

may have only one item or deal with one major subject are better indexed than collections which are more varied in content. Creativity is therefore required when using inventories. Production data of a news report series, for example, may suggest that an event is documented even though it is not mentioned in the content description. The running time of an oral history interview may hint of related subjects which could have been discussed, but which are not described. Effective use of this inventory requires that researchers read carefully the section which explains how the descriptions were devised.

The NFTSA inventory reflects the national acquisition mandate of the Public Archives. No explanation is offered, nor should one be required in an inventory, as to why the division acquired the films *Cabaret* and *Papillon* from Allied Artists Picture Distributing Company, but researchers may wonder what connection they have with Canadian culture. The NFTSA has also become, through its goodwill, the recipient of many provincial collections which do not appear to have national importance. That said, the mass of film and tape acquired by the NFTSA ought to excite even the most traditional historian. The NFTSA inventory should encourage greater acceptance of audio-visual materials as historical documents in their own right.

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General Guide Series 1983: Federal Archives Division. TERRY COOK and GLENN T. WRIGHT, eds. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1983. vii, 100 p. ISBN 0-662-52323-7. (free)

For some reason one doesn't think that archives have histories of their own; they merely seem to contain them. There is a need, among historians especially, to be reminded that our documentary heritage has not always been housed in accessible archival repositories. The birth of the Federal Archives Division of the Public Archives of Canada — an event briefly described in the introduction to this excellent guide to the Division's holdings — makes one aware of the difficulties archivists have had in preserving our most treasured records. Moreover, the story makes one doubly grateful for the professional manner in which Canada's federal public records are now managed.

Incredible as it may now seem, Douglas Brymner, the first federal Archivist, had no responsibility for federal government records when he took office in 1872. Thirty-one years passed before the Archives received that awesome and vital function. Even then, the Archives did not consider the preservation of public records a priority. It was not until the Massey Commission in 1951 strongly recommended the establishment of a genuine public records office that the Archives truly assumed the gargantuan tasks of evaluating departmental records and preparing them for use in historical research. In 1966 the Dominion Archivist formally received responsibility for the disposition of all federal public records. Less than 4 per cent of the records the government of Canada generates each year are retained by the Federal Archives Division, yet its holdings now fill about twenty-seven kilometres of shelf space. There is no better justification for a guide to these records than that coping with the

volume of material to examine is the main problem confronting researchers. As travel funds for research diminish annually, it becomes increasingly important for historical researchers to devise efficient strategies for mining the vast collections of the Federal Archives Division. Utilitarian guidebooks like this one and solidly researched published inventories for each record group are now indispensable.

The *Guide* offers an overview of the structure of the Federal Archives Division, an explanation of the record group concept, and brief but helpful administrative histories of the branches of the government whose records are held in the Division's 131 record groups. These histories will be particularly useful to researchers seeking the administrative and, therefore, the documentary connections which illuminate the varied sides of a research problem. The arrangement of the *Guide* is sensibly handled by listing the record groups in numerical order. For those unfamiliar with individual record group numbers the editors include both thematic and alphabetical lists as appendices. They also mention record groups which have published inventories.

To add that the *Guide* is available from the Public Archives for the cost of a postage stamp will surely turn Canada Post into a viable concern.

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