E. Deville to A.M. Burgess, 18 March 1892.

11 PAC, Records of the Surveys and Mapping Branch, RG 88, vol. 306, file 1230, “Catalogue of maps and other documents relating to Ordnance Lands received from the War Office in September, 1891.” (Prepared by) Topographical Surveys Branch, Department of the Interior. A copy is also in the library of the National Map Collection.

12 PAC, NMC, OL 2151, E. Deville to A.M. Burgess, 18 March 1892.

13 PAC, Records of the Public Archives of Canada, RG 37, vol. 118, letter 3771, A.M. Burgess to D. Brymner, April 1892; RG 88, vol. 306, file 1230, E. Deville to Deputy Minister of the Interior, 12 October 1899.

14 PAC, NMC, OL 2151, Deputy Minister of Militia and Defence to Secretary, Department of the Interior, 2 April 1892; see also, PAC, Records of the Department of Militia and Defence, RG 9, II A1, vol. 253, file A11297.

15 PAC, NMC, OL 2151, A.M. Burgess to E. Deville, 12 May 1892. Brymner knew in late 1891 that the War Office plans had been transferred to the Canadian Government. PAC, RG 37, vol. 118, letter 3690, A.W. Reynolds to D. Brymner, 17 December 1891.

16 PAC, RG 37, vol. 183; NMC OL 2151. This issue was never developed by Brymner in his writings on archives.

17 PAC, RG 37, vol. 118, letter 3771, A.M. Burgess to D. Brymner, 9 April 1892.

of (the) invitation to take charge of the historical part. . . ."¹⁸ From March to December 1892, the map collection remained with the Surveyor General lying on the floor of his office as he had "no place or furniture to store it."¹⁹ During that time requests for plans came from government departments and others, with some of the items consequently not being returned.²⁰ In December 1892, the Surveyor General "not feeling disposed to be any longer responsible for the custody of the collection"²¹ transmitted it to the Deputy Minister. The records were then given to the Ordnance and Admiralty Lands Branch where they were placed in a vault in the Langevin Block.²²

The existence of the former War Office map collection was known to many in Ottawa who had cause to use it and copies of items were often made.²³ In their visit to the Ordnance and Admiralty Branch, the Departmental Commissioners appointed on the recommendation of Treasury Board to inquire into the state of the Public Records located "a large collection of documents relating to the acquisition of the Rideau Canal, the Seigniory of Sorel, and other historic subjects."²⁴ The Commissioners were of the opinion that these records, along with a number of others, "should be transferred to the central records office on its establishment."²⁵ In another instance the Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, in 1901 made a report to Council in which the collection was mentioned.²⁶

There were others, namely researchers, however, who did not know the whereabouts of the collection. The Governor General, Lord Minto, in 1902 made the acquaintance of Arthur G. Doughty, Joint Librarian of the Legislative Library of Quebec and the two discussed a research topic of mutual interest: the early fortifications of the City of Quebec.²⁷ Doughty was aware of the transfer to Canada of the War Office map collection and he told Lord Minto.²⁸ The two then proceeded to try to locate the collection. Doughty contacted the Archives Branch and was informed that the plans were not there.²⁹ Lord Minto found "on enquiry that there was no trace of them in the Government offices at Ottawa, and it appeared probable, that some of them at any rate, had entirely disappeared."³⁰ Joseph Pope, Undersecretary of State, pursued the matter further on the Governor General's behalf and contacted the Department of the Interior concerning the collection.³¹ Within a day of his inquiry, Pope had his reply including a list of

18 PAC, RG 88, vol. 306, file 1230, E. Deville to Deputy Minister of the Interior, 12 October 1899.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.* As late as 1910 attempts were still being made to recover maps that had been borrowed during this period of time. PAC, Records of the Department of Agriculture, RG 17, vol. 976, file 154136A, W.W. Cory, Deputy Minister of the Interior, to G.F. O'Halloran, Deputy Minister of Agriculture, 15 October 1910.

21 *Ibid.*

22 PAC, NMC, OL 2151, J.R. Hall to A. Gobeil, 23 August 1893; J.P. Dunne to P.G. Keyes, 27 February 1907. Ironically, the Archives Branch moved into the same building in 1897. *Archives Mirror of Canada Past* (Toronto, 1972), p. 8.

23 For examples, see PAC, NMC, OL 2151; PAC, RG 9, II A1, vol. 273, file A13218.

24 Canada, *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the State of the Public Records 1897* (Ottawa, 1898), p. 42. For details about the Commission, see J. Atherton, "The Origins of the Public Archives Records Centre," *Archivaria* 8 (Summer 1979): 33-59.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

26 PAC, P.C. 406L, 3 January 1901.

27 PAC, Wilfrid Laurier Papers, MG 26 G, vol. 249, pp. 69288-69294, Lord Minto to W. Laurier, 19 January 1903 (PAC Reel C-797).

28 *Ibid.*

29 PAC, RG 37, vol. 132, letter 9154, A.G. Doughty to Archivist, Dominion Archives, 25 September 1902; *Ibid.*, vol. 189, A. Duff to A.G. Doughty, 4 October 1902.

30 PAC, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, MG 26 G, vol. 249, pp. 69288-69294, Lord Minto to W. Laurier, 19 January 1903 (PAC Reel C-797).

31 PAC, NMC, OL 2151, J. Pope to T.G. Rothwell, 30 September 1902. Pope had been a member of the 1897 Departmental Commission on Public Records and would have seen the collection during the Commissioners' visit to the Department of the Interior.

some thirteen plans relative to the fortifications at Quebec with the following statement from the Acting Deputy Minister of the Interior: "Kindly let me know how many of these plans you desire to be sent for His Excellency to examine and they will be forwarded at once."³² Pope also informed Doughty of the collection's location and Doughty immediately applied to the Minister, Clifford Sifton, for permission to copy some of the plans.³³ Permission was granted, but some of the items Doughty selected were found to have large cuts in them, the result of recent abuse.³⁴ The Surveyor General recommended to his Deputy Minister that the maps be removed to another location or else "the destruction of the collection is only a matter of time."³⁵

Though the collection had been located, Lord Minto felt compelled to write the Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, about the matter. In his candid letter Minto stated that his "researches for these papers has revealed to me what I can only call the most lamentable disregard for the historical archives of the Dominion. . . . The custody of these papers, such as it is, appears to be scattered through different Departments, each of which is more or less jealous of documents which it considers belongs to it."³⁶ Describing it as "a most unfortunate state of affairs," Lord Minto recommended a centralized government archives under a Deputy Keeper of the Records and mentioned "Mr. Doughty of Quebec" as the gentlemen "both by his ability and tastes" as most suitable for such an appointment.³⁷

Because of such criticisms as Lord Minto's concerning the state of its records and the related recommendations of the Commissioners investigating public records in 1897, the federal government in December 1903 directed that all archival material "be assembled in one place and put into the custody of one person, and so arranged and classified as to be easily accessible to all persons interested in them."³⁸ It provided further that:

documents bearing upon the early history of the Rideau and Welland Canals in the Department of the Interior and elsewhere, be placed in the custody of the Dominion Archivist and Keeper of the Record, who shall . . . become custodian thereof.³⁹

Immediately, the Department of the Interior began work to transfer to the Dominion Archivist all the maps and plans the Surveyor General had first scheduled in 1892 for the Archives Branch.⁴⁰ In 1904 Arthur Doughty was appointed Dominion Archivist and Keeper of the Record and construction commenced on a new Archives building.⁴¹ After conducting a survey of the amount of space needed "for the storage and proper display of the old Ordnance plans and records," officials of the Department of the Interior informed Dr. Doughty that "600 feet of floor space will meet the requirements of this Department for storage of its documents in your new building."⁴² Prior to the completion in 1906 of the Archives Building, Doughty did not actively pursue the transfer of the complete collection, but instead requested the Ordnance items as needed.⁴³ The frequency of these requests and the difficulties in retrieval renewed in

32 *Ibid.*, T.G. Rothwell to J. Pope, 1 October 1902.

33 *Ibid.*, J. Pope to A.G. Doughty, 3 October 1902; A.G. Doughty to C. Sifton, 6 October 1902.

34 *Ibid.*, P.G. Keyes to A.G. Doughty, 25 November 1902; RG 88, vol. 306, file 1230, E. Deville to Deputy Minister of the Interior, 19 December 1902.

35 PAC, RG 88, vol. 306, file 1230, E. Deville to Deputy Minister of the Interior, 19 December 1902.

36 PAC, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, MG 26 G, vol. 249, pp. 68288-69294, Lord Minto to W. Laurier, 19 January 1903 (PAC Reel C-797).

37 *Ibid.*

38 PAC, P.C. 2018, 7 December 1903.

39 *Ibid.*

40 PAC, NMC, OL 2151, P.G. Keyes to J.N. Ferguson, 12 December 1903.

41 PAC, P.C. 8/895, 16 May 1904; C.C.J. Bond, *City on the Ottawa* (Ottawa, 1967), p. 37.

42 PAC, NMC, OL 2151, J.N. Ferguson to P.G. Keyes, 14 June 1904; PAC, *Annual Report, 1904*, p. xvii.

43 PAC, NCM, OL 2151. For examples, see receipts, A.G. Doughty, 18 July 1906, 26 November 1906.



Patrick Mackellar's map ca. 1757 of Quebec is part of the "real nucleus of the map collection" and identified by H.R. Holmden as being a "treasure." (Public Archives of Canada, NMC 19310)

1907 the interest of the Department of the Interior in placing the “ancient and valuable historic records . . . not now required in connection with land at present under the control of this Department (with) the Dominion Archives”⁴⁴ in order that the collection “may be properly classified and made more accessible.”⁴⁵ Doughty assured the Interior officials that “as soon as the plans are read they will be carefully filed away and indexed, so that access can be readily obtained.”⁴⁶ Finally, in April 1907 the War Office maps, plans and related documents that had come to Canada in 1891 “were duly transferred to the present Archives building (on Sussex Drive), thus becoming the real nucleus of the map collection.”⁴⁷

The above chronicling of the provenance of the nucleus of the map collection portray a different series of events than that pictured by Holmden who wrote that the maps “had been bandied from pillar to post until at last they had been absolutely lost sight of and no one could or would admit any responsibility” until they were discovered at Lord Minto’s insistence “in 1905”.⁴⁸ From 1891, shortly after the collection arrived in Canada, it had been in the continuous custody of the Department of the Interior. Although the maps were not handled by that Department with proper care at all times, the Archives, which was charged with such responsibilities, was not without fault. The odyssey of the map collection from the War Office to the Department of the Interior to the Public Archives of Canada is a graphic example of the false starts, gropings and missed opportunities that have characterized the development of the latter institution.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the War Office collection did constitute a significant and early transfer of government records to the fledgeling Public Archives and provided H.R. Holmden with the nucleus of his Map Room. More significantly, these maps, plans and related documentation also played a critical part in the establishment of the Public Archives of Canada, the creation of the position of Dominion Archivist and Keeper of the Record and the appointment to that position of its first incumbent, Arthur G. Doughty. As a fitting seventy-fifth anniversary project, perhaps the National Map Collection, using the micrographic and machine readable technologies presently at its disposal, might consider attempting to reconstitute “the real nucleus of the map collection” to see how much of H.R. Holmden’s “Map Room” survives today for him to recognize. This will be no small task. For although the provenance of the War Office collection was acknowledged by Holmden in his 1912 *Catalogue*,⁵⁰ today the collection is physically dispersed by means of the multifarious filing system with no attempt to maintain clearly the provenance of Holmden’s nucleus as a distinct body of records.⁵¹ Finally, one wonders had Douglas Brymner in 1892 taken advantage of the original offer of the Department of the Interior to take charge of the War Office maps and plans, might not the National Map Collection in 1982 be celebrating its 90th rather than 75th anniversary?

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44 *Ibid.*, J.P. Dunne to P.G. Keyes, 27 February 1907.

45 *Ibid.*, P.G. Keyes to A.G. Doughty, 8 March 1907.

46 PAC, RG 37, vol. 36, file 60-3 Int., pt. 1, Dominion Archivist to Secretary, Department of the Interior, 12 March 1907.

47 PAC, NMC, file “History of the National Map Collection,” manuscript by H.R. Holmden, “The Map Room.”

48 *Ibid.*

49 B. Weillbrenner, “The Public Archives of Canada, 1871-1958,” *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, II (April 1961): 101.

50 H.R. Holmden, *Catalogue of the Maps, Plans and Charts in the Map Room of the Dominion Archives* (Ottawa, 1912). Items were identified by the code “O” meaning “Maps prepared under the direction of the Board of Ordnance, Imperial War Office,” p. iii.

51 The concern for provenance (or lack of it) in a “total archives” is a topic that has occupied many pages of print in recent issues of *Archivaria*. For the most recent instalment, see Terry Cook, “Media Myopia,” *Archivaria* 12 (Summer 1981): 146-157.

