

## FOREWORD

# *Kaye Lamb in Ottawa*

by J.W. PICKERSGILL

One day in June, 1948, Mackenzie King received a small delegation from the Canadian Library Association. The spokesman was the Vice-President of the Association, Dr. W. Kaye Lamb, then Librarian of the University of British Columbia. I believe the Prime Minister was astonished that the delegation had come not, as most delegations did, to ask for something, but to give him something.

That something was a microfilm of the newspapers published by his grandfather, William Lyon Mackenzie. No gift could have appealed more to Mackenzie King. Kaye Lamb explained that the Library Association had embarked on a project of microfilming Canadian newspapers and periodicals, starting with the earliest one still extant. For Mackenzie King, it was a case of love at first sight. He never lost the admiration for Kaye Lamb he conceived that day. The interview was prolonged while the Prime Minister and Dr. Lamb discussed microfilms, archives and the writing of history. As a member of the Prime Minister's staff I was present throughout the interview. As soon as the delegation left the office, Mackenzie King turned to me and said, "That man should become head of the Archives right away. Find out more about him."

I had never heard of Kaye Lamb until that visit, but I soon found out about his remarkable work at the Provincial Archives of British Columbia and in the post-war Library of the exploding University of British Columbia. The President of the University, Dr. N.A.M. Mackenzie, was a long-time friend of mine and he gave me all the assurances Mackenzie King needed — and more. Dr. Lamb was offered the appointment and, after a good deal of soul-searching, he accepted. His appointment as Dominion Archivist in November 1948 was one of the last major appointments recommended by Mackenzie King. Dr. Lamb held the post for twenty years.

By the time he took charge of the Public Archives, Louis St. Laurent had replaced Mackenzie King as Prime Minister but Dr. Lamb's relations with the former Prime Minister remained close for the rest of Mackenzie King's life. My own relationship with Kaye Lamb which began on that June day in 1948 grew closer with the years. Until about 1950 or 1952, I was not concerned officially with his duties as head of the Archives; our relationship developed because of our common concern with Mackenzie King and the disposition of his papers. As head of the Prime Minister's Office, I had been involved, since 1946, in making arrangements, through the Archives, for the classification and storage of Mackenzie King's immense

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collection of papers and I continued to be involved in this task for the rest of his life and after his death in 1950. The lively interest Dr. Lamb had displayed in the Prime Minister's papers and their proper disposition was certainly one of the reasons Mackenzie King believed he was qualified to head the Archives. From his arrival in Ottawa, Kaye Lamb was consulted regularly by Mackenzie King about his papers and about the future of Laurier House after his death. I was often included in these consultations and I know how important Dr. Lamb's influence was in ensuring the proper custody and care of what is the greatest collection of papers of any Canadian public man. Dr. Lamb was particularly keen to give historians access to these historical records as early and as completely as the law and the constitution would permit. He welcomed the prospect of making Laurier House a centre of study and research as an integral part of the Public Archives. Along with the late F.A. McGregor and the late Norman Robertson, Kaye Lamb and I were named Literary Executors in Mackenzie King's will. Dr. Lamb and I continued to serve in that capacity until July 1977 when we transferred the ownership of the rest of the Mackenzie King papers including his unique diary to the Crown in the care of the Public Archives.

My earliest official connection with Dr. Lamb began in 1951 when Parliament enacted the legislation entrusting the custody and administration of Laurier House to the Dominion Archivist. As head of the Prime Minister's Office, I had assisted Mr. St. Laurent in preparing the presentation of the legislation to Parliament. Though Dr. Lamb was not consulted about the Bill itself, we did have discussions about the way in which Laurier House would be integrated into the administration of the Archives.

I had an even closer association with Dr. Lamb in the preparation of the legislation sponsored by the Prime Minister for the establishment of the National Library which Parliament enacted in 1952. Dr. Lamb had been asked, when he became Archivist, to take over the direction of the planning for a National Library which had already been in progress for a year or two but which had not yet made much impact on the public. Once Dr. Lamb took over the task it was given an impetus which it never lost. He was assisted in gaining the attention of the government by the strong recommendation of the Massey Commission. I have always suspected that, because of his close association with N.A.M. Mackenzie who was one of the commissioners, Dr. Lamb had a considerable share in directing the Commission's attention to the vital need of a National Library in the development of Canadian cultural life. Certainly Mr. St. Laurent had no hesitation in deciding that Dr. Lamb should be appointed National Librarian when the Library came into legal existence on 1 January 1953. In more than one sense, Kaye Lamb was the founder and the creator of the National Library.

I joined the government as Secretary of State of Canada on 12 June 1953. In that capacity I became the spokesman of the Public Archives and the National Library in the Cabinet and the responsible Minister in Parliament. As a consequence I had a continuous official relationship with Kaye Lamb for the next four years until the St. Laurent government resigned on 21 June 1957. Dr. Lamb and I were not only close friends, sharing many common interests, but I was already aware of his objectives for the development of the Archives and the Library and in full sympathy with both. He reminded me, in September 1977, that, when I told him I was to become Minister of Citizenship and Immigration at the beginning of July 1954, and would cease to be

his Minister, he had suggested that I ask the Prime Minister to have the Ministerial responsibility transferred to Citizenship and Immigration by Order in Council. I acted on the suggestion, Mr. St. Laurent agreed and that is how our official relationship was extended from one year to four.

During those four years, I took no initiative about either institution and never, of course, interfered with their administration. Dr. Lamb had both initiative and administrative capacity enough for three or four men. What he needed from a minister and what I tried to give him was effective support for his initiatives in the Treasury Board, the Cabinet and Parliament. Kaye Lamb's objective for the Archives was to turn what had become little more than a combination historical museum and repository of antiquities into a Public Records Office, in addition to being a collection of the private papers of distinguished Canadians and others like Governors-General who had been associated with Canada.

He believed in the use of modern tools for the preservation of official records in cases where the documents themselves had no intrinsic historic value. The use of microfilm for this purpose was to be the prime instrument. Dr. Lamb realized that other departments and agencies of government would never give adequate priority to the management of records. He believed that an agency of which the sole responsibility was the management and destruction or preservation of records was essential for this purpose. He devised the system and persuaded the Government to build a special building to serve as the records centre. I was enthusiastic about this project and proud to see it come to fruition with the official opening of the new building in Tunney's Pasture in 1956.

The other great project Dr. Lamb promoted during this period was the provision of an adequate building to house both the Archives and the National Library. By 1956 he had been successful in persuading the St. Laurent government to choose a site for a new building and to approve the selection of architects. He devoted much of his own energy to working with the architects on the plans for the present building on Wellington Street.

The construction of the new building was not started until 1962 and it was completed and opened in 1967. It is a tribute to the thrift, the care and the foresight of Dr. Lamb and the architects that the cost of the building estimated at \$12 million in 1956 barely exceeded \$13 million when it was completed nine years later.

During the nearly six years from June 1957 to April 1963, while I was in the Opposition in Parliament, I had no official relationship with Dr. Lamb and could do very little to further his constructive activities. I am bound to say that it seemed to me he received good support from the government during those years and particularly from Hon. Ellen Fairclough and Hon. Richard Bell who were successively his Ministers. As the Opposition critic, I did what I could in Parliament to support the work of the Archives and the Library and particularly to endorse the efforts of the Ministers in getting on with the new building.

In April 1963, when I became Secretary of State in the Pearson government, the Prime Minister entrusted me once more with the ministerial responsibility for the Archives and the National Library. Dr. Lamb and I resumed our happy official association. It was with great regret that I saw it terminate in less than a year when I became Minister of Transport.

But in his final four years in Ottawa I was in frequent touch with Dr. Lamb as I had been during my years in Opposition in our capacity as Mackenzie King's Literary Executors. I am deeply indebted to him for the critical help he gave me so generously while I was editing the *Mackenzie King Record*.

Probably no one else in public life had a closer association with Kaye Lamb than I had during the whole of his twenty years in Ottawa. To sum up his impact, I would say that he was meticulous and highly effective as an administrator, zealous and practical as an innovator, both tactful and persistent as a collector of historical material, bold as a planner of both buildings and operations, patient and generous as an adviser of those engaged in research and a willing, intelligent and informed critic of historical writing. He founded the National Library and the Records Centre and he transformed the Public Archives. And his work was not confined to Canada. He was active in organizations of archivists in the United States and Britain and had close associations with archives and libraries in many other countries. It is not an exaggeration to say that no other country in our day had a greater archivist.

But his official life and work was only one side of Kaye Lamb. Eminent as he was as an archivist and librarian, he is no less eminent as a scholar, author and editor. His published work is as prodigious in volume as it is meticulous in detail.

Born and raised in British Columbia — with no thought until the age of 44 of a career as a national public servant — Kaye Lamb thought it worthwhile as a student to become thoroughly familiar with the French language and French culture. Dr. Lamb is a Western Canadian who, a generation ago, fitted himself to serve his fellow citizens in both official languages.

Kaye Lamb made himself the complete Canadian. I am proud to have the privilege of paying this tribute to one of the greatest public servants and one of the truly great Canadians of my generation.